

Nietzsche's Hyperanthropos-Centrism

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I. INTRODUCTION

Max O. Hallman's seminal 1991 essay, "Nietzsche's Environmental Ethics" (Hallman 1991), was the beginning of an important discussion and reassessment of the applicability of Nietzsche's philosophy for environmental purposes. Hallman's perhaps Dionysian enthusiasm [*Rausch*] for Nietzsche as a forerunner of deep ecology was soon tempered by Ralph R. Acampora's more sober Apollonianism (Acampora 1994).¹ Acampora argues, rightly, that some of Hallman's claims go too far, and that he relies too heavily on the unpublished material in Nietzsche's notes.² But most importantly for my purposes, Acampora disputes Hallman's claims regarding Nietzsche's purported anticipatory "biospherical egalitarianism" and his overcoming of anthropocentrism (Acampora 1994, 187). Instead, Acampora, wrongly, attributes to Nietzsche a stance of "high humanism".³ As Graham Parkes notes, "Nietzsche is admittedly an elitist – but with respect to his fellows rather than to animals, plants, and other natural phenomena" (Parkes 2005, 85). In this paper I argue that Nietzsche's environmental ethics are in fact compatible with a deep ecology platform in that paradoxically he does indeed overcome anthropocentrism in favor of an understanding of human uniqueness and a *superhuman* – or what I will call – *hyperanthropos*-centrism.⁴

II. THE ÜBERMENSCH

Acampora heavily faults Hallman for his "disregard of the highly significant Nietzschean figure of the *Übermensch*" (Acampora 1994, 188). He chides Hallman for relegating this important an issue to a footnote where he leaves the matter open for considerations of space (Hallman 1991, 100 n.3; Acampora 1994, 188 n.7). For Acampora, it is precisely Nietzsche's conception of the *Übermensch* that disqualifies him as a proponent of biospherical egalitarianism and thus from

¹ Other responses include (not an exhaustive list): Drenthen (1999); Del Caro (2004a); Parkes (2005); and Vincenzo (2006). Vincenzo, whose article contains its own more complete bibliography on the ecological Nietzsche, notes that, "The consensus among these authors, with the exception of Acampora, is that Nietzsche is of vital importance to environmental philosophy" (2006, 62). More recently see Zimmerman (2008).

² To avoid this criticism myself, I will restrict my references almost entirely to those writings Nietzsche himself chose to publish.

³ Acampora's other claims about Nietzsche's "aristocratic individualism" are also called into question by Young (2006). Young makes a strong case for Nietzsche as a more communitarian thinker.

⁴ *Hyperanthropos* being the Greek equivalent of Nietzsche's German *Übermensch*.

being a deep ecologist (albeit *avant la lettre*). This is the charge I must answer to make the case for Nietzsche's being compatible with the deep ecology platform.

For his part, Parkes, also noting the lacuna of the *Übermensch* in Hallman's article, takes it in a completely different direction from Acampora: "On the contrary, the idea of the *Übermensch*, or "Overhuman" – representing the possibility of a radically new way of being for the human – is profoundly relevant for ecological thinking." Parkes continues:

The Overhuman signifies a way of being that is attained by 'overcoming' the human, which, as the rest of Zarathustra shows, requires that one go beyond the merely human perspective and transcend the anthropocentric world view. (Acampora's claim that one should attribute a "high humanism" to Nietzsche is rendered problematic by the repeated assertions of the protagonist of his [Nietzsche's] favorite book [*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*] to the effect that 'the human being is something that must be overcome.')

 (Parkes 2005, 81).

Thus for Parkes and me, it is precisely Nietzsche's concept of the Overhuman that clears Nietzsche of the charge of anthropocentrism. Martin Drenthen tries to find a balanced approach. While agreeing with Acampora (as I do as well) that "ecophilosophers need to exercise hermeneutical caution in any attempt to appropriate Nietzsche for environmental ethical designs," he also states that:

On the other hand, I do object strongly to Acampora's statement that Nietzsche's philosophy can contribute nothing positive to environmental ethics at all. Acampora advises ecophilosophers who wish to utilize Nietzsche's thought *not* to rely on his positive moral and political statements (which, according to Acampora, aim at a "high humanism"), but "merely on the latter's 'negative' or deconstructive overcoming of Christian, homo-exclusive values." I believe that such a division between Nietzsche's constructive and deconstructive remarks is artificial. It is precisely *in* Nietzsche's critical remarks that we can discern his positive ethical project (Drenthen 1999: 164).

