

The Quest for Authentic Existence: Perspectives on Nietzsche's *Übermensch* and Ricœur's Capable Man

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Abstract: This paper is an attempt for an experimental articulation of an authentic human existence from the selective affinities of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Paul Ricœur (1913-2005). Overwhelmed by Nietzsche's nomadic philosophizing, Ricœur though as a Christian thinker, never took Nietzsche for granted as many religious philosophers did. Ricœur by no means considered Nietzsche's works as merely an Atheistic rant and a form of radical skepticism. Instead, Ricœur, in his work *The Conflict of Interpretations*, admires the intellectual courage and honesty of Nietzsche by deconstructing the culture of Platonism as well as reconstructing its modernization that imprisons man into a kind of "false consciousness." And this is where Nietzsche and Ricœur somehow creatively converge: the former exposes the nihilistic condition of man while the latter analyzes the fallible human condition. Henceforth, Nietzsche's *Übermensch* and Ricœur's Capable Man are critiques of this false consciousness. Both of them endeavor to heighten man's consciousness by emancipating man from the clutches of nihilism and alleviating man from his fragile existence. With this heightened consciousness, man is able to overcome his mediocrity and rediscover himself anew.

Keywords: *Übermensch*, capable man, overcoming, nihilism, Platonism

INTRODUCTION

It is very ironic that what is the closest and most self-evident to us is often the farthest from our consciousness. Through the engrossing illusion of an “afterworld” i.e., an “after-life,” as the by-product of Platonic ideology, we have taken for granted the only ontological fact—LIFE—not the transcendental and permanent life but the immanent and changing life. With this preoccupation of the life beyond, man have overlooked the life here and now. The tendency of man to value the former and devalue the latter is what Nietzsche pertains as the nihilistic culture and what Ricœur views as part of man’s fallible nature. The aim of this study, then, is to draw certain affinities between how Nietzsche presents the *Übermensch* to overcome nihilism and how Ricœur asserts the *Capable Man* as a response to the fragility of existence. The works of Nietzsche and Ricœur aim to awaken us from our dogmatic slumber in order for us to remember what we have forgotten, to usher us back to the real i.e., to bring us back to “Life.”

Moreover, in order to engage better throughout the discussion, it would be helpful to note that the intention of this paper is not to interpret Nietzsche but to play with his texts in order for his ideas to work in conjunction with Ricœur’s thoughts like Deleuze’s experimental reading of Nietzsche: “Deleuze’s moves from an interpretation *of* Nietzsche to an experimentation *with* Nietzsche.”¹ Through this kind of philosophical exploration, we are able to have a glimpse of the implicit convergence of Nietzsche and Ricœur.

NIETZSCHE: A MASTER OF SUSPICION

Ricœur made more sense of Nietzsche’s philosophy amidst its apparent oddity by contextualizing and experimenting with the latter’s nomadic yet

¹ Alan D. Schrift, “Deleuze: Putting Nietzsche to Work: Genealogy, Will to Power, and Other Desiring Machines,” in *Nietzsche’s French Legacy: A Genealogy of Poststructuralism* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 62.

critical use of texts. In Ricoeur's essay *Creativity in Language*, he highlighted the creative aspects of language by borrowing Wilhelm von Humboldt famous aphorism which elaborates "language as an infinite use of finite means."² This presupposes then that language itself which is composed of words is a repository and bearer of meanings. Hence, as a reservoir of meaning, language can be deciphered in a multifarious perspective. This is the reason why Ricoeur, in his book *The Conflict of Interpretations*, approached Nietzsche in an affirmative manner in order to make his ideas work. Ricoeur acknowledges that it is more worthwhile to play with Nietzsche's concepts freely yet innovatively rather than constraining them into a kind of dogmatism—where it seems like there is one and only reading of Nietzsche. The latter treatment is precisely what Nietzsche is critical about because his philosophy would seem to resist from any definitive reading³ Thus, Nietzsche's philosophy is open to infinite interpretations as well as misinterpretations. In other words, Ricoeur avows that Nietzsche's texts have lives of their own which summon every reader to a contesting comprehension; and after an arduous wrestle with the texts, the reader will experience a critical and creative art of interpreting for "seeking meaning no longer means spelling out the consciousness of meaning but, rather, *deciphering its expressions*."⁴

Nietzsche's way of thinking, usually expressed in aphorisms, is a basin of meanings which is open to everyone because of the "limitless of the thinkable"⁵ and the inexhaustibility of his thoughts. Through the richness of Nietzsche's works, we somehow experience a sense of powerlessness.

