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Reading Nietzsche at the Margins

Steven V. Hicks and Alan Rosenberg

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Chapter Two

Forgetting the Subject

Christa Davis Acampora

It is possible to live almost without memory, and to live happily moreover, as the animal demonstrates; but it is altogether impossible to live at all without forgetting.
—*On The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*

Why must the preying lion still become a child? The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred “Yes.”
—*Thus Spoke Zarathustra I: On the Three Metamorphoses*

Remembering is possible only on the basis of forgetting, and not the other way around.
—Heidegger, *Being and Time*

The subject of *forgetting*, generally, is intentionally marginalized in the history of Western philosophy. As paradigmatically the “science of knowledge” or, more broadly, the “love of wisdom,” philosophy characteristically strives to grasp and preserve, to have and to hold forever, its objects of investigation and the fruits of its labor. Forgetting threatens such an enterprise. It indicates weakness, decay, and deficiency. From the perspective of moral philosophy, forgetting is not only an indication of cognitive inferiority; it is a potentially sinister and reckless trait. Forgetting is the nemesis of what advances philosophy’s aims, namely *remembering*. Thus, there should be little surprise that the history of philosophy does not elaborately treat forgetting, remaining focused on memorializing truth, goodness, and the fundamental nature of reality. But does forgetting play a role in

garnering these very same goods that it appears to jeopardize? Nietzsche argues that it does. This is most clearly reflected in his account of the development of the individual and its significance in the growth and course of moral psychology. In forgetting the subject, Nietzsche endeavors to supply a new way of conceiving the subject that he thinks is more suitable to a metaphysics that would relinquish permanence, and he does this in such a way as to emphasize the significance and value of *forgetting* itself, which at the same time calls into question how we think about knowledge. Thus, Nietzsche’s forgetting of the subject bears on the most central concerns in philosophy despite the marginal status of forgetting in its history and the marginal attention forgetting has received in the secondary literature on Nietzsche.

To develop these points, this essay is divided into five sections. In the first, I selectively consider some prominent ideas about forgetting in the history of philosophy. This section is useful for appreciating some of the ideas that Nietzsche explicitly addresses in his own work. The account also highlights certain ideas about philosophy itself, learning, and truth that continue to be embraced today. I briefly consider also how forgetting has been treated by several thinkers following Nietzsche in order to supply the basis for a later section that will treat how the significance of forgetting in Nietzsche’s philosophy has yet to be fully appreciated. In the second part, I elaborate the role of forgetting in Nietzsche’s account of the formation of the self. It draws on one of the more potent discussions of forgetting in his works, and it is crucial to his account of the development of human moral psychology. I argue that mistaking the role of forgetting in Nietzsche’s account greatly affects whether one appreciates the end of the story he tells in the *Genealogy* and the possible future he envisions for humanity, namely how Zarathustra is supposed to facilitate the “overcoming” of humanity. How this process is tied to the history of moralization is more elaborately addressed in the third section, which considers how Nietzsche connects the battle against forgetting with cruelty. Nietzsche specifically ties the torturous practices of mnemonics to the development of reason. I discuss the passages in Nietzsche’s *Genealogy* where these ideas are introduced and then more fully develop those ideas in the broader context of Nietzsche’s philosophy generally. In the fourth section, I claim that the idea of forgetting the subject provides a reflective basis for the development of an ecstatic logic that is compatible with Nietzsche’s critique of Platonic metaphysics and the epistemological views it supports. By way of conclusion, I recap and emphasize what is lost in the continued marginalization of forgetting not only in Nietzsche’s works but also in philosophy generally. Finally, I suggest some paths for further pursuit.

I. Forgetting History

Of course, Nietzsche is not alone in the history of philosophy in reflecting on forgetting, although his interest joins him to a rather sparsely populated community

of philosophers. Plato certainly stands out as concerned about forgetting, but the apparent views of his character Socrates have had a lasting influence on how forgetting has been pushed to the margins of concern in philosophy ever since. The so-called theory of recollection is perhaps the best-known example of philosophical discussion that bears on the matter of forgetting. Recollection is supposed to account for how learning is possible at all. According to this view, learning is not a matter of being filled up with new things (a process that proves difficult to imagine and which has the consequence of presenting knowing as a passive process) but rather is a matter of recollecting what it is that one already has as contents of knowledge. The *Meno's* uneducated slave, who proves himself competent in geometry when appropriately prompted, is supposed to illustrate a case in point. We know, but don't always know that we know, many things, and education is aimed at educating such knowledge from us. We are constituted knowing, but have somehow forgotten. The task then of education and philosophy more generally is to overcome this forgetfulness.

One explanation of how we managed to forget what we already know, such that it needs to be brought out of us, is suggested in the *Republic's* Myth of Er (another is found in the *Phaedrus*). At the end of the long journey during which the transmigration of souls from one life to another is accomplished, the participants must cross the hot, dry plain of *Lêthê* (literally "forgetfulness"), where they are given the opportunity to drink from a river. "All of them had to drink a certain measure of this water," we are told, "but those who weren't saved [*sôizomenous*] by reason drank more than that, and as each of them drank, he forgot everything and went to sleep" (*Republic* 621a.¹ Compare this line with 621b in which Socrates tells Glaucon in explaining how Er returned to his body to tell the story, "And so, Glaucon, this is a story that was saved and not lost," in which the word *esôthê* appears. Both words translated as "saved" have the root *sôzō*, meaning to save, preserve, and remember. These multiple meanings are later exploited by Heidegger.) Presumably, variety in depth of intellection and ease of recollection can be explained, then, according to how much or what measure of water one drank from the river at *Lêthê*. Those whose souls were not conditioned to ascertain the measure that was appropriate (i.e., those without a sense of justice, those with less refined rational powers) drank too much and thus set for themselves a difficult course in their next lives. They will have already forgotten so much that recollecting will be difficult, and they will not be able to choose well the things that are worth pursuing in their new lives. Forgetting will make them morally degenerate and less happy. The goal of philosophy, of the exercise and enhancement of the rational powers, the myth instructs us, is to *avoid forgetting* so that one may choose and fare well (*eu prattōmen*).²

Two points are worth underscoring at this juncture. The first is that this story reminds us of the etymology of the common Greek word for truth—*alêtheia*—literally, non-forgetting, an idea to which I shall return shortly below. And the second is that there is at least another way of interpreting the upshot of

the myth as it relates to the significance of forgetting—drinking the water at *Lêthê* was *necessary*; the fact of drinking was not itself the indication of weakness or degeneration. The problem, for those who fared poorly, was not that they drank at all but rather that they exceeded their reasonable measure. Thus, forgetting might yet play an important role in the formation of the basis of the lives that become ours (although this is not explained). If so, then the task of philosophy is to *temper forgetting*—not eliminate it—to keep it from exceeding its bounds. But this sense of forgetting from Plato's myth was not saved.³

