

Pippi Longstocking as Friedrich Nietzsche's overhuman¹

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On January 3, 1889, Friedrich Nietzsche walks out from his lodging at Piazza Carlo Alberto in Turin. Suddenly, he witnesses a coachman flogging his old and tired horse. He rushes forward and throws himself around the horse's neck in an attempt to protect it. Then, after bursting into tears, he falls to the ground, unconscious, perhaps struck, for the first time, by the serious symptoms of advanced syphilis.²

This event concluded Nietzsche's prolific career at the early age of 44. It would be followed by more than a decade of crippling physical and mental disorder, before he died his second, and definitive, death on August 25, 1900. Thus, despite having

¹ This essay is a rewritten and extended English version of the one published in connection with the hundredth anniversary of the death of Nietzsche: Tholander, Michael (2000). Friedrich Nietzsche – och Pippi Långstrump. *Tvårsnitt*, 22(3), 2-17.

² Other theories suggest that Nietzsche suffered from a series of strokes, from dementia or from brain cancer, or that he fell victim to a combination of these maladies. See, e.g., Butler, Paul (2011). A Stroke of Bad Luck: CADASIL and Friedrich Nietzsche's "Dementia" or Madness. In P. McNamara (Ed.), *Dementia: History and Incidence*. Santa Barbara: Praeger.

declared the exacting precept “Die at the right time!”³ in his most well-known book, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche, quite ironically, died all too early, as well as all too late.

During the many years that have passed since his most productive years (1872-1888), Nietzsche has lost neither his attractiveness nor his controversial status. Today, Nietzsche is particularly famous, or infamous, for two things: His statement “God is dead”⁴ and his idea of the awaiting “overhuman” (Übermensch).⁵ It is the latter idea that is central to this essay. By pointing to a series of illuminative similarities between Nietzsche’s 19th century writings about an imagined, forthcoming human ideal and the 20th century fictitious figure of Pippi Longstocking, a literary parallelism will be presented throughout the essay.⁶ The intended purpose is to rectify the image of both Nietzsche and his overhuman. Whether or not this also has a bearing on the impression of Pippi Lockstocking is an open question.

³ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: Chapter 21, Voluntary death. Each quote from Nietzsche’s books in the essay is marked by a footnote that shows from where it has been taken. Some of the quotes have been rewritten in a gender-neutral language.

⁴ Expressed for the first time in *The Gay Science*: Book 3, §108.

⁵ See, e.g., *The Gay Science*: Book 5, §382; *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: Zarathustra’s prologue, §3; *On the Genealogy of Morality*: Essay 1, §16. The German term “Übermensch” has been translated into the gender-neutral “overhuman” rather than into the more common “overman” or “superman.” Graham Parkes also uses “overhuman” in his 2005 translation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* for the Oxford World’s Classics series.

⁶ Pippi and several other Astrid Lindgren characters (e.g., Emil of Lönneberga, Karlsson-on-the-Roof and Rasmus in “Rasmus and the Vagabond”) have previously, at least partly, been described as overhumans. See Gaare, Jørgen & Sjaastad, Øystein (2002). *Pippi and Sokrates: Filosofiska vandringar i Astrid Lindgrens värld [Pippi and Sokrates: Philosophical Excursions Into the World of Astrid Lindgren]*. Stockholm: Natur och Kultur.

The idea of the overhuman

Walter Kaufmann, the renowned Nietzsche scholar, argues that Nietzsche was influenced by Ralph Waldo Emerson, the great American thinker, in the choice of the term “overhuman.”⁷ Emerson had previously coined the idea of the “oversoul” in one of his essays, an idea that has some similarities with Nietzsche’s “overhuman.”⁸ However, Nietzsche had formulated many of the traits that he considers characteristic of the upcoming, transcending human being long before he used the term “overhuman” for the first time. This may indicate that the term, which Nietzsche actually employs quite sparingly, was used only to allude to Emerson’s “oversoul.”⁹

The overhuman ideal can be interpreted narrowly to include only the traits that are described when Nietzsche explicitly uses the term “overhuman.” However, it is also possible to broaden the meaning of the term and view it as the collection of ideals that he brings out in his writing. The term “overhuman” then becomes merely one of many names for the future pattern of perfection that Nietzsche envisions.

An alternative name that he often uses is “the free spirits,”¹⁰ a label which implicitly reveals that overhumans resist being bound by common beliefs and conventions. Other names

⁷ Kaufmann, Walter (1974). Translator’s Introduction. In F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*. New York: Vintage Books.

⁸ Emerson, Ralph Waldo (1841/2007). *The Over-Soul*. In *Essays: First series*. Stilwell: Digireads.com Publishing.

⁹ That Nietzsche did indeed read Emerson can be noted in a few places in his writing, e.g., in *Schopenhauer as Educator* (1874). That Nietzsche also felt a close affinity to him is revealed in a letter to a friend in which he refers to Emerson as a “brother-soul.” See Baudouin, Charles (1924/2015). *Contemporary Studies*. New York: Routledge.

¹⁰ For instance, this term is used throughout *Human, All Too Human*, see, e.g., Preface, §2; Section 1, Of first and last things, §30; Section 5, Signs of higher and lower culture, §225.

include “the unconscientious,” “the unfettered,” “the great longers,” “the untimely,” “the premature births” and “the inventive.”¹¹ Like “the free spirits,” these alternative names reveal some of the content that lies behind the term “overhuman.”

The misinterpreted Nietzsche

Nietzsche has often been viewed as a provocative deconstructionist – a modern protagonist of the same kind of relativism, skepticism and cynicism that the Sophists¹² had launched in Ancient Greece back in the 5th century BC. But his thoughts and ideas also include many constructive elements, which may even be viewed as laying the foundation for a whole philosophy of life. The overhuman ideal is a prime example of this constructive side of Nietzsche. Here, he paints an alternative image of the human race, an image which, according to Nietzsche, makes contemporary people seem like monkeys in comparison. Thus, as he lets *Zarathustra* phrase it, humanity is just “a rope stretched between the animal and the overhuman – a rope over an abyss.”¹³

However, it is the fate of all philosophers to be misinterpreted, and by using hyperbolic statements like the one above, Nietzsche is certainly not an exception to this rule. On the contrary, he is particularly affected by malicious readings, and especially with regard to the idea of the overhuman. For instance, a prevailing belief is still that the overhuman corresponds to the Aryan Nazi of the 20th century, even though Nietzsche, unlike many of his contemporaries, often praised Jews and looked down upon German nationalism and

¹¹ A few of these names are mentioned in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: Chapter 74, The song of melancholy, §2.

¹² See Kerferd, George (1981). *The Sophistic Movement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹³ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: Zarathustra’s prologue, §4.

authoritarianism.¹⁴ Thus, Nietzsche's overhuman cannot be a blond Aryan or serve as a kind of Nazi ideal. The overhuman is individualistic and would never stoop to the kind of herd mentality that was so significant of the Nazi movement.

Nor does the overhuman ideal allude to an individual who accomplishes as much as possible in as short a time as possible. Thus, it is not about being a successful careerist or status-seeker, who also succeeds in building lasting relationships, raising exceptional children and cultivating a perfect body. The overhuman ideal does not mean that you have to achieve all of the ideals celebrated by society, and neither does it necessarily translate into efficiency. Rather, it is about an approach to life and the events one encounters in it.