It is this positive ethical (environmental) project that I wish to highlight here and I think the right way to do that is to ask the question about Nietzsche's hyperanthropos-centrism.

Surely a writer who spent so much time in the more-than-human world and wrote about it so frequently as Nietzsche did (as Adrian Del Caro, Parkes, and others have so well documented) can contribute something further to the discussion of environmental ethics than just the deconstruction of the Christian values that arguably got us into our current predicament.⁵ At

⁵ In addition to the articles already mentioned see Del Caro (2004b), and Parkes (1994).

any rate as we will see, Nietzsche's proposed cure for the past two millennia of Christianity is the creation of the Superhuman.

III. BIOSPHERICAL EGALITARIANISM

According to the first principle of the eight-plank platform of Deep Ecology by George Sessions and Arne Naess, biospherical egalitarianism is described as: "The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman Life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent worth). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes" (Naess 1995, 68). They go on to explain that this is an explicit rejection of anthropocentrism. As Naess had already made clear in his earlier (1973) article entitled "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-range Ecology Movement. A Summary," it the stance on anthropocentrism that marks the difference between what he calls the shallow versus deep ecology. It is important to note, in light of one of Acampora's criticisms of Hallman, that in this article Naess calls for "biospherical egalitarianism – *in principle*" (Naess 1973, 95; emphasis mine). Acampora questions how Hallman can talk about Nietzsche's biospherical egalitarianism in terms of a non-exploitive relationship between humans and nature when Nietzsche's very principle of will to power explicitly includes the concept of exploitation. To prove his point, he quotes from Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* where Nietzsche himself writes:

Life itself is *essentially* appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker; suppression, hardness, imposition of one's own forms, incorporation and at least, at its mildest, exploitation...because life simply *is* will to power...'Exploitation' does not belong to a corrupt or imperfect primitive society: it belongs to the *essence* of what lives, as a basic organic function; it is a consequence of the will to power, which is after all the will of life (quoted in Acampora 1994, 189).

Acampora takes this as damning evidence against any claim that Nietzsche could be read as a biospherical egalitarian. But as Naess had previously explained of his principle of biospherical egalitarianism, "the 'in principle' clause is inserted because any realistic praxis necessitates some killing, exploitation, and suppression" (Naess 1973, 95). Naess is not naive. He knows that life lives on life. Predation is a part of the natural ecosystem. For Naess, this does not count against his general principle of biospherical egalitarianism. Note the similarity in language (*exploitation* and *suppression*) here between Naess and Nietzsche. Nietzsche's description of the will to power here is just the organic life principle itself. His concept of will to power does not disqualify him in Naess's expanded definition from being included in the deep ecology movement. Naess and Sessions further acknowledge the need for humans to satisfy vital needs in the third plank of the platform (Naess 1995, 68). For his part, Parkes, argues that in the *Beyond Good and Evil* passage cited by Acampora above, "Nietzsche is discussing

exploitation within human societies...This exploitation has nothing to do with the human exploitation of nature, which for Nietzsche is a hopelessly crude expression of human will to power and never something that he condones" (Parkes 2005, 85).