Forgetting does appear much later in the history of philosophy, in the philosophy of Schopenhauer, as playing an important role in shaping the basis of our lives and sense of ourselves. Forgetting oneself is important for Schopenhauer, since that self that we think we are (on account of the *principium individuationis*) is merely a representation of will and not the effect of an independent will that we in essence truly are. "Forgetting [of] oneself as individual" is an important insight for Schopenhauer and serves as the basis for being in a position to momentarily still the will whose cravings are the source of our suffering and dissatisfaction (Schopenhauer, 1966, I:199; see also Parkes, 1994, pp. 60–89, esp. 68ff for discussion of how this relates to Nietzsche's conception of subjectivity and forgetting, particularly in light of *The Birth of Tragedy* and the conception of Dionysian ecstasy [*Rausch*]. I more fully develop similar ideas in my section four below). For Schopenhauer, it is crucial to forget what was the most transparent and self-evident phenomenon for Descartes, the basis for all possible knowledge, namely the "I," or the self. Such forgetting is necessary not only for any possible happiness, for Schopenhauer, but also for our understanding of the truth of the way the world really is.

As noted above, a dependency of truth on forgetting is saved in the Greek word *alêtheia*. Truth conceived as nonforgetting at first glance appears to set up the two terms as polar opposites, as though they might be mutually exclusive or perhaps essentially contradictory. Indeed, this is how much of the history of philosophy has regarded the relation between truth (or what is known) and what is forgotten (what is not known), but some modern philosophers have suggested that such a view was not shared by certain ancient Greek philosophers themselves, at least not the predecessors of Socrates. Heidegger, of course, makes much of this idea. In his effort to revive a sense of truth that he alleges has been forgotten since Plato, Heidegger emphasizes the significance of forgetting as a fundamental feature of human ontology and the understanding of some of the most basic philosophical questions.

Quite unlike many of his predecessors, Heidegger gives prominence to forgetting when he writes that "remembering is possible only on the basis of forgetting and not the other way around" (Heidegger, 1996, II:4, §68). With this, Heidegger reiterates a predominant theme in his writings: human beings have *forgotten* Being. This *resembles* the Platonic idea of having knowledge, or the truth, without realizing it until it is drawn out of us. (And given the way Heidegger

emphasizes truth as a kind of relationship or communion with Being and the way in which he conceives of the emergence of this relationship as an event, especially in his later writings, it might also be the case that Heidegger, like Plato, has his own myths to go along with his conception of the relation between forgetting and remembering, too.) For Heidegger, we quite clearly have some understanding of Being—we do, after all, make claims about the existence of things and their character, and we convey such understanding not only in our use of language, but also in our use of things, in the way in which we interact with them in the world and the way in which they can become for us objects of care. Moreover, the very fact that we can even ask the question “What is Being?” suggests that we at least have some sense of what it is that we are seeking. But we fail to “save” (or remember) what we gather from the standpoint of interacting with beings in relations characterized by care.

Part of the explanation for this forgetting is that such relations, which are themselves interpretations (for Heidegger, ways of taking something *as* something), do not yet rise to the level of a theoretical or conceptual understanding. It is clear that this is not a case of forgetting in the usual use of the term, although it could be a case of forgetting in the sense of not “saving” what we have been shown, which echoes somewhat the Platonic association of saving and remembering.⁴ Heidegger’s conception of phenomenology, as introduced in §7 of *Being and Time*, and his characterization of what he calls the “circle of understanding” (esp. §§ 31–34) provide a basis for more fully elaborating this relation. Another explanation for forgetting, as Heidegger considers it, is that what is disclosed to us in our relations to things in the world gets forgotten or obscured (for Heidegger, “covered up”) through the application of ready-made interpretations supplied by the history of metaphysics and the variety of ways in which it conceives of being as itself an entity or thing and the commonplace adaptations of such metaphysical concepts that have made their way into everyday language. This influences not only how we relate to other entities in the world, including other human beings, but also how we relate to ourselves (our conceptions of self and what is meant by “I”) and to the most basic philosophical questions that we can ask. The tasks of philosophy as they relate to forgetting, then, for Heidegger include: 1) developing an understanding of human beings as *fundamentally in a condition of forgetfulness* (i.e., of not saving all that is potentially apparent to us), and 2) *overcoming the forgetfulness* that the history of philosophy has facilitated.

I have given priority here to the ideas of Heidegger because it seems to me that virtually no one after Nietzsche gives greater prominence to the idea of forgetting than he, and Heidegger draws upon a number of the ideas that I have emphasized in the history of philosophy while at the same time developing his own views on the matter.⁵ There are a number of people after Nietzsche, who make mention of Nietzsche’s emphasis on forgetting. Among them are Deleuze, Derrida, and Kofman. I make mention of each of these in various sections below and do not include them in this survey section because their comments on forgetting

are generally brief or are made almost entirely in relation to making observations about Nietzsche’s philosophy. Thus, I treat them as I reach the relevant point in my discussion of Nietzsche’s view, to which I now direct my focus.

II. Forgetting the Self

It is already widely recognized that Nietzsche describes forgetting not as an absence or lack of memory but rather as an *active force* in its own right (*GM II*, § 1). This feature of Nietzsche’s philosophy has been briefly noted by numerous commentators and is emphasized indirectly in the work of Deleuze, who writes extensively about the significance of active forces in relation to reactive ones in Nietzsche’s work (Deleuze, 1983, pp. 39–72).⁶ But how Nietzsche casts the nature of this activity and its vitality with regard to forgetting continues to be mischaracterized and misunderstood. Alan Schrift, writing of Deleuze’s contributions to understanding Nietzsche’s philosophy in terms of “becoming,” ties active forgetting to “the sovereign individual” (Schrift, 1995, p. 74), and this figure has played a prominent role in numerous other interpretations of Nietzsche’s vision for the future of humanity.

The figure of the sovereign individual makes its lone appearance in Nietzsche’s corpus in the section of the *Genealogy* that immediately follows the one identifying forgetting as an active force. Schrift links forgetfulness, as it is ascribed by Nietzsche to “a form of *robust health*” in *GM II*, § 1, with the power and freedom allegedly claimed and enjoyed by the sovereign individual as described in *GM II*, § 2. According to this view, the first two sections appear thematically continuous: the entity described in the first section is the same as that described in the second. But the proximity of the passages is deceptive. In those few paragraphs, Nietzsche provides a sweeping overview of a story of the moralization of humankind—of the production of “humanity,” what Nietzsche also describes as the “animal with the right to make promises.” He covers considerable ground between his reference to the active force of forgetting and the so-called fruit that is the sovereign individual. It is crucial that one appreciate that great distance if one is to understand the vision Nietzsche reaches toward at the end of the very same essay, in which he speculates about the future development of humanity, or what he at times designates as “overhumanity.” In other words, to understand how Nietzsche envisions the possibilities of overhumanity, one must understand the importance given to forgetting and how it stands in relation to what is said about the sovereign individual.