Still, the questions linger: How can we readily imagine the overhuman? What portrait can we paint of this ideal? What kind of individual can we envision more concretely? One answer to these questions is to think of the overhuman as Pippi Longstocking, the fictional nine-year old parentless girl created by the Swedish children's author Astrid Lindgren.¹⁵ However, from the start, it is crucial to emphasize that it is *not* Pippi's physical strength, perhaps her most recognizable attribute, which makes her an overhuman. She is not an overhuman in the simple sense of being some kind of female version of "Superman," a third common fallacy about Nietzsche's ideal. Unfortunately, this term has often been the English translation of the German term "Übermensch." But Pippi is not primarily superior due to her physical abilities. She is an overhuman in her approach to life and in her immediate life-affirming actions.

¹⁴ See, e.g., *Human, All Too Human*: Section 8, A look at the state. §475; *The Gay Science*: Book 5, We fearless ones, §348, §377; *Daybreak*: Book 3, §205, §207.

¹⁵ The first book about Pippi was published in 1945: Lindgren, Astrid (1945). *Pippi Långstrump*. Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren. To date, the books about Pippi have been translated into at least 70 languages. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pippi_Longstocking [2015-11-18].

Before moving on to the similarities between Nietzsche's human ideal and Pippi, it is worth pointing out that Astrid Lindgren herself, in a letter accompanying the first manuscript, indeed characterized her own creation as an overhuman: "Pippi Longstocking is, as you will find if you take the trouble to read the manuscript, a little *Übermensch* in the shape of a child."¹⁶ Towards the end of the letter, Astrid Lindgren also ironically adds that she hopes that the publisher will not file a report on her book to the Child Welfare Board, obviously well aware of its potentially controversial content.¹⁷

Amor fati

One of the more important aspects of the life approach that Nietzsche connects with the overhuman is the stoic willingness to accept life in every part of its joyful and tragic form. As he expresses it in *Ecce Homo*: "My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it ... but love it."¹⁸ Indeed, such a human being would be willing to relive his or her life over and over again, in an "eternal recurrence" of the

¹⁶ Quoted and translated from p. 16 in Lundqvist, Ulla (1979). *Århundradets barn: Fenomenet Pippi Långstrump och dess förutsättningar* [*The Child of the Century: The Phenomenon of Pippi Longstocking, and Its Premises*]. Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren. It is unclear whether Astrid Lindgren ever read Nietzsche in the original.

¹⁷ Astrid Lindgren was right in her anticipation of the adverse reception that the book about Pippi could potentially face. One year after the publication, the so called "Pippi feud" broke out, starting with a critical article by Professor of literature John Landqvist in *Aftonbladet*, a national newspaper. In other countries, the translation process "cleansed" some aspects of the text that were considered unacceptable, making new feuds less likely to occur. See O'Sullivan, Emer (2005). *Comparative Children's Literature*. New York: Routledge.

¹⁸ *Ecce Homo*: Why I am so clever, §10.

same, something that Nietzsche views as the proof of a completed, and very much desirable, self-overcoming.¹⁹

This grand will to accept the world as it is, in *all* its aspects, is patently displayed by Pippi. Although she lives all by herself, something that should be viewed in light of all children's great fear of losing their parents, there is no resentment in her, no wish that life should have been different. Instead, she resorts entirely to the *amor fati* principle and sees the good in the hand that fate has dealt her: "My mother is an angel and my father is a cannibal king, it is certainly not all children who have such fine parents."²⁰ From life's military school, she has thus learned the maxim that Nietzsche exalts in *Twilight of the Idols*: "What does not kill me makes me stronger."²¹

The antitype of Pippi is Mrs. Finkvist, a woman who shows clear signs that she wishes she were someone else. On the whole, Pippi is rather tolerant, but in a meeting with Mrs. Finkvist, it comes out that she, quite like Nietzsche, harbors contempt for this type of resentful human being. Their meeting occurs at a party in Villa Villekulla, where the Christmas tree is to be stripped of its decorations, "plundered," and where the children are supposed to be at the center of attention. The thing that annoys Pippi is that Mrs. Finkvist, who believes that children should not be allowed to exist, and who actually shouted "nasty kid" at Pippi earlier the very same day, nevertheless has the audacity to beg for a cake that Pippi has baked for the local children. But when Pippi encounters Mrs. Finkvist's cheerless and greedy manners, her patience runs out:

¹⁹ The idea of the eternal recurrence is central to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (e.g., Chapter 57, The convalescent, §2), but it was introduced already in *The Gay Science*: Book 4, Sanctus Januarius, §34^I.

²⁰ The "Pippi-quotes" have been picked from several Pippi Longstocking books by Astrid Lindgren, and also from movies based on her books.

²¹ *Twilight of the Idols*: Epigrams and arrows, §8.

“My dear Mrs. Finkvist,” she explains with ironic politeness, “this Christmas tree plunder party is suitable for children. That is, it is unsuitable for adults.”

People who, like Mrs. Finkvist, find it hard to enjoy parties and festivities, and appear there for the wrong reasons, have often been disappointed with life, Nietzsche argues in *Daybreak*: “[Those] who have been deeply injured by life are all suspicious of cheerfulness, as though it were childlike and childish.”²² Under each bouquet of roses, they discover a disguised grave, which mirrors their dark background. Moreover, they often become a nuisance to others, as Nietzsche points out in *The Gay Science*: “Those who are dissatisfied with themselves are continually ready for revenge, and we others will be their victims, if only by having to endure their ugly sight.”²³ It is partly in the light of this resentful type of human being, this enemy of joy and delight, that the overhuman must be understood.

The ultimate test of whether you are full of resentment, like Mrs. Finkvist, or whether you resemble Pippi and have accepted your fate, is provided by Nietzsche in *The Gay Science*: “What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: ‘This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more ... all in the same succession and sequence’ ... Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have

²² *Daybreak*: Book 4, §329.

²³ *The Gay Science*: Book 4, Sanctus Januarius, §290. This is probably the most famous paragraph about “the eternal recurrence.” Another well-known line, playing down death itself, is the following: “Was that life? ... Well then! Once more!” See *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: Chapter 79, The drunken song.

answered him: 'You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine.'²⁴

Yes to life

The resentment against life, which permeates the entirety of Mrs. Finkvist's character, can also be found in Socrates, according to Nietzsche. In *The Gay Science*, he ridicules Socrates' famous last words: "O Crito, I owe Asclepius a rooster."²⁵ For all those who have ears, Nietzsche argues, these words have to be interpreted as "O Crito, *life is a disease*."²⁶ The reason is that Asclepius was the god of medicine in Ancient Greece, which clearly implies that Socrates, through death, claimed to be cured of a disease.

But this resentment and animosity towards life are also embedded within wide-ranging belief systems, Nietzsche argues, and not just within individual people. Christianity is an example of such a life-denying belief system. Here, the extensive suffering in the world works as a pretext *against* life itself, according to Nietzsche. Instead, he wants to emphasize the need to accept suffering as *part* of life. Thus, when suffering befalls us, we should not gloomily try to comfort ourselves with the idea that a better afterlife awaits us. We should move on and accept life as it is. We should *live* our lives, not say no to it. We should realize, as Nietzsche points out in *The Anti-Christ*, that heaven is to be found in how we live, *here* and *now*, together with the ones we love: "The 'kingdom of God' is not something one waits for ... it does not come 'in a thousand years' – it is an

²⁴ *The Gay Science*: Book 4, Sanctus Januarius, §341.