² Paul Ricoeur, "Creativity in Language," trans. by David Pellauer, *Philosophy Today*, 17:2 (1973), 97. Hereafter, cited as Ricoeur, "Creativity in Language."

³ See, Paolo A Bolaños, *On Affirmation and Becoming: A Deleuzian Introduction to Nietzsche's Ethics and Ontology* (UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 1. Hereafter, cited as Bolaños, *On Affirmation and Becoming*.

⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, trans. by Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 149. Hereafter, cited as Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*.

⁵ Ricoeur, "Creativity of Language," 100.

Sometimes, we find ourselves lost in his big thought experiment; and Jacques Derrida coins this as the *impouvoir*.⁶ Nevertheless, this very moment of weakness that one experiences in reading Nietzsche is what makes his philosophy peculiar and interesting. Simply put, this weakness that we feel is ironically the strength of his philosophy for Nietzsche did not merely write to inform us but for us to inquire further, not to orient us but to disorient us—to make us think, to make us feel again.⁷

Therefore, Nietzsche's radical philosophizing is indubitably significant in the pursuit of heightening the consciousness of man which had been shackled by "false consciousness" for a long time since the emergence of Platonic Metaphysics. Nietzsche's intellectual enterprise advocates man to exercise a certain kind of "suspicion"—a critical, creative, and affirmative suspicion within oneself—a self-critique i.e., a "self-overcoming" that leads to the re-valuation and re-discovery of immanent values, meanings, and truths that invites humanity toward a "post-human condition" which later termed by Nietzsche as the ideal of *Übermensch*. This peculiar character of Nietzsche's thinking was admired by Ricoeur to the extent that the latter considered the former to be one of the "three masters of suspicion" together with Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud. The common denominator of these said "three masters of suspicion" is that they all attack the same illusion—the belief in a "Metaphysical Guarantor" which Nietzsche analogically pertains to the figure of God. This authoritarian figure, which Nietzsche is suspicious about, has tremendously impelled humanity to thoughtlessly submit on the conviction that the "meaning of the earth," its values and truths, depends solely on a transcendent power. Hence, the earth, in as much as to life, is devoid of meaning apart from God *Who* is believed to be the absolute source of truth, value, and meaning. And this Godhead figure, *Who* guarantees the justification of the Platonic-Christian-Moral system, is the principal ideology that Nietzsche aims to

⁶ See, Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Style*, trans. by Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

⁷ See, Bolaños, *On Affirmation and Becoming*, 2.

deconstruct in order to reconstruct a fresh sensibility of life as well an authentic way of living. With this, Ricœur considers Nietzsche as a “master of suspicion” not in the negative sense of being extremely sceptic but in an affirmative manner, for the latter is precisely suspicious about the false consciousness produced by man’s total dependence on God as the “metaphysical guarantor.”

THE CRITIQUE OF NIHILISM: AN EXEGESIS OF MEANING

Ricœur recognizes the oblivious condition of man. He is fully cognizant of the fact that “we are, above all, still *victims of the scholasticism* in which their epigones have enclosed them.”⁸ And this is precisely what Nietzsche’s “last man” indicates. The “last man” is deemed to be chained in the cave where the shadows of the “dead God” still cast upon him. Nietzsche confirms this by stating: “God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown.”⁹ Accordingly, this specific nihilism is the primary concern of Nietzsche for it escapes the “ontological fact of life” and it divests the “immanent meaning of the earth.” Thus, Nietzsche’s deconstruction and reconstruction of the “meaning of the earth” is made manifest in his nerve-racking declaration: “God is Dead!” Nevertheless, this staggering statement gained a lot of criticisms especially from metaphysicians, moralists, religious, and philosophers. And one of the ongoing disputes is whether Nietzsche advocates a “nihilistic philosophy” or an “affirmative philosophy”¹⁰ Unfortunately, several controversies attached to Nietzsche’s works like that of nihilism, atheism, anti-Semitism, Nazism, and

⁸ Ricœur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 148.

⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. by Walter Kaufman (New York: Random House, Inc., 1974), 108. Hereafter, cited as Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*.