The moral ideal that Nietzsche finds in the history of philosophy from Plato to Schopenhauer is one that increasingly prizes *willing*, and in so doing, ties it to responsibility, autonomy, and freedom: the greater one’s exercise of will, the more complete one becomes, the more one realizes the real potential of humanity, the more *being*, or actuality, one achieves. Acquiring the relevant form of willing to reach this ideal requires the development of memory, specifically

"memory of will" (*GM II*, § 1). Such memory is crucial for the establishment of what Nietzsche describes as a "long chain of will" in which the original "I will" (or the promise of some action or deed) and "the actual discharge of the will," that is, the action or actions one actually undertakes, remain essentially *bound* despite changes of circumstance and the emergence of other desires and acts of will. Taking this on as a goal, human beings have cultivated powers of memory that significantly outstrip those of forgetting, and the service of this end has had dramatic secondary effects, including how one regards the past, present, and future, and the expectations one has of others and oneself. In particular, what we might call the "memory project" requires certain dispositions toward the past and future and the necessity of securing, determining, and effecting it in such a way as to be in the position to maintain the "chain of will" mentioned above; all of this is needed to secure the conditions that make it possible to fulfill the promise made in the past and to make human affairs as regular and predictable as possible in the future in order to ward off circumstances that would interfere with the execution of the relevant actions dictated by the economy of promise-keeping. Nietzsche thus sees the *telos* of this kind of willing as inextricably bound with: 1) the development of reason, 2) a very peculiar sense of history and temporality, and 3) a philosophical anthropology in which "Man himself must first of all have become *calculable, regular, necessary*, even in his own image of himself, if he is to be able to stand security for *his own future*, which is what one who promises does!" (*GM II*, § 1).

The human being who stands security for his or her own future, though, is quite different from the creature with which *GM II* begins. That creature is described in terms of being an animal, and although human beings certainly retain their animality for Nietzsche, they are nonetheless cultivated to such an extent that they are not merely animals or, at least, are animals that have been bred to distance themselves from those of other species. In Nietzsche's *Genealogy*, it is the development of conscience more than reason that distinguishes human beings, and the second essay in particular examines how such a conscience is produced and how it played a role in effecting the kind of animals modern human beings are. At the *end* of this process stands the ideal of "the sovereign individual":

If we place ourselves at the end of this tremendous process, where the tree at last brings forth fruit, where society and the morality of custom at last reveal *what* they have simply been the means to: then we discover that the ripest fruit is the *sovereign individual*, like only to himself, liberated again from morality of custom, autonomous and supramoral (for "autonomous" and "moral" are mutually exclusive), in short, the man who has his own independent, protracted will and the *capacity to make promises* [*der versprechen darf*—and in him a proud consciousness, quivering in every muscle, of *what* has at length been achieved and become flesh in him, a consciousness of his own power and freedom, a sensation of mankind come to completion. (*GM II*, § 2; Kaufmann and Hollingdale's translation emended)

The ideal of the sovereign individual is the goal or the ultimate fruit sought by the process of moralization and refinement of conscience. It is a serious mistake to read it as Nietzsche's ideal, for when one does so, one remains blind to the fact that the sovereign individual is the very ideal that Nietzsche seeks to replace and whose possible overcoming Zarathustra heralds.

Emphasis in the critical literature on the centrality of the sovereign individual obscures Nietzsche's emphasis on forgetting and its importance in human moral psychology in the second essay of *GM*. This is especially so because those who are wont to emphasize sovereign individuality as Nietzsche's central counterimage and ideal in the *Genealogy* also celebrate *promising* as the signature feature of this ideal. But it is the demands of the economy of promise-making that have necessitated the development of memory (and secondarily reason) and the diminution of forgetting that Nietzsche thinks is responsible for the degenerate state of the "sick animals" we have become. Thus, some further scrutiny of the sovereign individual and how it stands in relation to forgetting is warranted.

I have discussed problematic readings of the sovereign individual at greater length elsewhere (Acampora, 2004), so I shall only recap the most salient points of those arguments. For Nietzsche, pursuit of the ideal of the sovereign individual has produced creatures—that is, the animals we call human—who are in many respects dystrophic and dysfunctional. By emphasizing the activity of forgetting and its diminution in the process of enhancing the will, the second essay of the *Genealogy* commences an account of a struggle between two opposing forces: remembering and forgetting. Their relation can be thought of in terms similar to the agonistic dynamic of the artistic forces of the Apollinian and Dionysian in *The Birth of Tragedy*. (I shall highlight one aspect of this similarity in later sections insofar as forgetting is linked with Dionysian self-forgetting and the disruption of the boundaries that remembrance establishes.) Just as our physical health depends upon the accomplishment of nutrition through an active process of consumption and digestion so does the formation of our psychic life occur through "inpsychation" (*Einverseelung*), which is achieved in the interactive processes of taking in experience and excreting what is unnecessary or undesirable to absorb. A disruption of this catalytic dynamic of opposing forces risks *dyspepsia*. We can, Nietzsche claims, suffer from a kind of mental *agita* when our ability to "be done with" our experiences is compromised. Forgetting is important for this reason and numerous others that Nietzsche stresses elsewhere in his writings. The task of the second essay is to describe how this is the current human condition and to envision a way of restoring the health that has been compromised. The news is not all bad for Nietzsche: the "breeding of the animal given the capacity to make promises" (*GM II*, § 1) that required the special strengthening of memory produced creatures that possess a peculiar capacity for willing. That capacity has tremendously creative possibilities, which is what makes humankind so interesting (*GM I*, § 6). By the end of *GM II*, Nietzsche essentially asks *What now?* . . . How can we recover from the psychic *dyspepsia* of our moralization in the deployment of the special capacity for willing we acquired along the

way? But we do not hear that question, and thus cannot pursue it along with or without Nietzsche's Zarathustra, if we remain fixated on the very activity that instigated our decadence, namely the atrophy of memory and the valorization of remembering that promising required.

The value of forgetting also points toward a conception of the subject that is difficult to conceive and frequently ignored, namely one that is not a specific entity or essence but rather a composite of interacting forces. Nietzsche writes in *GM II*, § 1, that forgetting is valuable and necessary because it allows for an evacuation of consciousness that frees it for other pursuits and preoccupations. This regulatory functioning is important because "our organism is oligarchically arranged." In describing the subject in this way, Nietzsche gestures back toward ideas that he develops more elaborately in *BGE*, §§ 16–20, in which he challenges the metaphysics of subjectivity, the ways in which we conceive of selves and individuals, and how he described the mistaken ideas we have about subjectivity based on our projection of a "doer behind the deed" in *GM I*, § 13:

A quantum of force is equivalent to a quantum of drive, will, effect—more, it is nothing other than precisely this very driving, willing, effecting, and only owing to the seduction of language (and of the fundamental errors of reason that are petrified in it) which conceives and misconceives all effects as conditioned by something that causes effect, by a "subject," can it appear otherwise. [. . .] there is no such substratum; there is no "being" behind doing, effecting, becoming; "the doer" is merely a fiction added to the deed [. . .] Scientists do no better when they say "force moves," "forces cause," and the like—[. . .] our entire science still lies under the misleading influence of language.