²⁵ Originally quoted in Plato's *Phaedo*, section 118a, written around 360 BC. See, e.g.,

http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1658?msg=welcome_stranger [2015-11-18].

²⁶ *The Gay Science*: Book 4, Sanctus Januarius, §340.

experience within a heart.”²⁷ Simply enough, God is in the hands that we hold.

However, when Nietzsche attacks those who say no to life, it is not always the Christians he is after, but also Arthur Schopenhauer’s introverted and life-denying pessimism.²⁸ Schopenhauer, who Nietzsche in many respects was influenced by, argued in accordance with Buddhist teachings that one must give up the thirst for life and live ascetically if one is ever to reach a final fulfillment in life. Contrary to this opinion, Nietzsche, for instance in *Twilight of the Idols*, argues that one has to say yes to life, no matter how cruel it can be: “Affirmation of life even in its strangest and sternest problems, the will to life rejoicing in its own inexhaustibility through the *sacrifice* of its highest types – that is ... to realize in oneself the eternal joy of becoming.”²⁹

Pippi lives her life in a manner that is exactly as life-affirming as Nietzsche ever could have wished for. She does not despair over her fate. She has come to terms with it. Not in a cold, detached or resentful manner, but by giving it a life-affirming meaning, and by viewing every novel situation as a new set of opportunities. Pippi’s solitary existence in Villa Villekulla, her own parentless home, is therefore not a problem for her. When she and her friends, Tommy and Annika, come home from a distant trip to tropical Kurrekurredutt Island, Annika beseeches her to sleep the first night with them, so that she does not feel alone. However, Pippi does not shun aloneness just because Villa Villekulla lay dark, empty and covered with snow. Instead, she displays her cat-like independence, one of the characteristics that have been granted the free spirits, and walks home to her

²⁷ *The Anti-Christ*: §34.

²⁸ See, e.g., Schopenhauer, Arthur (1851/2015). *Studies in Pessimism*. <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/s/schopenhauer/arthur/pessimism/index.html> [2015-11-18].

²⁹ *Twilight of the Idols*: What I owe to the ancients, §5.

freezing cold house all alone. "So long as the heart is warm and ticks properly, you don't feel the cold," as she argues.

But Pippi not only affirms life by overcoming sad experiences, aloneness and cold houses in a calm and stoic manner. As part of her free-spirited yes-saying, she also keenly engages in risky business. For instance, while at the circus, she manages to stand on a horse's back, walk the tightrope and defeat Mighty Adolf in wrestling, all within a few minutes. Moreover, on other occasions, she engages in daring rescue operations, saving two boys from a house fire, a girl from an escaped tiger at the zoo, and Tommy from a shark at the coast of Kurrekurredudd Island. Such engagement in risky business is an important aspect of the yes-saying to life, as Nietzsche makes clear in *The Gay Science*: "Believe me! The secret of reaping the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment from life is to *live dangerously!*"³⁰

However, the will to life is not just expressed in bodily risk-taking, but also in intellectual endeavors. Nietzsche himself was prepared to sacrifice his relationship with both family members and friends in conveying his thoughts and ideas.³¹ Pippi, for her part, constantly surprises her social surroundings through her unconventional reasoning. Often, it is adults that question her, but sometimes even Tommy and Annika have doubts about things. For instance, this can be noticed when Tommy asks why Pippi, quite oddly, keeps her horse on the front porch of Villa Villekulla. But although it seems like a fair question, Pippi certainly presents a convincing argument for this order of things: "Well, he'd be in the way in the kitchen, and he doesn't thrive in the parlor." In conclusion then, the will to life means taking on new challenges as soon as they appear, whether it is a matter of staying stoically calm in difficult life circumstances, excelling in bodily undertakings, or defending peculiar ideas.

³⁰ *The Gay Science*: Book 4, Sanctus Januarius, §283.

³¹ See, e.g., Kaufmann, Walter (1974). *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*. 4th edition. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Self-respect

Another aspect of the high-spirited yes-saying to life is the pride that the overhumans feel with regard to themselves. Thus, pride, one of the seven deadly sins according to traditional Christian ethics, is a virtue to Nietzsche. But this pride has nothing to do with arrogance, conceit or haughtiness, but only with a firm and relentless self-respect: “*What is the seal of liberation?*” Nietzsche asks in *The Gay Science*. “No longer being ashamed in front of oneself,”³² he answers. Later, in *Ecce Homo*, the answer to the same question reads: “Accepting oneself as if fated, not wishing oneself *different*.”³³

In Pippi, this desirable self-respect becomes visible when awful Bengt and his gang bully her for being red-haired and wearing oversized shoes. Unperturbed by the attacks, she just stands in the middle of the ring of boys and smiles with confidence. As an overhuman, she does not allow herself to be defined by outside parties, but only by her own sense of worth. Likewise, this self-respect comes into sight when Pippi walks past a perfume shop with a poster in the window that asks prospective customers: “Do you suffer from freckles?” At the sight of this poster, and the large jar of salve next to it, Pippi, whose face is covered with freckles, enters the shop and walks up to the saleswoman with determined steps. “No, I don’t suffer from them,” she exclaims, “I love them!” Then, in the spirit of the *amor-fati* principle, she quickly adds: “And if you should happen to get in any salve that gives people *more* freckles, then you can send me seven or eight jars.”

One explanation for Nietzsche’s strong belief in the importance of self-respect is his idea of the innocence of becoming. As he puts it in *Twilight of the Idols*: “*No one* is accountable for existing at all, or for being constituted as he or she is, or for living in the circumstances and surroundings in which he or she

³² *The Gay Science*: Book 3, §275.

³³ *Ecce Homo*: Why I am so wise, §6.

lives ... One is *not* the result of a special design, a will, a purpose ... one is a piece of fate, one belongs to the whole, one *is* in the whole – there exists nothing which could judge, measure, compare, condemn our being.”³⁴ Thus, the overhuman does not waste time worrying about fixed things, like freckles, but instead learns to love them. Moreover, the overhuman realizes that people are being shaped by forces beyond their control. Thus, Pippi would never blame Tommy for never biting his nails, nor Annika for always being properly dressed in freshly ironed cotton.

Life as a creative adventure

But although Nietzsche emphasizes the *amor fati* principle, as well as the idea of the innocence of becoming, he certainly does not believe in passivity or in an inescapable destiny. Instead, he celebrates an active approach to life that demands personal traits such as ingenuity, originality and lightheartedness. One should take advantage of every situation; cultivate one's character; build oneself a distinctive particularity in time and space. Life is about acting regardless of the circumstances; about creating oneself; about living in a playful manner.

That Pippi displays an impressive ingenuity is demonstrated repeatedly. For instance, she does not turn muddle-headed when she suddenly runs out of the blue cloth that she uses while sewing herself a new dress. Instead, she soon decides to add little red patches here and there, and is very happy with that. Indeed, she dresses according to her own taste and liking, and not in line with the prevailing fashion. This also explains why she refuses to wear any other shoes than those her father bought for her in South America, “to grow into,” and which are twice as long as her feet. In addition, she finds it quite unproblematic to wear long stockings of different colors, black and brown, on her thin legs. In short, Pippi is both innovative and original, and

³⁴ *Twilight of the Idols*: The four great errors, §8.

in this way, she fulfills perfectly the overhuman ideal and its independence from conventional norms.