¹⁰ This is exactly the gist of the debate between Richard Schacht and Arthur Danto. See, Paolo A. Bolaños, “Nietzsche’s Critique of Nihilism and The Possibility of the Eternal Recurrence as Moral Imperative,” *Ad Veritatem*, 2 (2003), 539. Hereafter, cited as Bolaños, “Nietzsche’s Critique of Nihilism.”

communism have corrupted the profundity of his works that imprinted somehow a negative reputation in the history of philosophy. With much being said about the negative attribution to Nietzsche, (which we could put the blame on his sister Elisabeth for forging some of his works to support certain ideologies) I convincingly agree with Schacht's supposition that Nietzsche never intended to be a nihilist;¹¹ and considering him as one is a consequence of doing lazy philosophy. Correlatively, Ricœur would seem to approve that Nietzsche is not a nihilistic philosopher but an affirmative philosopher for "what Nietzsche wants is to augment man's *power* and restore his *force*, but with the will to power means must be regained by the mediation of the code of the 'overman,' the 'eternal return,' and 'Dionysus,' without which this power would no more than the violence of the immanent."¹² Ricœur further clarifies that Nietzsche though he considered him as a master of suspicion does not mean that he is a master of skepticism. Yes, Nietzsche is in fact a "destroyer" and he explicitly manifests this in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: "O my brothers, break, break the old tablets!"¹³ These tablets that Zarathustra mentioned represents the dogmatized values, truths, and meanings that the "metaphysical guarantor" has compelled on humanity. However, the thought that Nietzsche is a "destroyer" should not distract us;¹⁴ For destruction, as Ricœur insightfully cited Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time*, "is a moment in *every new foundation*. The destruction of hidden worlds is a *positive task*, and this includes the destruction of religion insofar as it is, as Nietzsche says, a Platonism for the people."¹⁵ Ironically, this is Nietzsche's "critique of nihilism" as well as his "affirmative philosophy"—affirmative in

¹¹ Richard Schacht, "Nietzsche and Nihilism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 15:1 (1973), 65.

¹² Ricœur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 150.

¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. by Walter Kaufman, in *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 12, 10. Hereafter, cited as Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (trans. by Kaufman).

¹⁴ Ricœur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 148.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

the sense that he destroys (the conception of the Platonic afterworld) in order to establish anew the true meaning of the earth and Ricoeur captures this exegesis of new meaning as he asserts:

Only after such a “*destruction*” is the questioned posed of knowing what thought, reason and even faith still mean. All free our horizon for a more authentic speaking, *a new reign of truth*, not only by means of a “*destructive*” critique but by invention of an art of interpreting...Marx, *Nietzsche*, and Freud triumph over their doubt about consciousness through an *exegesis of meanings*.¹⁶ (emphasis mine)

Indeed, every destruction gives birth to a new beginning—a new reign of truths, values, and meanings. In other words, a creative destruction is a *conditio sine qua non* for an exegesis of meaning. Nietzsche’s critique of nihilism opens a breach from the Platonic ideology and proposes a new way of perceiving and living life. Thus, Zarathustra proclaims: “Behold, I teach you the Superman. The superman is the meaning of the earth!”¹⁷ Nietzsche summons man to retrace his immanent authenticity, his fundamental willingness to embrace the opaqueness of life. However, man can only unearth this forgotten authenticity if he will go against the culture of nihilism which imprisoned him into a sort of false consciousness.

NIETZSCHE’S COUNTERCULTURE AND RICOEUR’S WILLINGNESS TO LIFE

Nietzsche’s perspicacious thinking according to Deleuze is a “counterculture” thinking against the “nihilistic culture” of modernity. Nietzsche analogously explicates this poverty-stricken culture as a kind of

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 148-149.

¹⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. by R.J. Hollingdale (Strand, London: Penguin Books, 1961), Prologue, 42. Hereafter, cited as Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (trans. by R.J. Hollingdale).

disease that dampens man's active and affirmative perspective of life—it rips “out life by the root,” and thus, become “an enemy of life.”¹⁸ Accordingly, this nihilistic culture is like a virus that weakens man, it sips the authenticity of existence. As a cure to this contagious culture, Nietzsche presents us with an active, affirmative, noble, and humane outlook of life. Nevertheless, the prerequisite of this “counterculture” is obviously the deconstruction of the nihilistic culture of Platonism and the reconstruction of modern thinking—from obsolete thinking to a higher plateau of thinking i.e., a “post-modern thinking.” We are able to witness here a radical paradigm shift from metaphysical transcendence to an ontological immanence. Nietzsche's philosophy of immanence is definitely a rigorous appraisal of the pathologies of philosophy in order to rediscover and renew the critical and creative element of philosophical thinking. Nevertheless, Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics does not imply that he has a negative notion of “being.” Deleuze makes it clear that “Nietzsche does not do away with the concept of being. He proposes a new conception of being. Affirmation of being.”¹⁹ Nietzsche has provided us with a new lens to gaze differently, more creatively, and affirmatively at “being”—a new way of looking at “being” contrary to the metaphysical way wherein it emphasizes the dichotomy of body and soul as well as the material world and the world of ideas. In other words, Nietzsche recovers the power of man which have been stifled by nihilism.