More will be said about the role of language below. For now it is important to notice that the idea of a free and sovereign individual of the likes described in the ideal identified at *GM II*, § 2, is simply at odds with much else that Nietzsche conceives about individuality and how he conceives the subject. This lack of consistency between the radically free sovereign individual and what Nietzsche writes elsewhere about the subject is reason enough to be suspicious about taking it as Nietzsche's ideal. Combine that with the facts that the sovereign individual appears in no other place in Nietzsche's writings, that its signature characteristic of promise-making is not touted as a laudable or distinguishing feature of nobility either in the *Genealogy* or in any of Nietzsche's other writings (indeed, one finds barely any references to making a promise at all in Nietzsche's other texts), and one has very little reason to believe (and certainly little ground to argue) that the sovereign individual is an important idea that Nietzsche wants to retain at all.

So, what is the brief account of the sovereign individual describing if not a goal that Nietzsche seeks to pursue? Virtually every commentary on the passage in question emphasizes the apparent strength of will of the sovereign, which

accounts for its freedom and is somehow realized in exercising its right to make promises (for my criticism of the translation of *der versprechen darf*, see Acampora, 2004). But I find the conclusion of the passage more interesting and relevant. What is it that makes the life of the sovereign individual desirable? How does it attract those inspired to pursue it? The *real* promise of the sovereign individual is a particularly powerful sensation: "a proud consciousness, quivering in every muscle, of *what* has at length been achieved and become flesh in him, a consciousness of his own power and freedom, a sensation of mankind come to completion" (*GM II*, § 2). There is an aesthesis of power that courses throughout the entire economy of promise-making—making promises, breaking them, and punishing others who are unable or unwilling to keep promises, and it is so great that humans have even instigated their own further deformity in the form of diminishing their powers of forgetting in order to pursue that feeling. The "sovereign individual" is a peculiar conceptual accretion formed by the gravitational pull of the sensation of power that accumulates through the processes of cultivating memory and will to the degree that promising becomes not only desirable but also possible. It is a conceptual ideal that has oriented the process of moralization, finally culminating in modern rationalistic accounts of human subjectivity. Modern individuals, for Nietzsche, have become something of monstrous creatures; the hypertrophy of reason is advanced by an undercurrent of the dystrophy of forgetting.

Thus far, I have focused my discussion of Nietzsche's conception of the relation between subjectivity and forgetting on the idea that what we call the subject is formed through forces (*Kraften*) of remembering and forgetting and on how the formative influence of forgetting has been diminished. Elsewhere in Nietzsche's writings, he emphasizes the significance of forgetting in the process of conceptualization more generally: not only is our concept of the subject formed through an activity of forgetting, all concepts are, and this bears on how we regard the relation between our ideas and what they are supposed to identify and describe.

Sarah Kofman emphasizes the role of forgetting in the activity of conceptualization. In *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, she elaborately describes how Nietzsche considers the formation of concepts as a metaphorical activity, an artistic and inventive process (hence not simply mirroring objects). Casting things in terms of concepts is a specialized form of metaphorical thinking. A distinctive feature of this kind of thought, however, is that we have *forgotten* its metaphorical nature. Moreover, in tying the conceptual to the true and the real, that which is acknowledged as metaphor, in contrast, has been cast aside as less desirable, less pure, derivative, and ultimately less powerful, a pale imitation or image of what truly is.

Kofman makes much of Nietzsche's claim that the specialized language and conceptualization that philosophy utilizes is metaphorical, which we have forgotten is metaphorical:

Because of this fetishization of value, the fact that value is the product of evaluation gets forgotten, and the latter is now measured against the former; the fact that the concept results from a metaphorical activity gets forgotten, and it is taken for a transcendent model, with all specific things and actions being simply degraded copies or simulacra of it. The phantasmatic construction of a transcendent world means that the genesis of the measuring standard gets forgotten. (Kofman, 1993, p. 44)

The concept is based on metaphor, a metaphor of a metaphor, but it is judged as the standard and, thereby, as superior in relation to the metaphoric process from which it is derived, as itself *proper*. It forgets and denigrates its origin. The concept is based upon forgetting in another respect, too, insofar as its insistence on sameness, regularity, and identity amounts to an *active forgetting of differences* (Kofman, chapter 3, "The Forgetting of Metaphor," *passim*). Thus, the process of conceptualization is itself a *secondary* metaphoric process that is itself derived from the original metaphoric grasping that characterizes human understanding and description of its experience. And this derivative, or secondary, metaphoric transformation works in such a way that it *forgets*—in the sense of extracting or refusing to recognize as significant—many differences, distinctions, and other possible features that might be further investigated or otherwise emphasized. Therefore, what we generally take to be the legitimate scrutiny of the world is actually a willful blindness to and intentional forgetting of many different aspects of our experience.

Kofman emphasizes that Nietzsche replaces the traditional conception of humankind as rational animals with the idea of the human as the metaphorical animal (Kofman, pp. 25ff). The shift does not signal that Nietzsche is tossing rationality to the wind or denying that it is a useful function of human cognitive activity. Instead, he is claiming that what we identify as *reason* is but one—and a very specialized and, at times, narrow—kind of metaphorical activity, one that is not based solely on remembering, recollecting, or purely reasoning but in which much forgetting plays an active role. It is the capacity to engage in metaphorical thinking generally and to direct our actions in light of such that is characteristic of human being for Nietzsche. But humankind—committed as it is to its conception of humanity, the good as such, and the relentless reduction of all existence to conformity of what it calls reason—is currently experiencing a kind of stasis (e.g., *Z*, Preface, § 3). What must we do in order to create something beyond ourselves, and what would it mean to "overcome man," as Zarathustra puts it and as Nietzsche anticipates it in *On the Genealogy of Morals* II, § 24 and throughout the third essay?

The conception of the subject that drives the ideal of the sovereign individual supplies a fundamental sense of boundary and containment. It serves as a primary metaphor that is extended and applied to our understanding generally; it supplies the formal structure for extension of our other metaphorical activities and serves as a rule or guide for the assertion of limits and boundaries utilized

in cognition more broadly. It grounds a feature of reason that might very well be undermined if we developed a different conception of self. If we supplant the idea of the subject as responsible (remembering) agent, we might very well require and develop a different kind of logic. (I shall return to this point in the fourth section below, where I discuss the role of forgetting in developing an ecstatic logic.)