At the same time, this relaxed attitude towards established conventions equips Pippi with the kind of imaginative creativity that an overhuman must have. It is precisely this creativity that allows her to devote a day to search for a “spink” together with Tommy and Annika. Pippi had invented this word, “spink,” all by herself, and now she wants to find out whether she can find anything in the world that fits it. Thus, very much like the early Ludwig Wittgenstein, she wants to settle the relationship between the word and the world.³⁵ However, she soon realizes, as did both Nietzsche and the later Wittgenstein, that the most important aspect of language is what we can *do* with it.³⁶ Thus, when she finally suggests to Tommy and Annika that “spink” is the name of the beetle they find on the gravel path at Villa Villekulla, the most important thing is not the name-giving *per se*, but the act of persuasion that she is forced to engage in.

This means that language is rhetoric rather than a more or less truthful representation of the world: “[W]ith words it is never a question of truth, never a question of adequate expression,”³⁷ as Nietzsche argues in *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*. In line with this, there is no final goal attached to language – such as a complete description of the world – but only a restless hunt for new meanings, truths, paradoxes, and so on. However, as Pippi’s spink game shows, this is not something regrettable, but rather something liberating. It contributes to making life a creative adventure. It allows you to transcend the limits that language appears to set before you, and to strive for something new, something adventurous, something joyful. Thus, here Schopenhauer’s pessimism is once again attacked. What

³⁵ See, e.g., sections 4–4.116 in Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1921/1971). *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. London: Routledge.

³⁶ See, e.g., §1-43 and §122-133 in Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1953). *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell.

³⁷ *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*: §1.

Schopenhauer identifies as the problem of life, the endless pursuit of goals which can never be satisfied, Nietzsche views as the ultimate meaning of life. It is in creative activity – the relentless hunt for change, novelty, transcendence – that happiness is to be found. The fact that you will perhaps never be satisfied with the fruits of the pursuit, but restlessly pursue new goals, is therefore not a problem for Nietzsche. Life is a journey for the overhuman, not a destination. Therefore, Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* also cries out: "Yes, for the play of creating!"³⁸

However, the fact that the overhuman approaches life as a creative adventure does not imply that one should be lying idle. To create oneself means hard work and training, and if you are going to get good at something, it also means sacrifice. As *Zarathustra* expresses it: "[Anyone] who would learn to fly one day must first learn to stand and walk and run and climb and dance; one cannot fly into flying!"³⁹ This also applies to Pippi, who wants to become a pirate when she grows up. Then it is not good enough to be content with a slothful life as princess on Kurrekuredutt Island, as Pippi herself realizes: "If I'm to be a really good pirate one day," she declares, "then it won't do for me only to live court life. It makes you soft."

Dionysian passion

As part of Nietzsche's celebration of creativity, he directs harsh criticism against an overly naive faith in reason. Such faith in reason is shared by many of the great philosophers – from Aristotle,⁴⁰ via Seneca,⁴¹ to Kant⁴² – who argue that the passions

³⁸ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: Chapter 1, The three metamorphoses.

³⁹ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: Chapter 55, The spirit of gravity, §2.

⁴⁰ See "Book 3" in Aristotle (ca 330 BC/1992). *Nicomachean Ethics*. Mineola: Dover.

⁴¹ See "Chapter 76" in Seneca (ca 40-65/1958). *The Stoic Philosophy of Seneca. Essays and Letters*. New York: Norton.

must be the slave of reason. Nietzsche can be said to reverse this in two ways. First, he argues that human beings are not as rational as we like to think we are. There is an irrationality within us that we gladly turn a blind eye to. Second, it is not even desirable to be governed by a supreme reason. The latter criticism, distrust of reason as the way to human salvation, is a thought that runs through Nietzsche's entire writings, from *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) to *The Will to Power* (1883-1888).

In *The Birth of Tragedy* the criticism concerns the idea that Apollonian reason, with Socrates, came to dominate over Dionysian instincts and the lust for life. "The utterance 'truth at any price' is something Socratic,"⁴³ as Nietzsche, quite disdainfully, puts it in *The Philosopher*. This pursuit of Truth, with a capital T, reflects a nihilistic response to the vicissitudes of life, and it prevents passion, fantasy and irrationality – the life-affirming, Dionysian elements. Our salvation lies not in knowing, but in creating, Nietzsche argues. And in creating, we undoubtedly need passion, Dionysian passion, in order to succeed, not primarily reason.

In the posthumously published *The Will to Power*, the criticism of the dominant reason concerns Nietzsche's fear that people, when finally realizing that the Apollonian quest for truth is a chimera, will lapse into a nihilism in which they see no meaning of life. Instead, Nietzsche argues, you should give the world the meaning it is waiting to be given. You do not discover the world, but *create* it. And this is something you must realize if you are not to despair over the transitory nature of the world, not to get caught up in a destructive nihilism.

This criticism of reason is also something that Pippi manifests through her way of living. Instead of dwelling on the past, and questioning the meaning of life, she orchestrates her own

⁴² See "Second section" in Kant, Immanuel (1785/1981). *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Indianapolis: Hackett.

⁴³ *The Philosopher*: §70.

wayward projects. Thus, it is hardly surprising to learn that Pippi often entertains herself with dancing in her loneliness, very much like Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, "the self-enjoying soul."⁴⁴ Thunder-Karlson and Bloom, the two local thieves, discover this when they sneak around Villa Villekulla. They are planning to steal Pippi's suitcase, the one that is full of gold pieces, and are waiting for Pippi to go to bed. But Pippi never goes to bed. She is learning to dance schottische. And she does not want to stop until she is sure that she really can. Perhaps Pippi is practicing for her future life as a princess of Kurrekurreduitt Island, where she imagines a Dionysian existence: "Princess Pippilotta! What pomp! What grandeur! And how I shall dance! Princess Pippilotta dancing in the light of the camp fire to the rolling of drums. My goodness, how my nose ring will rattle then!"

But Pippi not only dances schottische with herself, lively and passionately, but constantly allows herself to be led by her impulses and whims. For instance, when Pippi meets spring, she does it in her special way, a way that affirms both the imaginative and wild side of her. Basking in the sunshine is not good enough for her, so she steps straight down into a ditch and starts jumping with joy in the water: "It's only in this country that they've got this idea that children shouldn't walk in ditches," she explains, "but in America, the ditches are so full of children that there isn't any room for the water."

Perspectivity

The spontaneity of Pippi also explains why she cannot possibly get caught in the nihilistic trap. Pippi does not seek truth. She says yes to fiction, the fiction that you create yourself. This also means that she embraces the kind of perspectivity that Nietzsche emphasizes, for instance in *On the Genealogy of*

⁴⁴ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: Chapter 54, The three evil things, §2. Dancing is a recurrent theme in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

Morality: “There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective ‘knowing’; and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our ‘concept’ of this thing, our ‘objectivity’, be.”⁴⁵ Thus, only our imagination sets the limits for what things can be. The world is therefore inexhaustible to us – if only we are able to recognize the possibility that it includes an infinite number of interpretations.