IV. ANTHROPOCENTRISM

The main issue in terms of anthropocentrism is the question of what, if any, special status to afford us humans. Patrick Curry helpfully defines anthropocentrism as "the unjustified privileging of human beings, as such, at the expense of other forms of life, analogous to such prejudices as racism or sexism" (Curry 2011, 55). Nietzsche himself ridicules this type of anthropocentrism as the height of human vanity: "What is the vanity of the vainest man compared with the vanity which the most modest possesses, when, in the midst of nature and the world, he feels himself to be 'man'!" (Nietzsche 1996, 386). Nietzsche wants to "translate man back into nature" (Nietzsche 1990, 162), to "place him back among the animals" (Nietzsche 1982b, 580). Under the heading of "The Fundamental Errors," in *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche lists *as an error* humans thinking that we are "the astonishing exception the superbeast [*Übertier*] and almost-god, the meaning of creation which cannot be thought away, the solution of the cosmic riddle, the mighty ruler over nature and the despiser of it, the creature which calls *its history world history!* – *Vanitas vanitatum homo* [man is the vanity of vanities]" (Nietzsche 1996, 307). Two sections later, Nietzsche remarks humorously, "Let us hope there really are more spiritual beings than men are, so that all the humour shall not go to waste that lies in the fact that man regards himself as the goal and purpose of the existence of the whole universe..." (Nietzsche 1996, 307). In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche warns us of the "siren songs of old metaphysical bird-catchers who have too long been piping to [humans] 'you are more! you are higher! you are of a different origin!'" (Nietzsche 1990, 162). He states most emphatically in *The Antichrist*, "Man is by no means the crown of creation: every living being stands beside him on the same level of perfection" (Nietzsche 1982b, 580). Nietzsche sees human vanity in relation to the world of nature as completely unjustified. It is a holdover from the Judeo-Christian tradition that Nietzsche seeks to overcome. Even Acampora concedes that Nietzsche is only *descriptively* anthropocentric and not *normatively* homo-exclusive (Acampora 1994, 191). Acampora bases the charge of descriptive anthropocentrism on the many instances where Nietzsche seems to call humans to be more than nature, to perfect, and improve themselves thus rising above nature. It is true that Nietzsche is very often focused on human culture, its ills and possible cures, but Nietzsche also frequently calls for us to rise above humanity itself: "Man is something that should be overcome" is the frequent refrain in *Zarathustra* (Nietzsche 1969, 41).

V. PARADOXICAL UNIQUENESS

The question of human uniqueness takes a paradoxical turn in Nietzsche's thought. In the section of *The Antichrist* quoted above in which "man is by no means the crown of creation," he continues:

And even this is saying too much: relatively speaking, man is the most bungled of all the animals, the sickliest, and not one has strayed more dangerously from its instincts. But for all that, he is of course the most *interesting* (Nietzsche 1982b, 580).

If Nietzsche turns out not to be a biospherical egalitarian, it is not because he is an anthropocentrist, but rather, on the contrary, because he places humans *lower* on the scale of perfection than animals! What makes humans the most interesting to Nietzsche is not their exalted status (possessing reason or made in the image of God) but rather their sickliness. Humans and human culture are most deserving of his attentions precisely because it is humans that are the problem, not nature. It is humans, not other animals, who are out of touch with their own natural instincts and their place in the world. Hence the need to reinsert them back into nature. Nietzsche paints a similar picture in *On the Genealogy of Morals*:

The man who, for lack of external enemies and resistance, and wedged into an oppressive narrowness and regularity of custom, impatiently tore apart, persecuted, gnawed at, stirred up, maltreated himself; this animal that one wants to 'tame' and that beats itself raw on the bars of its cage; this deprived one, consumed by homesickness for the desert, who had to create out of himself an adventure, a place of torture, an uncertain and dangerous wilderness – this fool, this longing and desperate prisoner became the inventor of 'bad conscience.' In him, however, the greatest and most uncanny of sicknesses was introduced, one from which man has not recovered to this day, the suffering of man from man, from himself – as the consequence of a forceful separation from his animal past, of a leap and plunge, as it were, into new situations and conditions of existence, of a declaration of war against the old instincts on which his energy, desire, and terribleness had thus far rested (Nietzsche 1998, 57).

Here we get a graphic description of what happens to human-beings when they stray from or are separated from their natural animal instincts. Anticipating Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Nietzsche compares human culture to a "cage" and speaks of the separation of human from the "desert" and wildness. This separation from his or her own animal nature and from the more-than-human world, Nietzsche says, has made humans sick. Nietzsche, who often referred to himself as a psychologist, is years ahead of his time in diagnosing our modern

“nature-deficit disorder.”⁶ The human animal has turned its instincts on itself in the development of the “bad conscience.” It is thus we have become self-absorbed or in a word – anthropocentric. But note that this is a disease, a sickness. We are now homesick for our natural environment. In an aphorism entitled “Animal’s Criticism” in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes, “I fear that the animals see man as a being like them who in a most dangerous manner has lost his animal common sense – as the insane animal, the laughing animal, the weeping animal, the miserable animal” (Nietzsche 2001, 145). Again, according to *On the Genealogy of Morals*, humanity’s only “superiority” over other animals is the depth of our soul, created by our bad conscience, and our capacity for evil, making us the most dangerous animal! (Nietzsche 1998, 15-16).