The overcoming of humanity involves overcoming, by reconsidering and reconceiving, our *concept* of humanity. This occurs not simply by redescribing or renaming the human. And it involves even more than revaluing humanity in the sense of asserting different ways of conceiving of the value of human life and the possibilities for human community. What the story of the sovereign individual from *GM* II, § 2, helps us to appreciate (once the roles of promising and remembering are better understood in their context) is the significance of the organization of desire in the specification of choice-worthy ends or ideals. Following the first two sections of the second essay of the *Genealogy* that have been the main focus of this part of the paper, Nietzsche suggests a rather sinister motivation for the process of moralization that is guided by the ideal of the subject as a responsible agent, and he ties this to a history of the development of reason. It is to this genealogy that I turn as prelude to discussions of the ways in which the reactivation and renewed cultivation of forgetting might facilitate the replacement of the concept of humanity that Nietzsche associates with such destructive ends and motives.

III. Memory's Cruelty and the Development of Reason

If further evidence is needed for Nietzsche's emphasis on the significance of forgetting and the disaster that the emphasis on remembering has wrought, one need only consider the remainder of the second essay of the *Genealogy*. The rest of the essay is devoted to the history of the moralization of humanity, specifically the production of *conscience* and *bad conscience*. Conscience, Nietzsche claims, became possible through torturous processes of mnemonics that aimed to instill a sense of duty and obligation that required the extirpation of forgetting. What do we need in order to have a conscience? Nietzsche claims it fundamentally rests upon the cultivation of special powers of memory. "How can one create a memory for the human animal? How can one impress something upon this incarnate forgetfulness, attuned only to the passing moment, in such a way that it will stay there?" (*GM* II, § 3, translation emended).

Nietzsche offers graphic examples of how "mnemotechnics" have been employed in the form of human sacrifice and mutilation: "all this has its origin in the instinct that realized that pain is the most powerful aid to mnemonics" (*GM* II, § 3). It is clear that Nietzsche conceives quashing forgetfulness as the way in which ascetic practices achieved the fixity of their standards and norms. Memory was quite literally emblazoned in the psyche, initially by means of torture of the body, to render the ideals of asceticism "inextinguishable, ever-present,

unforgettable” and also to free “these ideas from the competition of all other ideas, so as to make them ‘unforgettable’” in the sense that there is no possible alternative to eclipse them or win out as desirable in comparison or contrast with them. Nietzsche writes, “the severity of the penal code provides an especially significant measure of the degree of effort needed to overcome forgetfulness and to impose a few primitive demands of social existence as *present realities* upon these slaves of momentary affect and desire” (*GM II*, § 3). So, a goal of ascetic mnemotechnics was the permanent fixation of desire such that no other possible goal could even emerge on the horizon as one worthy of pursuit, much less as a potential rival. Again, Nietzsche’s description of the techniques employed to acquire such direction of desire is quite graphic: the penal codes and sagas detail punishments involving flaying or boiling alive, trampling by horses, ripping the criminal body to shreds, piercing the body and cutting out the vital organs while the criminal is alive, stoning, crushing the skull on the wheel, and so on—and all of this in full public view. These practices have the purpose of producing a memory that contains “five or six ‘I will not’s’ in regard to which one had given one’s *promise* so as to participate in the advantages of society” (*GM II*, § 3). This is the brutal basis of promising that Nietzsche highlights, and he thinks it also serves as the primal basis of reasoning: “it was indeed with the aid of this kind of memory that one at last came ‘to reason!’” (*GM II*, § 3).

Nietzsche’s anticipated overcoming of humanity, which I have suggested might include reassignment of the boundaries of the self and its attendant conception of reason, might also be seen as an overcoming of the torture and cruelty that lie at reason’s fundamental basis. In this sense, crossing the boundaries that were erected in forging the ideal of the sovereign subject signals not only a kind of liberation but also, at least potentially, a new kind of compassion or, at least, relief from prospective torture that the further “advancement” of reason might require. Forgetting the subject could entail foregoing the brutality of the practices that served modern processes of subjectification.

IV. The Freedom of Forgetting: Ecstatic Logic and History

Near the end of Derrida’s 1968 lecture “The Ends of Man,” he identifies the spirit of a disruptive form of critique of the concept of humanism in Nietzsche’s idea of active forgetting, linking it to the laughter of the lion in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (although Nietzsche himself associates forgetting with the figure of the child). The lion does not violently destroy but, rather, radically forgoes by ferociously laughing at its opposition. Derrida writes: “His laughter then will burst out, directed toward a return which no longer will have the form of the metaphysical repetition of humanism. . . . He will dance, outside the house [of Being, as Heidegger describes it], the *aktive Vergesslichkeit*, the ‘active forgetting’ and the cruel (*grausam*) feast of which the *Genealogy of Morals* speaks” (Derrida, 1982, p. 136).⁷ It is worthwhile to consider this link between *active* forgetting and the

kind of ecstasies it provides, the way in which it effects its *outside* once the scope of consideration is expanded beyond the *Genealogy*. Nietzsche’s emphasis on the Dionysian and his earlier reflections on history indicate important connections between *forgetting* and the kind of freedom it can provide.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche associates the Dionysian with the dissolution of boundaries, a forgetting of the self, and the basis for an alternative way of symbolically interpreting what it means to be a human being, to have a human body, and to live a human life. It is interesting to observe how the idea of forgetting the subject is described and elaborated—*das Subjective zu völliger Selbstvergessenheit hinschwindet* (*BT*, § 1). The Dionysian is not simply a breaking of boundaries, an absence of self, or a sheer loss of measure. As Nietzsche identifies the features of subjectivity that are dissolved in Dionysian self-forgetting, he also draws attention to a joining, or union, with something else, to the realization of some other possibility that is not a part of ordinary human subjective experience. Two exemplary passages will have to suffice. In the first, Nietzsche indicates that the Dionysian is emblematic of the possibility of forgetting definitive human characteristics, such as walking upright and the use of verbal language: “In song and dance man expresses himself as a member of a higher community; he has forgotten [*verlernt*] how to walk and speak and is on the way toward flying into the air, dancing” (*BT*, § 1). This prospectively connects one to a more-than-human community of other living beings, grounding other ways of meaningfully interacting with them as one shares in their expressive and locomotive possibilities. A second passage suggests a different relation to the human community that we ordinarily take as our own: “The dithyramb is thus essentially different from all other choral odes. The virgins who proceed solemnly to the temple of Apollo, laurel branches in their hands, singing a processional hymn, remain what they are and retain their civic names: the dithyrambic choric is a chorus of the transformed [*Verwandelten*] whose civic past and social status have been totally forgotten” (*BT*, § 8, translation emended). This characterization of Dionysian possibilities envisions forgetting (or forgoing) two further defining characteristics of human community: civic identity and social standing. The Apollinian standpoint strives to *remain* and *retain*; the Dionysian conjures a different set of possible relations among human beings, ones that are not principally organized along Apollinian lines. Thus *forgetting* is not simply a loss. In *The Birth of Tragedy* and in the numerous other discussions of the Dionysian elsewhere in Nietzsche’s writings, forgetting is liberating not only because *it frees one from* certain claims and ties but also because *it frees one to* form new associations and different affiliations, to have, gain, or save what would not be had otherwise.