Therefore, the counterculture thinking that Nietzsche initiates is a higher degree of philosophizing that possesses a certain radicality and capacity to emancipate ourselves from the belittling formalistic matrix that had been established and preserved by Platonism. In this way, we can say that Nietzsche is somehow advocating a radical way of thinking as well as a

¹⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of Idols: Or How One Philosophizes with a Hammer*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann, in *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976) V, 1. Hereafter, cited as Nietzsche, *Twilight of Idols*.

¹⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. by Hugh Tomlison (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 186. Hereafter, cited as Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*.

creative living which serves as a liberating force toward an authentic existence. It is a liberating force because man who is a thinker and a truth-seeker has the responsibility to liberate himself from the indoctrination of self-defeating ideologies which have become impediments in his pursuit of excellence.

Correlatively, Ricœur is aware of the false consciousness brought by the nihilistic culture of Platonism. The culture of Platonism has become one of the commodities wherein man finds his security and worth. It has become ingrained in man's custom: in his way of thinking, acting, and living. Man's predisposition towards life has profoundly restricted and deeply ingrained from this nihilistic culture. Platonism has become man's everyday way of living to the point that this very culture, which man himself created and blindly accepted, turned out to be an inevitable self-destruction. John A.T. Robinson attests to this nihilistic culture in his work "*Honest to God*"²⁰ which argues that humanity has accepted so much mold from religious culture that made us inauthentic; thus, to become authentic once again, we must have the courage to recast this thick mold. This is likewise the challenge of Ricœur to humanity, to overcome the obsolete aspects of culture in order for one to grow in his fullest potential and autonomy.

Ricœur remains optimistic and gave a noble reason to live, for man is not only limited by his fallible nature which stifles his authenticity; instead, he is all the more capable. Though imperfect, man is perfectible since he can always be rectified, for "human fallibility is not the sum total of existence or of human nature."²¹ Accordingly, man's frailty is not a stumbling block, but a steppingstone of the stairway to being capable. Furthermore, to say "I am" is to say, "I want, I move, I do."²² Thus, man

²⁰ See, John A.T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963).

²¹ Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 320. Hereafter, cited as Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*.

²² *Ibid.*, 231.

can amidst the confines of his fallibility. This implies that fallibility is an existential necessity for man's self-affirmation of his inherent capabilities. As John C. Crystal said: "We are limited, not by our lack of ability, but by our inability to think of ourselves at a point beyond where we are."²³ This is also what Ricœur meant in saying: "I can change my perspective of perception and in this way, I move myself."²⁴ However, man remains stagnant—because he is becoming shallow and narrow, he is becoming forgetful, and in order to break free from this shallowness and to be awakened from this forgetfulness, one must undergo the "creative function of emptying oneself in order to reassert and recapture oneself."²⁵ Man must unburden himself from the weight of Platonism and empty himself from self-defeating ideologies in order to rediscover his authentic self. Thus, the primary task of the capable man is to overcome himself, to "deconstruct the false cogito"—the "idealist, subjective, solipsistic cogito"²⁶ created by Platonism. Metaphorically, only in the death of the egoistic self that this very self is recovered and renewed. The capable man, then, is someone who is striving to go beyond his finitude, who keeps on rising whenever he falls for "nothing is demanded of a man that he cannot do."²⁷ This is the

²³ Richard S. Deems, *Leading in Tough Times: The Manager's Guide to Responsibility, Trust and Motivation* (Massachusetts: Human Resource Development Press Inc., 2003), 170.

²⁴ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 323.

²⁵ Paul Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, ed. George H. Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 34.

²⁶ Ricœur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 242-266. The danger that Ricœur perceives in the Cartesian cogito is the solipsism of the subject as the be all and end all of "Being": "This illusion is the fruit of a preceding victory, which conquered the previous illusion of the thing. The philosopher retained in the school of Descartes knows that things are doubtful, that they are not what they appear to be. But he never doubts that consciousness is at it appears to itself." Thus, Ricœur argues that "after doubting the thing, we have begun to doubt consciousness" (148) Hence, Ricœur proceeds to a "Hermeneutics of the Self" as a critique to the "Philosophy of Consciousness."