To say that humans are the problem is not to insist on a rigid human/nature distinction, but is rather an acknowledgement of the importance of retaining the concept of anthropocentrism as a way to talk about the problems that uniquely human interventions, both in kind and scale, in ecosystems have caused. Only human beings, for instance, have crossed the kingdom barrier with genetic modification (a difference in kind) by introducing animal genes into plants (like salmon genes in tomatoes). Likewise, there is obviously a difference in scale between a beaver dam and a Hoover Dam. Morality too is a uniquely human cultural invention. For Nietzsche, arguably our greatest. Other animals have no need for such moral constructs. Animal morality, if such exists (and there is a growing body of scientific research that suggest it does at least to some extent), would presumably be based more on the ethical categories of good and bad rather than the uniquely human moral categories of good and *evil*.

Nietzsche sees the claim of human uniqueness (in any other form than the sickness that makes us most interesting) as hubris. “Hubris,” he writes, “is our entire stance towards nature today, our violation of nature with the help of machines and the so thoughtless inventiveness of technicians and engineers...” (Nietzsche 1998, 80). As Del Caro observes:

Nietzsche cannot sanction control of or technological domination over nature. Like an environmentalist, he needs nature to remain intact, to keep its obstacles (at least from the human perspective), to keep its naturalness – Nietzsche is a conservationist in this sense. Control over nature would have the effect of taming nature, rendering it innocuous, and Nietzsche decries this process in humans who are becoming ‘tamed’ instead of regulating their passions creatively (Del Caro 2004a, 318).

We saw in the passage from the *Genealogy of Morals* above the terrible price we are paying for the taming of the human animal. We are just beginning to learn the terrible price that we are

⁶ See Louv (2008).

now paying for our hubristic attempts to tame the rest of nature as well. As Del Caro writes elsewhere, “If we cannot dominate nature because nature does not acknowledge us as masters, we can still alter, transform, use, and destroy nature, or at least those parts of it to which we have direct access and upon which we depend for our day to day lives, and in recognition of this danger to both ourselves and other life on earth, Nietzsche calls for a superhuman who will cease the hubris-laden humanistic behaviors of the past and present, redirecting humanity from ‘the human is the meaning of the universe’ to ‘the superhuman is the meaning of the earth’” (Del Caro 2004b, 424).

To our contemporary debates about the legitimacy of drawing any sort of human/nature distinction, Nietzsche might say, “Yes, of course, humans are just another part of nature and in no way distinct, *except* as the sickest of animals and the most in need of a cure. It is (uniquely) human culture that has made us sick.”⁷ Culture is both our blessing and our curse. It is what makes us most interesting to Nietzsche, but at what cost to our animal nature? Unfortunately for us modern humans, the disease is incurable. The only solution is to overcome humanity as we now know it and create the Superhuman.

On the plus side, what makes us the most interesting and concomitantly the most dangerous animal for Nietzsche is our unprecedented willingness to experiment on ourselves. “Hubris is our stance towards ourselves,” as well as Nietzsche points out, “for we experiment with ourselves as we would not permit ourselves to do with any animal and merrily and consciously slit open our souls while the body is still living...We do violence to ourselves now, no doubt, we nutcrackers of souls, we questioners and questionable ones, as if life were nothing but nutcracking; precisely in so doing we must of necessity become, with each passing day, ever more questionable, *worthier* of questioning, perhaps also *worthier* – of living?” (Nietzsche, 1998, 80). The whole point of these experiments with the ascetic ideal that Nietzsche is discussing in this section, and the one thing that humans alone seem capable of, is to give meaning to suffering. We alone amongst our animal kin *want* to suffer. This makes us the bravest animal (Nietzsche 1998, 117). But to what end? Self-overcoming! Here is the crux of the matter for Nietzsche: we moderns stand at a dangerous crossroads. We are the types of beings that must give meaning to our suffering. We can do that either through a nihilistic will to nothingness, or we can prepare the ground for the coming of the Superhuman who will be the meaning of the earth. The Superhuman redeems our present suffering and thus becomes the meaning of the whole sad history of the ascetic ideal: “This human of the future who will redeem is from the previous ideal as much as from that which has grown out of it, from the