There are two further points about forgetting that I wish to briefly mention, both warranting more elaboration than such a brief paper allows: 1) the relevance of forgetting in the formation of basic concepts that also inform how we conceive of the character and place of logic (anticipating what others have described as “ecstatic logic”) and how this supplies important critical tools, and 2) the way in

which Nietzsche ties forgetting to the *definition* and *formation* of the subject (i.e., that he does not simply valorize formlessness or meaninglessness). Introduction of these themes provides a basis for the concluding discussions of how Nietzsche considers forgetting as a condition for the possibility of happiness and goodwill toward others and of how forgetting might bear on other issues in moral and social philosophy even if one would rather leave Nietzsche behind.

An ecstatic logic is one that investigates and interrogates or challenges the terms upon which logic unfolds and proceeds. (It is one of the two kinds of critique at issue in Derrida's discussion at the conclusion of "The Ends of Man" [e.g., p. 135]). It questions, or contests, the foundations of logic and the basic concepts upon which it rests. An ecstatic logic does not simply "stand out" of logic in a flight into the irrational or illogical; rather, it is one in which the terms of development, conflict, incorporation are potentially themselves transgressed, reoriented, *in play* (and accounts for Nietzsche's association of forgetting with the child rather than the lion in *Z*). One "stands out," achieves *ekstasis*, not simply through a rejection of logic but through an interrogation of the foundations of logic (the reflective ground that logic itself might not provide). Overcoming such challenges might result in a redefinition of the very terms upon which logic progresses. This appears to be, at least in part, what Nietzsche has in mind in his conception of the relation of the Apollinian and Dionysian with regard to the dynamic of erecting boundaries and distinctions and then erasing, annihilating, or transgressing them in the course of the Apollinian-Dionysian *agon*.

I have emphasized the connection between the Dionysian and the forgetting of measure in *The Birth of Tragedy*, claiming that it is more than a sheer celebration of liberation from claims of reason, more than just the absence of any boundaries. This point requires further elaboration, which I can only begin here. (For an excellent account of the place of measure in Nietzsche, see Van Tongeren, 2002. One also finds a stunning and sweeping account of the significance of the measureless [*das Masslose*] and ecstatic logic in Sallis, 1991, although I think the relation between *das Masslose* and restraint needs yet more explanation and emphasis.) The selfless Dionysian *appears* to be fully liberated: free from the limitations associated with confinement within boundaries of the modern conception of subjectivity, free of the values and standards that issue from that determination. I write "appears" because this kind of freedom, which I take the early Nietzsche to find rather provocative but fundamentally unsatisfying, seems to be nearly exclusively negative. I think even the early Nietzsche takes it to be also meaningless. To make "the crossing into the abyss" toward which the Dionysian draws us is to completely lose ourselves insofar as we lack any relative relation in light of which the transgression of the boundary has any significance. Without such context it *disables* or *disengages* the norms it breaks, but Nietzsche envisions such crossing as also *enabling* and *engaging* possibilities for reformation and re-creation. Meaningful freedom for Nietzsche has both the negative and this positive aspect.

The formative role of forgetting in the shaping of the subject and its possibilities for happiness and concern for others are described in relation to our desire to remember and memorialize in Nietzsche's *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* (hereafter *HL*). For now, I wish to focus on the formative process, deferring the rest for discussion below. Although Nietzsche describes the forgetting of the Dionysian in *The Birth of Tragedy* as in opposition to the plastic powers of the Apollinian, in *HL* he describes *forgetting* as intimately tied to the exercise of plastic powers, which he defines as "the capacity to develop out of oneself in one's own way, to transform and incorporate into oneself what is past and foreign, to heal wounds, to replace what has been lost, to recreate broken moulds" (*HL*, p. 62). Too much remembering can become meaningless and stultifying:

Imagine the extremest possible example of a man who did not possess the power of forgetting at all and who was thus condemned to see everywhere a state of becoming: such a man would no longer believe in his own being, would no longer believe in himself, would see everything flowing asunder in moving points and would lose himself in this stream of becoming. . . . Or, to express my theme even more simply: *there is a degree of sleeplessness, of rumination, of the historical sense, which is harmful and ultimately fatal to the living thing, whether this living thing be a man or a people or a culture.* (*HL*, p. 62)⁸

Forgetting, it seems, is an important condition for experience—important for giving the shape, form, rhythm, texture, and depth that make the seemingly endless stream of possible objects of concern and attention *an* experience, to recall Dewey's famous distinction. This occurs not simply by piling up experiences but also by taking some away, by encouraging some to fade, recede, fall away. Forgetting in this sense *grants* rather than evacuates or eliminates; too much remembering leaves us with experience without pause and strips from us possibilities for action.

What determines the limit, the degree to which forgetting is necessary, the point at which remembering becomes poisonous? After all, too much forgetting is also dangerous. Strength and health are characterized by the capacity to efficiently and creatively incorporate experience; "that which such a nature cannot subdue it knows how to forget" (*HL*, p. 63). This conception of the relation between forgetting and the formation of the subject resonates with Nietzsche's account of "inpsychation" in the dynamic of forgetting and remembering in *GM II*, § 1, which he also compares with processes of nutrition. In *HL* he puts it thus: "a living thing can be healthy, strong and fruitful only when bounded by a horizon; if it is incapable of drawing a horizon around itself, and at the same time too self-centred to enclose its own view within that of another, it will pine away slowly or hasten to its timely end" (*HL*, p. 63). The human needs to be "just as able to forget at the right time as to remember at the right time" (*HL*, p. 63). Nietzsche continues the theme later in the essay when he writes, "Sometimes,

however, this same life that requires forgetting demands a temporary suspension of this forgetfulness; it wants to be clear as to how unjust the existence of anything—a privilege, a caste, a dynasty, for example—is, and how greatly this thing deserves to perish. Then its past is regarded critically, then one takes the knife to its roots, then one cruelly tramples over every kind of piety” (HL, p. 76). Critical history is an example of *remembering* at the right time.