²⁷ Paul Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. by Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Bacon Press, 1969), 129. Hereafter, cited as Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*.

constant struggle of the fallible man in becoming a capable man who, as Emmanuel Levinas would put it, despite the “struggle remains human.”²⁸

Similarly, Nietzsche offers us a kind of thinking that liberates man from the shackles of culture which stifle him to become the best-version-of-himself as human being with the aspiration of the *Übermensch*. This presupposes then that the counterculture thinking of Nietzsche is a “tool” i.e., a hammer which equips man to break the mediocrities of life, to make himself free from what is inauthentic. Hence, the *Übermensch* is an endless utopic project, a ceaseless dialectic of self-overcoming—a rigorous quest for authentic human existence.

Nietzsche and Ricœur were convinced that the ontological fact of life is not an easy-go-lucky life because life itself is a tragic reality. It is the “damaged life” as Theodor Adorno puts it, the “absurd life” of Albert Camus, and the “chaosmos” of Deleuze. Indeed, life is a strenuous dialectic for Nietzsche acknowledges that “nihilism stands at the door.”²⁹ Ontologically, this is the constant existential struggle of man. Given this existential factuality, Nietzsche endeavors to once again re-evaluate and re-discover the immanent value of life: “But what is life? Here we need a new, more definite formulation of the concept of ‘life.’ My formula for it is: Life is will to power.”³⁰ And to avoid unnecessary confusions, Deleuze contextualizes Nietzsche’s *will to power*: “What Nietzsche calls *noble, high, and master* is sometimes active force, sometimes affirmative will. What he calls *base, vile and slavish* is sometimes reactive force and sometimes negative will.”³¹ This presupposes then that the will to power is the willingness to live an authentic life. Ricœur likewise avows that it is the affirmative will to power that gives value to life:

²⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 55. Hereafter, cited as Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*.

²⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1967) I, 1. Hereafter, cited as Nietzsche, *Will to Power*.

³⁰ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, II, 254.

³¹ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 55.

Willing is the *valuation of life*, I broaden out the spread of my motivation by contrasting other *values* with my own *life*. The fact is that the *body* is not only a *value* among others, but also that it is in some way involved in the apprehension of all motives and through them of all *values*.³² [Emphasis mine.]

Simply put, Nietzsche's *Übermensch* and Ricœur's *Capable Man* present a more humane valuation of life in which man can willfully and meaningfully think and live without any constraint and compromises. The notions of the *Übermensch* and *Capable Man* are ideals for the realization of the very humanity of man.

THE ÜBERMENSCH AND THE CAPABLE MAN: AN AUTHENTIC EXISTENCE

Nietzsche's critique of nihilism becomes a prelude to his philosophical anthropology. In *Twilight of Idols*, Nietzsche highlights two types of men based on how one perceives and lives his life. He elaborates that

Every individual may be scrutinized to see whether he represents the ascending line or the descending line of life. Having made the decision, one has a canon for the worth of his self-interest. If he represents the ascending line, then his worth is indeed extraordinary—and for the sake of life as a whole, which takes the step farther through him, the care for his preservation and for the creation of the best conditions for him may be extreme ... if he represents the descending development, decay, chronic degeneration, and sickness ... then he has small worth, and the

³² Paul Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, trans. by Erazim V. Kohak (USA: Northwestern University Press, 1966), 122. Hereafter, cited as Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*.

minimum decay requires that he take away as little as possible from those who have turned out well. He is merely their parasite.³³

This is precisely the typology of life that Nietzsche wants us to ponder in a world where “God is dead”: either we just mourn and do nothing about the “death of God,” hence, live life negatively and passively like what the old man does in the forest—“I makes songs and sing them, and when I make songs, I laugh, weep, and mutter: thus I praise God”³⁴ or we do something creative, productive, and worthwhile with regards to the thought experiment of the “death of God” by overcoming it including the shadows of the dead God, hence, live life affirmatively and actively like what Zarathustra did; and now he revisits again the ground to teach us the “Bergenske”—that “man is something that should be overcome.”³⁵ Thus, man as an overture is never a palliative responsibility rather it is a dangerous yet a noble task: “a dangerous going-across, a dangerous wayfaring, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and staying still.”³⁶ This is how arduous the task of self-overcoming and Ricoeur correlatively relate this with the phenomenology of the *capable man* who is striving to go beyond his finitude, who recognizes that he *can* despite his existential limits, and who keeps on rising whenever he falls for “nothing is demanded of a man that he cannot do.”³⁷ This capacity to overcome oneself is precisely the greatness of man. Moreover, “what is great in man,” according to Nietzsche, “is that he is a bridge and not a goal; what can be loved in man is that he is a *going-across* and a *down-going*.”³⁸ Nonetheless, in order for self-overcoming to be possible, one should unburden himself from the “weight of heavy things” loaded by “modern ideals” for “man is a rope, fastened between animal and Superman— a rope

³³ Nietzsche, *Twilight of Idols*, IX, 33.