⁷ No one in Nietzsche’s day could have imagined to what extent human activity is now making the rest of the planet sick as well. I am using the word “culture” here as the contrast term to “nature” and to denote what Nietzsche often refers to as the “anti-natural moralities” which are really what make modern culture sick.

great disgust, from the will to nothingness; this bell-stroke of noon and of the great decision, that makes the will free again, that gives back to the earth its goal and to man his hope...*he must one day come...*" (Nietzsche 1998, 66). This is what makes modern humans so worthy for Nietzsche as we will see, because we are the type of animal that will serve as the bridge to the Superhuman.⁸

VI. RETURN TO NATURE?

Before we turn directly to Nietzsche's hyperanthropos-centrism, a few cautionary words are needed about this notion of a return to nature or re-inserting the human into nature. For Nietzsche, this is decidedly not a going backwards to some fantasized pristine past *à la* the Romantics, nor is it throwing off all culture and returning to the "noble savage" *à la* Rousseau. Nor is it a Stoic living "according to nature." It is a way forwards not backwards. Nietzsche considers Rousseau's return to nature an impossibility, calling it a "return to nature *in impuris naturalibus* [in natural filth]" (Nietzsche 1982a, 513; see also the paradoxical note "Contra Rousseau" in Nietzsche 1997, 100). This quip contra Rousseau also indicates his critique of the Romantics as well. They mainly focus only on the beautiful, benign, and harmonious aspects of nature, forgetting that it is also often "red in tooth and claw." In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche equates Romantics with those who "suffer from an impoverishment of life and seek quiet, stillness, calm seas, redemption from themselves through art and insight, or else intoxication, paroxysm, numbness, madness." Unlike his Dionysian type (which is the superhuman as we will see) who suffers from a superabundance of life and who can look life squarely in the eye (the good and the bad of it), the impoverished Romantic type "takes revenge on all things by forcing, imprinting, branding his image on them..." (Nietzsche 2001, 236). This criticism of the Romantics leads us directly to his critique of the Stoics as well, and in this same section of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche also includes Epicurus as a Romantic type.

VII. ACCORDING TO NATURE?

I include this somewhat lengthier consideration of the Stoics as well because it is another bone of contention between Acampora and Hallman. Both Hallman and Acampora refer us to *Beyond Good and Evil*, section 9; Hallman to argue for Nietzsche's view of our embedment in nature, and Acampora to disprove it. Hallman quotes part of Nietzsche's critique of the Stoics:

⁸ Here I disagree in important ways with Zimmerman (2008) who emphasizes Nietzsche's interest in *human* nature over *biospheric* nature and who thinks Nietzsche is happy to roll the dice with modern humanity's display of technical power. While I do think it is true that modern humanity – even democratic and herd humanity – is a necessary stepping stone to the Superhuman (to think otherwise would be *ressentiment*), I do not think Zimmerman, perhaps because of Heidegger's influence, sufficiently emphasizes the importance of the overcoming of modern humans in favor of the re-naturalized Superhuman.

In truth, the matter is altogether different: while you pretend rapturously to read the canon of your law in nature, you want something opposite, you strange actors and self-deceivers! Your pride wants to impose your morality, your ideal, on nature – even on nature – and incorporate them in her; you demand that she should be nature "according to the Stoa," and you would like all existence to exist only after your own image. . . . And some abysmal arrogance finally still inspires you with the insane hope that because you know how to tyrannize yourselves-Stoicism is self-tyranny-nature, too, lets herself be tyrannized: is not the Stoic-a piece of nature? (quoted in Hallman 1991, 118).