Forgetting is important for monumental history, for creating the possibility for some things to stand out as exceptional by letting other things fall away, but it is also important that monumental history not rule or dominate the other modes (antiquarian and critical). It is not simply a willful fictionalizing of all history, for when that happens “the past itself suffers *harm*: whole segments of it are forgotten, despised, and flow away in an uninterrupted colourless flood” (HL, p. 71). What Nietzsche advocates instead is the cultivation of a sense for the “unhistorical.” He explains:

With the word “the unhistorical” I designate the art and power of *forgetting* and of enclosing oneself within a bounded *horizon*; I call “suprahistorical” the powers which lead the eye away from becoming towards that which bestows upon existence the character of the eternal and stable, towards *art* and *religion*. *Science* . . . hates forgetting, which is the death of knowledge, and seeks to abolish all limitations of horizon and launch mankind upon an infinite and unbounded sea of light whose light is knowledge of all becoming. (HL, p. 120)

Thus Nietzsche reaches conclusions about the relation between forgetting and remembering, having limits and being free, and being and becoming that are at odds with much of the tradition and even certain strands of his other thinking. Nietzsche’s readers would expect him to praise a perspective that appreciates *becoming* and prioritizes it over *being*, but in HL Nietzsche describes how such genuine appreciation is actually thwarted and suggests that our apprehension of being, made possible when we can “pause” experience by letting some of it drop out from its stream, is a condition for the direction of our actions and our assessments of our possibilities. *Too much remembering actually makes us less able to know* or to hold on to experiences such that they can stand out as meaningful. But too much forgetting is also detrimental, particularly in light of our possibilities for freedom. Although forgetting superficially promises freedom, Nietzsche argues that the conditions of meaningful freedom are realized in an interactive dynamic in which remembering and forgetting each play a role in constituting the subject, enable it to incorporate its experience, and reconstitute it in light of what it has been and might possibly become.

I previously noted that in HL, Nietzsche further claims that forgetting is important both for our happiness and our ability to attend to the well-being of others. His *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* opens with a meditation on this theme. Nietzsche writes, “In the case of the smallest or of the greatest happiness, however, it is always the same thing that makes happiness happiness:

the ability to forget. . . . He who cannot sink down on the threshold of the moment and forget all the past . . . will never know what happiness is—*worse, he will never do anything to make others happy*” (HL, p. 62; my emphasis). I take Nietzsche to mean that our happiness is not achieved simply by balancing out pleasures and pains. The sheer joy we take in the affiliation with loved ones, for example, is not founded upon balancing or canceling out the hardships we have also shared with them. Our joy in companionship does not simply bubble up occasionally out of a context in which we equalize and then exceed the despair we have also shared. Joy rushes out from a moment when suffering is *forgotten*, and in that moment it is as though our pains never existed at all. Our pleasures and pains differ not only quantitatively, or in degrees of intensity, but also qualitatively, with differences in kind. Some pains that we suffer simply cannot be canceled or balanced by past or future pleasures—the death of a child, the witnessing of torture and humiliation of others, the long slow pain of debilitating illness. Were it not for *forgetting*, joy following such experiences would be simply impossible. Forgetting is significant for our attention to the happiness of others, too, Nietzsche claims, and it is this relevance to the possibility of community that I want to briefly highlight as one of the ways in which Nietzsche’s meditations on forgetting might be relevant to other concerns in moral and social philosophy.

V. Forgetting Ourselves and Saving Community

Insofar as *forgetting the subject* potentially supplies us with different possibilities for conceptualizing human subjectivity and individuality, as argued above, it may be relevant to resolving certain tensions in moral and social philosophy that pit the interests of the self and its autonomy against the interests of others and their claims on us for assistance and nurturance. It might very well be that different possibilities for conceiving and resolving these tensions open when seen in light of a different conceptual basis of subjectivity. We find similar relations between alternative conceptions of selves and different social and moral possibilities, for example, in care ethics and its conception of the relational self, and the compassionate basis of Buddhist ethics and its “no-self” model. What different possible ethics might we be able to conceive in saving the forgetting of subjectivity?

Forgetting the self in the ways I have suggested above might soften the rigid boundaries of the dominant view of the self and provide more porous access to a shared basis of human subjectivity and recognition of fragility. For a possible connection between such a subject and an ethics of generosity, see Cixous and Clément (1986; see also Schrift, 1995, pp. 82–101). Although I cannot engage this literature in this paper, I do think that the nature of forgetting that happens in the alternative logic of the economy of the gift, as it is described, needs further exploration. The character of such forgetting is not fully developed in the work of Cixous and Clément, and it is toward such a project that I think Nietzsche’s work might make useful contributions.

In his book on the phenomenology of remembering, Casey (1987) argues that an emphasis on the overcoming of forgetfulness in the modern tradition results in an even greater forgetfulness (or marginalization) of remembering than does forgetting itself. But perhaps the diminution of forgetting is tied to the problem of failures of recognition and granting (and hence to coping and understanding) of the fragility of human existence. Lest we think we have passed through the age of cruelty (in the formation of mnemonics), we might give further consideration to the idea that the marginalization of forgetting in the conceptualization of the significance of remembering is also tied to how we conceive the objects of our concern (human and otherwise) in terms of control, domination, power, which Heidegger and many others explore. Our conceptions of forgetting bear on these discussions, which have further implications and applications in our moral and social philosophies.

Casey also emphasizes the significance of remembering for building community and notices that the disappearance of remembering demotes the role of elders (Casey, 1987, p. 7). Drawing on the ideas elaborated here, we might also say that the marginalization of forgetting also demotes the value of the elderly in our society. They are forgotten, in part, because it is believed they have nothing valuable to contribute (inferior as "storage" devices to books, movies, CDs, etc.), and because they are feared as the emblems of forgetting. In a social context in which a characteristic of human existence is defined in terms of being an efficient *manager* of memory storage, the sluggishness or inability of the elderly to engage in memory retrieval results in a perceived *loss of humanity*. If forgetting is replaced at the center of our conception of humanity, its appearance in our everyday lives and in the macrorhythms of human life more generally might appear less monstrous and afford different possibilities for how we relate to persons who appear to have a *surplus* of forgetting.

Nietzsche's praise of forgetting should by no means be taken as a dismissal or denigration of remembering (notice the point about critical history and the formation of boundaries and horizons that the *dynamic* of remembering and forgetting makes possible). As I have argued, forgetting the subject is not simply a celebration of mindlessness or oblivion. Nietzsche's emphasis on the activity of forgetting and its implied interactive context (as a formative force shaping the individual, analogous to the formative forces of the Apollinian and Dionysian in *BT*) suggests that the forgetfulness of forgetting, the marginalization of forgetting bodes ill for remembering, too. Delving a bit further into the analogy indicated in the Apollinian and Dionysian in *BT* is a worthy point of departure. Just as forgetting the Dionysian resulted, for Nietzsche, in the deformity of the Apollinian, so too does the forgetting of forgetting result in the transmogrification of remembering. Our conceptualization of these two possibilities is intimately related, and these conceptual formations give shape to and organize our practices in the world, thereby giving structure to how we relate to each other and other objects of concern.