That Pippi has this creative ability for perspective seeing becomes clear at Kurrekurredutt Island. After saving Tommy from the shark attack mentioned above, Pippi actually starts weeping. This surprises Tommy and Annika, as well as all the cannibal children, because never before has Pippi been seen to lose her good spirits. “You weep because Tommy was nearly eaten up?” one of the cannibal children finally asks. “No,” Pippi answers and wipes her eyes, “I weep because the poor little hungry shark did not get any breakfast today.” This answer shows that Pippi is able to take the perspective of unfortunate animals, and feel pity for them. It is hard not to draw a parallel to Nietzsche’s final perspective taking, weeping at Piazza Carlo Alberto in Turin with his arms around the flogged horse’s neck.

In a later episode, as a participant at a school outing, Pippi actually also saves a horse that is being whipped harder and harder by its owner. “You’re not going to beat that horse anymore,” she says firmly to Mr. Flowergrove, the owner, and breaks the whip into small pieces. Then, in a kind of perspective reversal, Pippi gives him a taste of his own medicine: She picks up a heavy sack from the tormented horse’s back and puts it on Mr. Flowergrove’s back instead. Then she clarifies the lesson to be learned: “Now we shall see if you’re as clever at carrying as you are at whipping.”

⁴⁵ *On the Genealogy of Morality*: Essay 3, §12.

Pippi's perspective seeing also becomes visible when she arranges a Thing-searcher expedition – an adventurous hunt for lost things in nature – and invites the more limited Tommy and Annika to participate. When the three of them are crawling along a ditch, looking for things, Pippi suddenly finds a rusty old tin can. “Well, I never saw the like!” she cries out, “What a find! What a find!” Tommy, who represents the naive realist, then stares with amazement at Pippi. “What can you use that for?” he finally asks, rather unimaginatively. Pippi then quickly clarifies that it can be used as a jar for cookies, quite a conventional use perhaps, but also as something that turns day into night – if you only care to put it over your own head. Hence, we become aware that Tommy's conviction that the object found is a rusty tin can, and nothing else, limits his life-world in a substantial way, something that Nietzsche, in *The Anti-Christ*, captures with the words “[c]onvictions are prisons.”⁴⁶ Beyond this, the example also illustrates that original human beings, of Longstocking standard, need not necessarily be the ones who discover an entirely new phenomenon, but rather the ones who manage to see something new in the old. With other words, “a rusty tin can” does not need to be *only* “a rusty tin can.” It can be anything you like it to be.

Another example during the Thing-searcher expedition, which shows Pippi's extraordinary perspectivity, is the scene in which the sleeping Mr. Gustavson is transformed into Pippi's “cute little rabbit” and has to face being fed with dandelion greens. Pippi, as the free spirit she is, does not allow herself to be limited by the supposedly real world that Tommy and Annika inhabit. She creates her own world in a free and uninhibited manner. And she not only entertains herself in doing this, but amuses Tommy and Annika as well. She thereby confirms Nietzsche's observation in *Human, All Too Human* that “wherever there is happiness, there is joy in nonsense.”⁴⁷ Such

⁴⁶ *The Anti-Christ*: §54.

⁴⁷ *Human, All Too Human*: Section 4, From the soul of artists and writers, §213.

joy in nonsense frees us from the merciless shackles of everyday life.

Childlike self-forgetfulness

As children often display the kind of presence, intensity and spontaneity that Nietzsche finds so desirable in human beings, they often serve as a metaphor for the overhuman ideal in his writings. As he puts it in *Daybreak*: “The ones who live as children live – who do not struggle for their bread and do not believe that their actions possess any ultimate significance – remain childlike.”⁴⁸ Only those who struggle to find truth, the toil that always ends in nihilism, risk losing themselves in frustration, discontent and cynicism.

When children play, however, they are blissfully lost in the activity itself, and both the outside world and the self are forgotten. The activity itself is the goal and the child is deeply concentrated, something that should also characterize the mature human being, according to a reflection that Nietzsche makes in *Beyond Good and Evil*: “The maturity of a human being – that means to have rediscovered the seriousness one had as a child at play.”⁴⁹ Immersed in such serious play, one will find oneself in the moment, free from the past and the future; one will appear as a new beginning, a self-propelled wheel, a here and now.

Not even the brusque appearance of tragic death can change this for the overhuman, as Pippi shows. When she plays the monster at the school outing, fiercely chasing all the other children, she suddenly stumbles across a dead little baby bird. At the sight of it, Pippi quickly throws off her game character and kneels down. All activity stops and a complete silence

⁴⁸ *Daybreak*: Book 4, §280.

⁴⁹ *Beyond Good and Evil*: Chapter 4, Apophthegms and interludes, §94.

spreads. Pippi puts the bird very gently on a bed of soft moss, sighs deeply and whispers to it: "If I could, I would make you live again." But then, in a split second, Pippi moves from the most sentimental mourning of the dead baby bird to a state of ecstatic play, once again picking up the role of dangerous monster. "Now I'm going to cook you for dinner," she shouts at the children, and with shrieks of terrified joy they try to hide among the bushes. The fragility of life must never prevent you from erupting in self-forgetting passion, enthusiasm and creativity. Even the baby bird would have wanted it that way.

Nietzsche, who quite obviously views himself as an overhuman, fears in *Ecce Homo* that he will one day lose his passion, enthusiasm and creativity, the ideals that he recurrently returns to in his texts: "*Willing* no more and *esteeming* no more and *creating* no more – oh, that this great weariness might always remain far from me!"⁵⁰ As he writes this, he is certainly unaware that he is less than half a year away from his collapse in Turin. That Pippi, on her part, sees no end to her playfulness and creativity is revealed when she, before her departure to Kurrekurredudd Island, answers Tommy's question about whether she will ever return to Villa Villekulla: "Oh yes, when I retire in about fifty or sixty years' time. Then you and I can play and have a nice time together, can't we?"

Besides this, Pippi also has her chililug pills that will keep her childlike. When Tommy and Annika sit on Pippi's kitchen table and complain about having to grow up, Pippi soon digs out three such pills from a nearby drawer. "Awfully good pills for those who don't want to grow up," she explains while distributing them. For sure, the pills look like ordinary yellow dried peas, as Tommy points out, but Pippi got them from a reliable old Indian chief in Rio, so they ought to work. Especially if you take them in the dark and say the famous

⁵⁰ *Ecce Homo*: Why I write such good books, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra," §8.

magic words: “Pretty little chililug, I don’t want to get bug.” As Pippi makes clear, the last word is vital for a good result – “bug,” not the more predictable “big”.

Fiction as condition of life

We have now gradually approached how Nietzsche’s overhuman looks at, and relates to, knowledge and truth. Put simply, the overhuman resembles the Sceptics⁵¹ when it comes to epistemological stances. The free spirits require *reasons* to believe in something, whereas the fettered ones are content to simply believe, Nietzsche disparaging claims in *The Gay Science*: “[T]he great majority of people does not consider it contemptible to believe this or that and to live accordingly, without first having given themselves an account of the final and most certain reasons pro and con, and without even troubling themselves about such reasons afterward.”⁵² The conclusion is that people must learn to think for themselves, and not just uncritically trust what others say.