³⁴ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (trans. by R.J. Hollingdale), 41.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁷ Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 129.

³⁸ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (trans. by R.J. Hollingdale), 44.

over an abyss.”³⁹ It is only in unmasking ourselves from our mediocrities and unloading ourselves from the burdens of culture that keep us from falling into the abyss of life.

In a way, the experience of nihilism is an eye-opener for man. Nihilism becomes the *conditio sine qua non* of man’s self-overcoming. Nevertheless, this overcoming is not accomplished overnight; it is a lifetime struggle, “and once I have overcome myself that far, then I also want to overcome myself in what is still greater; and a victory shall seal my perfection.... Meanwhile I still drift on uncertain seas; smooth-tongued, and still see no end. As yet the hour of my struggle has not come to me—or is it coming just now.”⁴⁰ This presupposes that as long as man possesses life he is in relentless battle with nihilism; thus, man must affirmatively live and actively overcome every moment of his life. “This perhaps means that nihilism still is a natural tendency for humans, and the only way to overcome it is to experience it,”⁴¹ not to escape it but to pass through it, for it is in going through it that one is able to overcome it.

Subsequently, the event of overcoming is a “creative moment” and a “great noontide” for self-rediscovery, self-realization, “self-reflection of consciousness”—the “great hour” when Zarathustra is going-down again, like a frightful lightning and a thawing wind, from the mountain to “teach the *Übermensch*” as he bellows: “Behold, I teach you the Superman. The Superman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: The Superman *shall be* the meaning of the earth!”⁴² What the *Übermensch* offers us is a new image of thought and new mode of living by advancing the “de-deification of nature” and the “naturalization of man”⁴³ Every man has the aspiration of the *Übermensch* for man is never complete in himself, he is a rope i.e., an overture which needs to be continuously overcome. Henceforth, Zarathustra announces:

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁴¹ Bolaños, *On Affirmation and Becoming*, 67.

⁴² Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (trans. by R.J. Hollingdale), 42.

⁴³ See, Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 109.

I have the overman at heart, that is my first and only concern—and not man: not the neighbor, not the poorest, not the most ailing, not the best ... that you despise, you higher men lets me hope ... Overcome these masters of today, O my brothers—these small people, they are the overman’s greatest danger.⁴⁴

The triumph of Zarathustra is likewise the triumph of man over himself, over his own mediocrity, and nihilistic tendency. It is the victory of the one who is ascending in life over the decadent man, the noble over the base, the master over the slave, the healthy over the sick, the joyous over the resentful, the active over the reactive (in relation to force), the affirmative over the negative (in relation to power). This is the reason why Zarathustra eagerly warns us against the *poison mixers*, *despisers of life* and the *afterworldsmen* for “the poison (fiction) that these despisers of life feed us are the very transcendent values that we have hitherto accorded the value of truth which we usually regard as the foundation of life.”⁴⁵ These poison mixers are the people who are obviously consumed by the nihilistic culture. They unmindfully live a life of inauthenticity and continuously proliferating poisons by recruiting more of their kind. Their poisons dizzied us to believe in their pathological ideologies which in turn becomes self-destructive. Hence, the *poison mixers* live in distrust and rigidity while the “noble man lives in trust and openness with himself.”⁴⁶ The noble man is the master of himself, he has the courage to say “I will” even though the fiercest dragon says “thou shalt.”⁴⁷ This denotes that the “noble type of man

⁴⁴ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (trans. by W. Kaufmann), 13, 3.

⁴⁵ Bolaños, *On Affirmation and Becoming*, 13.

⁴⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (New York: Modern Library, 2000) I, 12. Hereafter, cited as Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*.

⁴⁷ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (trans. by R.J. Hollingdale), 45. Personally, this fundamental trust of man in himself and in life is the act of the whole person freely making the choice. This is the struggle of a decision before a reality (i.e., life) that doesn’t yield its meaning outright that reveals and conceals, that teases in its ambiguity: one has to decide

experiences itself as determining values; it does not need approval..."⁴⁸ He does not need the approval of the "metaphysical guarantor," to obey the command of the *ascetic priest* or to be influenced by the *morality of rabble* for "morality is herd instinct in the individual."⁴⁹ In life, we must have the audacity to say "No" for an affirmative "No" paves the way to the relentless "Yes":

Saying Yes to life even in its strangest and hardest problems, the will to life rejoicing over its own inexhaustibility even in the very sacrifice of its highest types—that is what I called Dionysian"⁵⁰