Hallman sees this as further evidence of Nietzsche's critique of human arrogance in trying to make nature according to our image and design. Note the similarity here with Nietzsche's critique of the Romantics for attempting the same. Acampora quotes from the beginning of the section in order to contextualize (and thus call into question) Hallman's reading here. Nietzsche, as Acampora reminds us, begins this section by saying:

"According to nature" you want to *live*? O you noble Stoics, what deceptive words these are! Imagine a being like nature, wasteful beyond measure, without purposes and consideration, without mercy and justice, fertile and desolate and uncertain at the same time; imagine indifference itself as a power – how *could* you live according to this indifference? Living – is that not precisely wanting to be other than this nature? Is not living – estimating, preferring, being unjust, being limited, wanting to be different? (quoted in Acampora 1994, 190).

"Is this the speech of a 'forerunner of deep ecology' – or someone who would put 'Earth first!' – or of someone who believes that 'the land' might be in any way normative for human behavior?" Acampora asks incredulously. To which Graham Parkes in his essay answers, "quite possibly" (Parkes 2005, 89). Parkes points out that when read in conjunction with section 188 which also talks about the Stoics, we see that Stoic self-tyranny is also "natural."

According to Parkes, Hallman is missing the point of section 9 which is not about human arrogance in relation to nature, but rather that the self-mastery of the Stoic reflects nature's own process of advancement. Self-tyranny leads to higher culture which, again, is not all bad. It is a means of improvement and making us humans more interesting.

While I certainly agree with Parkes that there is a positive role for culture to play, I do think what Nietzsche is criticizing here is not so much the *self-tyranny* of the Stoics but rather their *self-delusion*. They *think* they are living according to nature, but they want to be the ones to decide what that "nature" is. They want to impose their own law and order on a world which is essentially chaos and Heraclitan flux. They make the same error as the Romantics (and Rousseau for that matter) in that they want to pick and choose only certain aspects of nature to emulate. This is not taking nature as it really is, but rather substituting something of their own

creation in its place, as the passage Acampora reminds us of, makes clear. This is about human arrogance. Nietzsche also remarks in section 188 that “‘Nature’ *as it is*, in all its extravagant and *indifferent* magnificence . . . appalls us, but is noble” (quoted in Parkes 2005, 89). The Stoics, and they are not alone in this, cannot live according to this extravagant and indifferent nature. They perforce must imagine a nature that operates according to their own needs. Only the superhuman can face nature “as is.” As Parkes goes on to comment:

The “as it is” is clearly meant to suggest the possibility of encountering a “dehumanized” nature on its own terms, and not just as it appears to human beings within a projected horizon of utilitarian or scientific or aesthetic concerns. While it may be appalling in its indifference, it is also noble – and thus worthy of human emulation. In this sense nature can serve as a standard for Nietzsche’s task of the “renaturalization” of humanity – a humanity that might reasonably be expected to expend its energies tyrannizing itself for the sake of culture rather than tyrannizing nature for the sake of commercial profit. The human being is for Nietzsche a part of nature, a distinctive part, although antinatural moralities have served over the millennia to obscure this condition.

It is my contention that a renaturalized human is precisely Nietzsche’s recipe for the Superhuman. What I believe Nietzsche is emphasizing here is that in order to “live according to nature” or to “return to nature” one has to learn to affirm it *as is* not just as one wishes it to be or as one projects it as being. As Drenthen notes, there is a central paradox in Nietzsche’s position:

As a key concept in Nietzsche’s critique of morality, *nature* functions as a counterpoint to any moral interpretation of nature. Nietzsche not only criticizes the dominant anthropocentric attitude toward nature, but *all* appropriations of nature. At the same time, he urges us to make better interpretations of what nature really is, since, according to Nietzsche, we cannot get rid of nature. Although we are inevitably trying to master nature, we remain aware of the fact that the world is not of our making. We find ourselves already “in context,” we live in a world that is already there (Drenthen 1999, 174).

As Nietzsche will say in *The Antichrist*:

Once the concept ‘nature’ had been devised as the concept antithetical to ‘God’, ‘natural’ had to be the word for ‘reprehensible’ – this entire fictional world has its roots in *hatred* of the natural (–actuality!–), it is the expression of the profoundest discontent with the actual...*But that explains everything*. Who alone has reason to *lie himself out* of actuality? He who *suffers* from it. But to suffer from actuality means to be an abortive actuality... (Nietzsche 1982b, 582).