Pippi has this kind of skeptical mind, as should be clear by now, but she also wants to encourage other people to gain it. Thus, after fooling a girl into believing that people eat swallow’s nests in China, she soon clarifies, with an authoritative voice, that this gullibility is intolerable: “You certainly ought to *know* that’s not true. You shouldn’t let people make you believe just anything they like.” However, as soon as the girl walks away, Pippi immediately starts telling fibs again. Like the overhuman, she has a complicated attitude towards the “truth”: She believes in it, questions it, plays with it, hunts it, doubts it, and so on.

⁵¹ The Sceptics belong to the Hellenistic period of Greek philosophy (323-31 BC), but the Sophists of the 5th century BC were partially Sceptics too. See Kerferd, George (1981). *The Sophistic Movement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁵² *The Gay Science*: Book 1, §2.

In *Assorted Opinions and Maxims*, Nietzsche argues that doubt is actually a condition for the belief in truth: “Belief in truth begins with doubt as to all truths believed in hitherto.”⁵³ This doubt, however, is only seemingly a Cartesian doubt. The overhuman does not employ doubt in order to create a supposedly safe metaphysical system, the way Descartes attempted.⁵⁴ The overhuman views fiction as a condition of life, not as something that can be escaped. Doubt is therefore only a liberating tool, not something designed to reestablish new false beliefs. At the most, the various truths one believes in should be allowed to become “brief habits,”⁵⁵ as Nietzsche makes clear in *The Gay Science*, that is, fictions that you cherish as if they were the final solution, but which you later, in an unperturbed manner, bid farewell in order to meet new fictions already waiting in the vestibule.

This tribute to fiction, and the realization that fiction is a remarkable means of entertainment, is certainly exhibited by Pippi. Thus, it is not a greater illusion to believe that the chililug pills will protect you from growing up than it is to believe that you will finally find Truth with a capital T. But perhaps Pippi's weakness for fiction becomes most visible when we hear her tell anecdotes from all over the world to Tommy and Annika: About people walking backwards in Egypt; about the Chinese man who hides under his big ears when it rains; about people telling fibs all day long in the Belgian Congo; about the prohibition against homework in Argentina; about people walking on their hands in Indo-China; about “jollification” lessons in Australian schools, and so on. These anecdotes show that Pippi can conjure up other, alternative worlds – perhaps more fascinating than the one we already know. And they show

⁵³ *Assorted Opinions and Maxims*: §20.

⁵⁴ Descartes, René (1644/1983). *Principles of Philosophy*. Boston: Reidel. “Doubt” is one of the most common words in Part I. The famous phrase “Ego cogito, ergo sum” can be found in Part I, article 7.

⁵⁵ *The Gay Science*: Book 4, Sanctus Januarius, §295.

that almost any fiction is good enough, not only those that are considered true.

Daring to question

Fictions regarded as true are, to Nietzsche, merely those errors which have not yet been detected. Or as he expresses it in *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*: “Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions.”⁵⁶ Thus, as he argues in *The Gay Science*, the strength of knowledge does not depend on its degree of truth, but “on its age, on the degree to which it has been incorporated, on its character as a condition of life.”⁵⁷ However, overhumans do not let themselves be bound by such truths, but dare to question them and go beyond them.

One example could be to tell fibs in the manner Pippi does. Then Annika’s naive criticism of Pippi, “It’s wicked to lie. My mother says that,” does no harm. First, those who come up with this type of objection do not think on their own. Who says your mother is always right? Second, this type of objection does not acknowledge the array of lies. Who says there are not many ways of lying? Indeed, if we focus on the latter question, we soon realize that Pippi does not lie in order to deceive people, something that Tommy, but not Annika, understands: “Don’t be silly Annika, Pippi doesn’t tell real lies, it’s pretend lies.”

In this way, Annika is very far from Nietzsche’s overhuman ideal. Those who, like Annika, feel incapable of lying, have not understood what truth, in reality, is. They must surely believe themselves to be telling the truth all the time and have not realized that fabrication, or fiction, is an inescapable condition of life. The conclusion is that you can, indeed, lie – if you only remember to do it with Pippi’s self-understanding and self-distance. The greatest liars are those who not only genuinely

⁵⁶ *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*: §I.

⁵⁷ *The Gay Science*: Book 3, §110.

want to mislead other people, but, in addition, lie to themselves. Annika definitely lies to herself when she, unconsciously self-righteous, believes herself to be telling the truth all the time. However, Pippi does not blame Annika, but instead praises Tommy for defending her own position: "Sometimes you talk so wisely it makes me think you might be a great man one day."

Like Nietzsche's overhuman, Pippi also realizes that knowledge is highly changeable. When Tommy and Annika do their geography homework at Villa Villekulla, Pippi suddenly cries out: "But supposing, just when you've learnt how many Hottentots there are, one of them goes and gets pneumonia and dies! Then it's all been for nothing!" Thus, memorized knowledge, just for its own sake, is not valuable knowledge to Pippi. This also becomes clear when a policeman tries to persuade Pippi of the importance of education. In order to convince her, the policeman argues that it might be very good to know the name of Portugal's capital. But he gets a quick reply from Pippi: "If you're all that anxious to find out what the capital of Portugal is, well, by all means, write directly to Portugal and ask them" – a modern answer, from a free spirit, who has come to realize that it is more important to know *how* to acquire knowledge than to learn it by heart.

Later, when finally attending school, Pippi refuses to accept a habitual procedure that she cannot find any sense in. Here, she challenges the common question-answer routine which, quite asymmetrically, gives the teacher the right to ask the questions, whereas the students are expected to provide the answers. The thing that disturbs Pippi is the fact that the teacher asks questions that she already knows the answer to. "You knew it all the time, so why did you ask then?" she exclaims when the teacher reveals the correct answer to a question. From Pippi's perspective, it is just ridiculous that the teacher asks questions that she knows the answer to. Questions should be asked out of genuine interest and out of a genuine desire to understand things.

“What is education?” Nietzsche asks himself in *The Will to Power*. “[E]ssentially the means of ruining the exceptions for the good of the rule,”⁵⁸ he answers. The question-answer routine can be seen as a part of this devastation, even though Nietzsche does not explicitly write this. It might be good for those who are unable to direct themselves, the fettered spirits. But for the free spirits, those who have the power and the will to create themselves, such teaching is devastating. And although this type of teaching often aims at increasing the amount of knowledge possessed by the students, the result is often disappointing. The inner motivation that gives rise to effortless learning disappears when the student is treated as a machine. Thus, perhaps Nietzsche is right when he, in *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, quite provocatively blames the teachers for the lack of an edifying proliferation in school: “[I]t is on their account that so little is learned and that little so badly.”⁵⁹

Defense of pluralism

The overhuman’s mistrust of truth and knowledge also impinges on the examination and view of Morality with a capital M. A first error with morality, Nietzsche argues, is that it sacrifices individual self-realization for supposedly higher purposes: to optimize the public good (Benthamite utilitarianism),⁶⁰ to submit to strict governing by rules (Kantian deontology),⁶¹ or to save the individual for a superior afterlife (Christian mythology). Instead, Nietzsche advocates an Aristotelian virtue ethics,⁶² which fits well with traits that Pippi displays – ingenuity, inventiveness, originality, lightheartedness, courage, and so on.

⁵⁸ *The Will to Power*: Book 4, Discipline and breeding, §933.