This *Dionysian Yes* opens up infinite possibilities while the nihilistic culture as an "illness... separates me from what I can do, as reactive force makes me reactive, it narrows my possibilities."⁵¹ In this way, Nietzsche's *Übermensch* like Ricoeur's *Capable Man* urges one to be open to changes, to possibilities, to chaos even to the point of death for the "Übermensch as the new meaning of the earth, is the overcoming of humanity, which is seen in the drama of the last man and the man who wills his own death."⁵² Self-overcoming necessitates the experience of many deaths for this is the only way for man to overcome his mediocrities and nihilistic tendencies. This death of man "is said to be an active operation an 'active deconstruction,'"⁵³ that emancipates him from the servility of the nihilistic culture. Though imperfect man is, he is capable in many ways

whether to confide in it or to despair over it. Nevertheless, it is in this act of trusting that reality hints at a meaning. Man chooses to trust not because he has already seen the meaning (of life) but because he is trusting to see the meaning of it. Simply put. The meaning is given in the very act of trusting.

⁴⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1966) IX, 260.

⁴⁹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 166.

⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *Twilight of Idols*, X, 5.

⁵¹ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 66.

⁵² Bolaños, *On Affirmation and Becoming*, 41.

⁵³ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 70.

since he can overcome himself and rise up from where he has fallen, for “human fallibility is not the sum total of existence or of human nature.”⁵⁴ Ricœur affirms that the mediocre man has the capacity to become otherwise, that man’s frailty is a part of the stairway to being capable. The act of self-overcoming is “a credit addressed to the resources of *self-regeneration*.”⁵⁵ Hence, the Ricœurian capable man or the Nietzschean noble man is someone who is striving to overcome his finitude, his baseness, his decadence; who ceaselessly realizes his authenticity in his own humanity.

Moreover, the noble/capable man acknowledges the uncertainty and untimeliness of life. Life is like the game of dice-throwing wherein the result is unpredictable but despite of its ambiguity the noble/capable man courageously embraces the game for the mere throwing of the dice implies the affirmation of possibility. In other words, embracing the opaqueness of life ushers us to a life of possibilities. This suggests that the noble/capable man is a hopeful man—he is hopeful not in an afterlife but in this life and the future it unfolds: “man continues to look to the future, scanning the retreating horizon for new possibilities.”⁵⁶ This is what Ricœur meant when he said that man is a “positive man;”⁵⁷ i.e., “capable man” which is similar to Nietzsche’s noble man i.e., “overman.” However, as aforementioned earlier, the way to Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* and Ricœur’s *Capable Man* is never easy for the noble/capable man is also someone “who is at once acting and suffering.”⁵⁸ In life, man will always be confronted with tragedies but the noble/capable man takes these difficulties not as stumbling-block but a stepping-stone, an opportunity to go beyond his present lowly condition

⁵⁴ Rebecca Huskey, *Paul Ricœur on Hope: Expecting the Good* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2009), 19. Hereafter, cited as Huskey, *Paul Ricœur on Hope*.

⁵⁵ Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 446.

⁵⁶ Huskey, *Paul Ricœur on Hope*, 41.

⁵⁷ Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, 429.

⁵⁸ Paul Ricœur, “Memory, History, Forgiveness: A Dialogue Between Paul Ricœur and Sorin Antohi,” interview by Sorin Antohi (New York: Trivium Publications, 2003), 21.

for “nothing is demanded of a man that he cannot do.”⁵⁹ Nietzsche is determined that through the inspiration of the *Übermensch* man will be able to overcome the tragedies of life:

Facing up to this challenge requires one to also think and behave like the *Übermensch*—beyond good and evil, Godless—and like Dionysus—purposeless, free, joyous! This is the only way by which one could think joyously sans the shackles of transcendent universals.⁶⁰

Through the guiding principle of the *Übermensch*, man is able to daringly overcome his mediocrity as he aspires to be more from what/who he is now. He is never contented to what is in the moment, he does not find security in any of the status quo, and he always feel the emptiness within himself which needs to be overcome. Accordingly, the noble/capable man always ascends in life, faces life head-on; his “Yes” to life gave him the *will* to say “I am’..., I want, I move, I do.”⁶¹ One must therefore be willing to morph from a “weight-bearing camel” to a fierce “lion,” then finally to an innocent “child” joyfully uttering his “sacred Yes” to life. Zarathustra expresses this “Yes” as he comments: “Yes! To look down upon myself and even upon my stars: that alone would I call my *summit*, that has remained for me my *ultimate* summit!”⁶² Because of the relentless “Yes,” one rediscovers that “I can change my perspective of perception and in this way, I move myself”⁶³ from decadence to authentic existence. Above all, through this unbinding and encompassing “Yes,” the noble/capable man i.e., authentic man is always ready to face what Nietzsche termed as the “Eternal Recurrence” in which whatever one wills he likewise will its

⁵⁹ Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 129.