In this passage, Nietzsche unmasks the hatred and discontent that lie beneath our attempts to separate ourselves from nature and to take up a superior position. Unwilling or unable to accept actuality as we find it, humans have substituted a fiction of our own devising in its place.⁹ Note that we did this not from a position of strength but from suffering. We see again the paradoxical nature of human uniqueness here as well.

At the risk of going against the grain of certain postmodern readings of Nietzsche which celebrate his tendency to play fast and loose with concepts like truth, I think there is a certain realism here in Nietzsche's views on nature. While he would agree with Kant that we cannot know the thing-in-itself, and that there are "necessary fictions" which make life possible for beings like us, he also would remind us that there are those "plain, harsh, ugly, unpleasant, unchristian, immoral" truths as well (Nietzsche 1998, 10).¹⁰ One of which would be that nature is not always kind and that it is definitely not here just for our benefit. The plot line of Nietzsche's greatest work (by his own estimation), *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, is about his hero with great difficulty coming to terms with just such truths.

VIII. HYPERANTHROPOS-CENTRISM

Nietzsche's Zarathustra is the teacher of the hyperanthropos [Übermensch]. He introduces the concept to his audience as follows:

I teach you the Superman. Man is something that should be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?
All creatures hitherto have created something beyond themselves: and do you want to be the ebb of this great tide, and return to the animals rather than overcome man? (Nietzsche 1969, 41).

The Superhuman is clearly envisioned here as the next stage in the evolution of humanity. Just as humans evolved from other life-forms, so the Superhuman will now evolve from humans. Nietzsche goes on to say that just as the ape is a laughingstock to humans, so will current humans be to the future Superhumans. This is a clear rejection of the notion that humans any sort of end-point or crowning achievement in the evolutionary process. As Zarathustra will go on to say, "Man is a rope, fastened between animal and Superman – a rope over an abyss" (Nietzsche 1969, 43). Note also the forward trajectory here. There is no returning to previous stages – no returning to the animal. This is not to deny the animal nature of humans, we are clearly linked by our common evolutionary history, it is to point out that because of the uniquely human creation of culture (morality), we have become more (special but not

⁹ Cf. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable."

¹⁰ For Nietzsche on "necessary fictions," see "On the Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," in Nietzsche (1979).

superior). “You have made your way from worm to man,” Zarathustra tells his audience, “and much in you is still worm. Once you were apes, and even now man is more of an ape than any ape” (Nietzsche 1969, 42). There is clearly a continuity here between human animals and the rest of the animal world.

As discussed above, there is no turning back the clock on culture – no Romantic, Rousseauian, or Stoic, return to nature. Nietzsche wants to affirm what makes humans unique and interesting even though it is also what has made us sick. The process of reinserting humans back into nature, which will be the task of the Superhuman, is not to deny what makes us unique but rather to find a way to affirm it while overcoming the sickness it has caused – our nature deficit disorder – by reconnecting us with the more-than-human world which we have cut ourselves off from.

Zarathustra’s teaching continues:

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! (Nietzsche 1969, 42).

This is his clear statement of hyperanthropos-centrism. The meaning of the Superhuman is inextricably tied to the earth as he makes clear:

I entreat you, my brothers, *remain true to the earth*, and do not believe those who speak to you of superterrestrial hopes!...Once blasphemy against God was the greatest blasphemy, but God died, and thereupon these blasphemers died too. To blaspheme the earth is now the most dreadful offence... (Nietzsche 1969, 42).

The Superhuman rejects the metaphysical siren song of separate or higher origin, turning their attentions back to the earth from which their human forebearers have become estranged. Metaphysical humans are quite literally for Nietzsche extra-terrestrials in terms of orientation.