⁵⁹ *The Wanderer and His Shadow*: §282.

⁶⁰ Bentham, Jeremy (1780/1996). *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

⁶¹ Kant, Immanuel (1785/1981). *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Indianapolis: Hackett.

⁶² Aristotle (ca 330 BC/1992). *Nicomachean Ethics*. Mineola: Dover.

Nietzsche is decidedly most aversely critical of Christian and Kantian ethics. The universal claims of morality that these related schools of thought set up, prevent human virtue and prosperity, he argues. In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche also identifies an ulterior motive behind the desire for a universal morality – to control people more efficiently: “What is wanted ... is nothing less than a fundamental remolding, indeed weakening and abolition of the individual ... one hopes to manage more cheaply, more safely, more equitably, more uniformly, if there exist only *large bodies and their members*.”⁶³

In Pippi's world, Mrs. Prüzelius can be seen as the embodiment of this type of suffocating universalism. She is a well-intentioned tyrant of the worst kind, a self-appointed improver of mankind – a preacher of morality – that no one wants to be exposed to. She is the guardian of an imagined, homogenous morality, vainly and naively believing her own precepts to be good for everyone. She wants to impose a secure childhood in an orphanage on Pippi, something that presumably would give her a good start in life and insight into the fine, subsumed, disciplined life. But Mrs. Prüzelius never for a moment asks herself whether this is what *Pippi* really wants. She worries about Pippi's parentless existence, but does not realize that Pippi herself is far more concerned about her mother's imaginable distress: “Don't worry,” as Pippi soothingly whispers to her up in heaven, “I can look after myself.”

In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche, hardly unexpectedly, mocks Immanuel Kant's famous categorical imperative,⁶⁴ the principle that, rather like the Golden Rule, states that you should act only according to such maxims that you would be prepared to elevate to universal law. The criticism of the categorical imperative is not primarily that we miss out on all the fun when

⁶³ *Daybreak*: Book 2, §132.

⁶⁴ See p. 421 in Kant, Immanuel (1785/1981). *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Indianapolis: Hackett.

we follow rigid rules, but that it is highly selfish to believe that one's own moral judgments, and one's own way of living, could serve as a universal law in the way Kant envisioned. But as the moralists in society, very much like Mrs. Prüzelius, nevertheless insist on imposing their own values on others, they are not only willing to sacrifice the individual, but also the diversity and pluralism of society. As Nietzsche expresses it in *The Will to Power*: “[I]nstead of discovering the standard in the highest enhancement of life itself, in the problem of growth and exhaustion, ... [the moralists strive to] exclude all other forms of life.”⁶⁵

The moralists thus practice a reversed alchemy, Nietzsche argues, and this makes the most valuable individuals worthless. At the same time, the moralists appear as self-glorifying Pharisees, as they naively believe themselves to be living in accordance with the ideals they espouse. In reality, Nietzsche provocatively claims, they are merely disillusioned herd animals that easily succumb to their supposedly filthy inclinations. They thus appear as monkeys in relation to the ideals they exalt.

This universal morality can also be discerned in the naive Annika. When she, Tommy and Pippi are on the run from home and meet Konrad, a peddler that sells a magic gripping glue, Annika soon wants him to wash his very dirty ears. When Konrad innocently wonders why, Annika tries to find a good enough reason: “Well, cause I don’t want you to roam along the roads, all alone and dirty and – well, you know, alone!” Then Pippi laughs disarmingly and says: “Well, he doesn’t get any lonelier because he’s got dirty ears, does he?”

Just like Pippi in this sequence sees through Annika’s argument that Konrad should wash his ears, Nietzsche’s overhuman realizes the cavities and cracks of moral judgments. One must

⁶⁵ *The Will to Power*: Book 2, Critique of highest values, §354.

learn to “*look away from oneself*,”⁶⁶ as *Zarathustra* exclaims in the spirit of a relativistic Sophist.⁶⁷ Only then are you able to recognize that what is good for yourself is not necessarily good for everyone else. People who say yes to life, overhumans, do not dedicate their lives to limiting the opportunities of others. Instead, they create themselves on their own terms, and let others be in peace. Moreover, as Nietzsche, in a defense of pluralism, makes clear in *Human, All Too Human*, it is also important that we cease treating ourselves as “inflexible, invariable, single individuals”, as this would make us more inclined to recognize and appreciate the diversity of life forms in society: “[R]ather than making oneself uniform, we may find greater value for the enrichment of our knowledge by listening to the soft voice of different life situations.”⁶⁸

Individual imperatives

A second major criticism that Nietzsche directs towards morality, and which also shows how he imagines the overhuman, is that it often seems to be merely an unreflective habit. This is also confirmed by the fact that many moral philosophers – again from Aristotle to Kant – have associated the moral life with a close orientation to prevailing conventions. But Nietzsche argues that it cannot count as morality if you do things merely out of deep-rooted, unreflective habit. Instead, that means being fettered, rigid and highly inflexible. Thus, within the prevalent moral system, it is impossible to be both moral and autonomous, according to Nietzsche. Therefore, he also refers to overhumans as “immoral” individuals – immoral, but autonomous.

⁶⁶ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: Chapter 45, The wanderer.

⁶⁷ The Sophists have been both celebrated and criticized for their relativism. See, e.g., Kerferd, George (1981). *The Sophistic Movement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁶⁸ *Human, All Too Human*: Section nine, Man alone with himself, §618.

Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* contrasts the forthcoming overhuman with "the last human beings,"⁶⁹ a caricature of people who are so fearful of life that they are unable to strive for anything but safety and convenience, something they achieve by living completely conventionally. Under their crude morality, which is based on unreflective habit, any kind of originality gives rise to a bad conscience. Their morality is therefore a conservative force, which prevents the emergence of new, better habits. It makes them anxious, fearful and spineless, and thwarts all individual attempts to pursue new experiences, happiness and self-realization.

But the truly autonomous, the overhumans, have the courage to challenge conventions. They are free and independent, and are able to think and act differently from what would be expected based on their background, environment and position. Thus, overhumans need to operate on the basis of their very own categorical imperatives. This certainly explains why Pippi sleeps with her feet on the pillow, why she bakes ginger-snaps on the kitchen floor, and why she keeps her horse on the front porch. But it could never mean that Pippi, as an overhuman, would like to force other people to act exactly as she does. When overhumans create themselves, they create laws that apply to themselves only. "We want to be the poets of our life – first of all into the smallest, most everyday matters,"⁷⁰ as Nietzsche expresses himself in *The Gay Science*.

Unconventional, but good-hearted

It should now be clear that whereas strength of character to both Kantians and Christians is the ability to master supposedly dirty inclinations and passions, strength of character to Nietzsche's overhuman is instead having the courage to violate culturally inherited manners, routines and habits. Nobody can

⁶⁹ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: Zarathustra's prologue, §5.