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Notes

1. For translations of Nietzsche's texts, I use Hollingdale's *HL*, Kaufmann's *BT* and Z, and Kaufmann and Hollingdale's *GM*, unless otherwise indicated.
2. The famous ending of the *Republic* is worth recalling: "And so, Glaucon, the tale was saved, as the saying is, and was not lost. And it will save us if we believe it,

and we shall safely cross the River of Lethe, and keep our soul unspotted from the world. But if we are guided by me we shall believe that the soul is immortal and capable of enduring all extremes of good and evil, and so we shall hold ever to the upward way and pursue righteousness with wisdom always and ever, that we may be dear to ourselves and to the gods both during our sojourn here and when we receive our reward, as the victors in the games go about to gather in theirs. And thus both here and in that journey of a thousand years, whereof I have told you, we shall fare well [*eu Prattōmen*].” In his discussion of nobility as it relates to its essential activity (in contrast to the *reactivity* of slave morality) in *GM I*, § 10, Nietzsche writes, “they likewise knew, as rounded men replete with energy and therefore necessarily active, that happiness should not be sundered from action—being active was with them necessarily a part of happiness (whence *eu prattēin* takes its origin)—all very much the opposite of ‘happiness’ at the level of the impotent, the oppressed, and those in whom poisonous and inimical feelings are festering, with whom it appears as essentially narcotic, drug, rest, peace, ‘sabbath,’ slackening of tension and relaxing of limbs, in short *passively*.” The association in Nietzsche of forgetting with a kind of activity (*GM II*, § 1), one crucial for happiness (e.g., *HL*, p. 4 and *GS*, “Jokes,” § 4) echoes in this passage.

3. Forgetting is not the only process that has been rendered passive. Edward Casey (1987) explores how the contemporary conceptualization of memory as instrumental and as part of an essentially passive process has its roots in the philosophies of Plato (where remembering becomes instrumentalized) and Aristotle (where it becomes construed as something passive). Nietzsche’s point seems to be that both forces, remembering and forgetting, are active and involved in an interactive dynamic that facilitates or grounds our distinguishing, valuing, or coming to know things.
4. Ultimately, Heidegger’s view represents quite a departure from the Platonic sketch offered above. Insofar as Heidegger thinks that truth is a relationship and an activity of disclosure, remembering what has been forgotten is a way of relating to things in the world rather than the retrieval of lost knowledge.
5. Those interested in reviewing a collection of the few occasional remarks about forgetting that are made by modern philosophers in particular might find Seidel 1966, pp. 81–98, of some use. Seidel’s work on the nature of mind and consciousness is now rather dated, but his general thesis about the relation between forgetting as providing a reservoir of resources for creativity and his historical observations might be helpful to those pursuing relevant topics. There is also some brief discussion of forgetting in the history of philosophy in the context of a more elaborate account of the history of remembering in Casey 1987. I make only a few references to this work below, but it certainly would repay further study for those interested in the themes of this paper.
6. Deleuze (1983) argues that Nietzsche distinguishes forces only in relation to quantity and that active and reactive forces differ with regard to whether they obey or command in relation to each other (e.g., pp. 39–40). Consciousness is the work of reactive force: “Consciousness merely expresses the relation of certain reactive forces to the active forces which dominate them. Consciousness is essentially reactive; this is why we do not know what a body can do, or what activity it is capable

- of (*GS*, § 354). And what is said of consciousness must also be said of memory and habit” (p. 41). In contrast, “The body’s active forces make it a self and define the self as superior and astonishing: ‘A most powerful being, an unknown sage—he is called the Self. He inhabits your body, he is your body’ (ZI, ‘Of the Despisers of the Body,’ p. 62)” (Deleuze, p. 42). If we map these to Nietzsche’s discussion of the role of memory in the creation of consciousness, *remembering* is cast as a *reactive* force while *forgetting* is the *active* force that is responsible for the creation of the subject more generally. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari offer some further elaboration of this idea of the active forces forming the self, particularly in relation to forgetting when they attribute to Nietzsche the idea that (in relation to the creation of the body as specified and articulated in terms of its parts, organs, and functions, and therefore accountable in a system of desire and exchange) “it is a matter of creating a memory for man; and man, who was constituted by means of an active faculty of forgetting (*oubli*), by means of a repression of biological memory, must create an *other* memory, one that is collective, a memory of words (*paroles*) and no longer a memory of things, a memory of signs and no longer of effects. This organization, which traces its signs directly on the body, constitutes a system of cruelty, a terrible alphabet” (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, pp. 144–145). What I take this to mean is that our sense of ourselves as human beings, as having specifically human bodies and being specific human individuals, stems from actively forgetting many facets and aspects of our bodies that we share with other nonhuman animals. There is a process of carving up the body into parts that is necessary for fitting them into a system of significances and meanings of what constitutes our humanity and to what we would do well to aspire (Deleuze and Guattari, p. 143).
7. Derrida’s lecture begins with a call for a more attentive history of the development of concepts, and he considers in greater detail the development of the idea of “the human” (or, the concept “man”) in phenomenology, particularly in Heidegger’s works. He distinguishes two ways to critically evaluate and challenge philosophical frameworks that supply the basis for conceptual economies (concepts that are basic for others and are crucially interrelated). One critical approach works from “within,” attempting to open and expand the existing framework, and the other approach works from “without” by seeking to abandon the rejected framework and to effect a complete and total dissociation from it. Both risk failure insofar as the first may well remain blind to what lies outside of itself and which could nevertheless be useful for the expansion and change it hopes to bring about. The second critical approach risks failure insofar as it insists upon its absolute distinction to such an extent that it might not recognize essential similarities that it holds and adopts rather naively and might not subject those features to a thorough-going critique (Derrida 1982, p. 135). Derrida associates Heidegger’s work with the first kind of strategy and his own contemporary French thinkers with the second. He appears to include Nietzsche in the second group as well, and it is at this point that he briefly mentions Nietzsche’s idea of active forgetting as described above.
 8. Some commentators and persons who asked questions when I gave earlier versions of this paper at conference meetings objected that Nietzsche does not really praise forgetting, recalling that as Nietzsche writes in *HL*, *even animals forget*;

what distinguishes us as humans is that we remember. I shall not address whether this is literally true since it is not relevant to the present discussion or the broader question of whether it is good *for us* to remember so much as we do, or to prize memory of a certain sort as highly as we do and for the reasons that we do. It is clear from this passage in *HL* that Nietzsche thinks that forgetting is essential to vitality. Others further object that if Nietzsche has in mind a renewal of forgetting it must be a kind that is different from that of animals. This also strikes me as unsupported. While many readers might be keen to distinguish human beings as essentially different from all “other animals,” Nietzsche is not. I am not making a wholly reductive claim here—I am not saying that for Nietzsche we are *just like all the other animals*. Such a claim cannot be true if one thinks that “all the other animals” as a contrast term with “human beings” has no meaningful reference. All animals, Nietzsche seems to claim, need to forget in order to live: they need to do this in order to function biologically (processes of digestion conceived as forgetting) and in order to have any possible conscious psychic life (processes of “inpsychation” mentioned above). Many specific animals may not have psychic lives, and it might be that no other animals have cultivated the powers of memory that human beings wrought in the processes of moralization. These speculations and qualifications, however, do not imply that human forgetting is qualitatively different from the kind of forgetting vital to all animal life.

Part Two

Laughing at the Margins *Nietzsche's Tragic/Comic Sense of Life*