⁶⁰ Bolaños, *On Affirmation and Becoming*, 80.

⁶¹ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 321.

⁶² Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (trans. by R.J. Hollingdale), 174.

⁶³ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 323.

eternal return. Nietzsche furthers the ethical import of the eternal recurrence:

This life as you now live it have lived it, you have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you...The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!⁶⁴

In the end, our fate and destiny lie on the way we perceive and live life. Nietzsche's *Übermensch* as well as Ricœur's *Capable Man* is more of an appeal than a proposal for us to be authentic because authenticity does not only renew ourselves but also renew life. To put it differently, the *Übermensch* and the *Capable Man* renew the humanity of man and the vivacity of life. Furthermore, Nietzsche and Ricœur provide us with a new form of humanism: the former prompts us that we are "human, all too human"⁶⁵ and the latter reminds us that "man is only man."⁶⁶ Above all, Nietzsche's conception of the *Übermensch* and Ricœur's notion of the *Capable Man* mark the peculiarity and radicality of their own philosophy of Man in the sense of creating a space for a discourse which deals with human authenticity.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 341.

⁶⁵ See, Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. by R.J. Hollingdale (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁶⁶ See, Paul Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, trans. by Charles A. Kelbley (Chicago: Regnery, 1965) and Paul Ricœur, "The Meaning of Man," in *Political and Social Essays*, ed. David Steward & Joseph Bien (USA: Ohio University Press, 1974).

⁶⁷ Bolaños, "Nietzsche's Critique of Nihilism," 549.

CONCLUSION

It is indeed erroneous to outrightly label Nietzsche's philosophy as a resentful atheistic rant!⁶⁸ With all the negative allegations from various commentators, Ricœur respects Nietzsche's philosophic dignity. Ricœur have pondered the peculiar character of Nietzsche's thinking because of his intellectual honesty and brevity. Indubitably, Nietzsche as well as Ricœur has something fundamental to tell us particularly to those who are still victims of the nihilistic culture of Platonism: the decadent, base, sick, reactive, negative, and even the "last man" who blindly submit and accept the indoctrination of pathological ideologies, which dampens our sensibility of life, of the world, and of ourselves. Thus, Nietzsche's *Übermensch* and Ricœur's *Capable Man* carry a liberating force that awaken us from our dogmatic slumber and opens a more critical way of thinking, acting, and existing. These humanistic ideals are implicitly teaching man a kind of discipline on exercising suspicion and self-critique in order to liberate himself from the servility of false consciousness. And by this emancipation from the nihilism, man once again rediscover himself anew with more vigor and enthusiasm. The *Übermensch* and the *Capable Man* aim to draw man towards self-authenticity. Hence, to recover man's authenticity, Nietzsche in a way gives us a retreat:

The man who does not wish to belong to the mass needs only to cease taking himself easily; let him follow his conscience, which call to him: "Be your self! All you are now doing, thinking, desiring, is not yourself." Every youthful soul hears this call day and night and trembles when he hears it; for the idea of its liberation gives a presentiment of the measure of happiness allotted it from all eternity—a happiness to which it can by no means attain so long as it lies fettered by the chains of fear and

⁶⁸ See, Paolo A. Bolaños, "Nietzsche, Spinoza, and the Ethological Conception of Ethics," *Minerva: An Internet Journal of Philosophy*, 11 (2007), 114.

convention. And now dismissal and senseless life can be without liberation!⁶⁹

It is difficult indeed to be ourselves in a world where it compels you to be otherwise. Man will always be in a dialectic struggle with himself and with the culture of nihilism in order to rediscover his authentic self. The quest for authenticity is an arduous project to pursue because the self, with all its mediocrity and complacency, is the last and hardest one to let go. Henceforth, self-authenticity necessitates a “personal sacrifice”⁷⁰ because aspiring for authentic existence amidst the absurdity of life is a selfless act. It demands innumerable *deaths* (like the death of *God*, the death of the *last man*) particularly our own death in order to give birth to the “Overman” of Nietzsche and the “Capable Man” of Ricœur. To conclude this paper, let me end with this line: “I find myself only by losing myself.”⁷¹

⁶⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. by R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), III, 1.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁷¹ Paul Ricœur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 106.

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