To be sure, it is the rare exceptional type person (and here Acampora’s suspicions about Nietzsche’s elitism are correct) that will serve to elevate humanity as a whole and prepare the way for the Superhumans to come. Even Zarathustra himself was not the Superhuman, but merely the prophet announcing their arrival. But again, to Parkes point above, this elitism is directed at human-to-human relationships rather than human-to-nature relationships. Further, Nietzsche envisions the elevation of human to superhuman as ultimately benefiting not only humans but the earth as a whole through a healthier relationship between superhuman-to-nature than now exists in the human-to-nature relationship. Del Caro puts it nicely:

When Nietzsche speaks of humans “crossing over” from animal to human, and from human to superhuman, he is directly addressing the need to reinhabit the Earth according to Earth-affirming principles and behaviors. The famous Zarathustra phrase “the superhuman shall be the meaning of the Earth” seeks to elevate not only humans, but rather Earth and all its life forms, and this elevation in common of the Earthly will in turn ground and elevate humans...Just as humans evolve on Earth from the lower animals, the superhuman must evolve on Earth from the human, and key to this second stage of development is a reorientation toward the Earth... (Del Caro 2004a, 321).

The superhuman, on my reading, will take what has been gained through the development of human culture and then reorient themselves towards the Earth to achieve a healthier, more productive for all concerned, relationship with it. Moreover, it is this very turn towards the Earth that will effect the healing of sickly modern humanity. Thus the reorientation towards the Earth will end the era of hubristic, humanistic, domination of the Earth, which will benefit the more-than-human-world and in this very salutary reorientation humanity itself will be raised to a higher level.

IX. CONCLUSION

Just as Naess and Sessions end their Deep Ecology platform with a call to action, “Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes” (Naess 1995, 68), so too does Nietzsche leave us with a call to action to prepare the way for the Superhuman. Zarathustra says, “I love him who works and invents that he may build a house for the Superman and prepare earth, animals, and plants for him: for thus he wills his own downfall.” Rather than a hubristic call to dominate the earth, this is a call to turn attention back to the earth, not to seek a redemption from beyond, and to engage with the earth in an ethic of care, the language here parodying the Biblical call to “Prepare ye the way of the Lord.” The new “Lord” will be the superhuman and his kingdom definitely of *this* world. ““But we certainly do not want to enter into the kingdom of heaven;”” Zarathustra tells the Higher Men (who are themselves not yet the Superhuman but merely harbingers of its coming), ““we have become men, so we want the kingdom of earth”” (Nietzsche 1969, 325). Nietzsche is trying to turn our attention back to the Earth. Only thus, can we prepare the way for the superhuman.

Zarathustra makes his hyperanthropos-centrism clear when he tells the Higher Men, “The Superman lies close to my heart, *he* is my paramount and sole concern – and *not* man: not the nearest, not the poorest, not the suffering, not the best” (Nietzsche 1969, 297). So against those, like Acampora, who would read Nietzsche in terms of a *hyper-anthropocentrism*, I have deliberately displaced the hyphen to indicate his *hyperanthropos-centrism* instead. I have shown how Nietzsche can be cleared of the charge of anthropocentrism through his paradoxical

claim that humanity's only uniqueness is our sickness, bad conscience, and capacity for evil. His elitism is directed towards humans and towards their eventual overcoming in the Superhuman. In that way, Nietzsche's environmental philosophy is compatible with Deep Ecology and its understanding of and emphasis upon biospherical egalitarianism. Nietzsche's ecological vision – he does have one – is forward-looking and constructive. As Nietzsche explains in his last published work, *Ecce Homo*, the type of (super)human that Zarathustra wants “conceives reality *as it is*, being strong enough to do so; this type is not estranged or removed from reality but is reality itself and exemplifies all that is terrible and questionable in it – *only in that way can man attain greatness*” (Nietzsche 1989, 331).

A lingering doubt may remain in some reader's minds as to how a self-proclaimed *immoralist* like Nietzsche could possibly be compatible with an environmental *ethic* like Deep Ecology. I would suggest (although a fuller explication of this would require another essay) however, that Naess' ethic, based as it was in his love of Spinoza, was more an ethic of identification than a moral code or system (which is why he favored environmental ontology to environmental ethics). Naess' gamble, and here I think Nietzsche would concur, is that the greater and more expansive our notion of Self – as in Self-Realization! – The greater our identification with and hence our respect for Nature would become. I have tried to show how both Nietzsche and Naess reject the narrow vision of anthropocentrism in favor of a much more inclusive and expansive vision of Nature and our proper place in it. Nietzsche's Superhuman in my reading here may turn out to be someone not unlike the fully self-realized person, in Naess' sense of the term.

X. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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