⁷⁰ *The Gay Science*: Book 4, Sanctus Januarius, §299.

therefore doubt that Pippi then has to be characterized as an indisputable overhuman. This fact has often caused people to understand Pippi as an instigator of bad behavior among children. Indeed, Pippi's unconventional features also explain why Astrid Lindgren's first, even more provocative, manuscript was rejected in Sweden.⁷¹

We merely have to take a look at Pippi's full name in order to get an idea of how unconventional she is: Pippilotta Delicatessa Windowshade Curlymint Ephraimsdaughter Longstocking. But a better example of Pippi's unconventional character is her unperturbed confidence towards adult authorities. As we have already seen, she displays such an attitude towards the teacher, when she refuses to answer questions to which the teacher actually knows the answer. Another well-known example is the scene where Kling and Klang, the local police officers, come out to Villa Villekulla and announce that Pippi will be transferred to the Children's Home for Orphans. Pippi then shows, with linguistic cheekiness, that she already is in a Children's Home: "I'm a child," she says and points to herself. "And this is my home," she says and points to Villa Villekulla. "I think that makes it a Children's Home." After this, the well-known chase across the roof of Villa Villekulla starts. Undoubtedly, policemen are the very best thing Pippi knows, next to rhubarb pudding of course, but she still tries to escape. Kling and Klang do their best to capture her, but it all ends when the playfully evasive Pippi takes the policemen by their belts and carries them down the garden path.

But Pippi also violates conventions in a more positive spirit. For instance, she gives Tommy and Annika presents even at her own birthday, when she is the one who should get them. Moreover, when she arranges a big Christmas party for the local children,

⁷¹ See Lundqvist, Ulla (1979). *Århundradets barn: Fenomenet Pippi Långstrump och dess förutsättningar [The Child of the Century: The Phenomenon of Pippi Longstocking, and Its Premises]*. Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren.

she quite unconventionally hangs all the parcels with Christmas presents in a big tree next to Villa Villekulla, and then lets the children climb up and get them. One should also notice that when Pippi gives presents, she does it without expecting anything in return, sometimes even without revealing herself as giver, as when she lets Tommy find a notebook and Annika a coral necklace upon coming home from the Thing-searcher expedition. In this way, Pippi certainly lives up to the bestowing virtue that *Zarathustra* so tenderly exalts and nurtures: “Uncommon is the highest virtue, and unprofiting; beaming is it, and soft of luster: a bestowing virtue is the highest virtue.”⁷²

This bestowing virtue also becomes evident when Pippi gives a gold coin to Thunder-Karlsön and Bloom, even though they have just been trying to steal her suitcase, the one that is full of gold pieces. Furthermore, it is expressed in her Schopenhauerian care for animals.⁷³ Above, we have already witnessed this in relation to a flogged horse, a hungry shark and a dead little bird. But there is yet another example to be mentioned: Instead of trying to catch her house mouse in a mousetrap, Pippi gives it yummy cheese at Christmas – as well as its very own Christmas tree. Indeed, “the human being is the cruelest animal,”⁷⁴ as Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* argues, but an overhuman like Pippi does not put herself above other animals. Instead, she treats them with the same respect that Nietzsche defends in *The Gay Science*: “The animal has as much right as any human being.”⁷⁵

Ultimately, Pippi in a remarkable manner, shows that it is possible to be perceived as good-hearted even if one goes one’s own way and breaks established conventions, obligations and expectations. Thus, there is no necessary contradiction, as one might often imagine, between breaking conventions and

⁷² *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: Chapter 22, The bestowing virtue, §1.

⁷³ See, e.g., pp. 95-96 and 175-182 in Schopenhauer, Arthur (1840/1995). *On the Basis of Morality*. Indianapolis: Hackett.

⁷⁴ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: Chapter 57, The convalescent, §2.

⁷⁵ *The Gay Science*: Book 2, §77.

simultaneously appearing as a nice person. This is also something that Tommy and Annika's mother seems to have realized: "Pippi Longstocking may not have very good manners, but she has a kind heart."

A dancing star

Being unconventional is thus not about being able to commit atrocities or being vicious. That is also why the destructive nihilist is so contemptible for Nietzsche, the nihilist who, like Fyodor Dostoyevsky's Ivan Karamazov believes that everything is permissible when there is neither a judgmental God nor a definitive truth.⁷⁶ Being a free spirit does not mean that you should do exactly what would be gratifying in the moment. And it certainly does not mean that you are allowed to injure people in order to demonstrate that you stand above them, as some perverted Nietzsche interpreters, who probably never read him, have claimed.

On the contrary, insofar as destructive passions and instincts sail up within you, there are endless opportunities to purify and embellish them, as Nietzsche argues in a proto-Freudian manner.⁷⁷ As part of the argument, put forward in *Twilight of the Idols*, he also blames Christian morality for taking quite the opposite pathway, that is, for enforcing a life-denying castration of passions: "The Church ... never asks: 'How can one spiritualize, beautify, deify a desire?' – it has at all times laid the emphasis of its discipline on extirpation."⁷⁸ In contrast, Nietzsche argues that strong passions should be sublimated, transformed into something that society can admire or benefit from. Indeed, strong passions and a turbulent inner world might

⁷⁶ Dostoyevsky, Fyodor (1880/1992). *The Brothers Karamazov*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁷⁷ See, e.g., Freud, Sigmund (1929/1989). *Civilization and Its Discontents*. New York: Norton.

⁷⁸ *Twilight of the Idols*: Morality as anti-nature, § I.

even be a prerequisite for great deeds, as *Zarathustra* argues: “I tell you: one must still have chaos in one, to give birth to a dancing star.”⁷⁹

But what is a dancing star? It is *not* the fixed, material bodies that we see in the distant night sky. It is rather quite the reverse: It is something dynamic, something immaterial, something close to our skin. It could be anything that makes us transcend our current situation, anything that contributes to new orders, anything that brings about enjoyment. Nietzsche himself would perhaps emphasize the creation of new, life-affirming values – beyond good and evil – as the brightest dancing stars. But you could also settle for something quite earthly and everyday, as Pippi does: Invite your best friends for tea a beautiful summer afternoon, and then cry out “How lovely it is to be alive!”

Perhaps you have to become your own dancing star in order to become an overhuman. “What is love? What is creation? What is longing?”⁸⁰ the last human beings ask in *Zarathustra*, quite forgetful of what makes life worth living. But a dancing star *demand*s exactly that: Love, creation and longing. If you do not know how to begin, follow the directive that *Zarathustra* gets from his animals after lying isolated and ill for many days: “Step out of your cave: the world waits for you as a garden.”⁸¹

Exemplars

It should now be clear that Nietzsche’s overhuman is neither an Aryan Nazi, a thoroughly efficient careerist, nor Superman personified. Instead, the overhuman ideal is very much something desirable and achievable, something that can appeal to all of us, regardless of ideological preferences, something we may have already approached to a great extent.

⁷⁹ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: Zarathustra’s prologue, § 5.

⁸⁰ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: Zarathustra’s prologue, § 5.

⁸¹ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: Chapter 57, The convalescent, § 2.

Nietzsche himself mentions historical figures such as Jesus and Napoleon as specimens of overhumans,⁸² showing that he did not exclusively view the overhuman as a future phenomenon. In our era, there are plenty of individualities which could serve as examples of overhumans. Spontaneously, one easily comes to think of international celebrities such as Aung San Suu Kyi, Malala Yousafzai or the Dalai Lama. But more local, original talents could also be mentioned: Alain Robert, the French urban climber, Eddie Izzard, the British stand-up comedian, or Kristina Lugn, the Swedish poet and playwright, and the star of the Swedish Academy.

However, the label “overhuman” cannot be reserved for famous people. All those who create themselves with courage and joy, despite setbacks and the realization that one's own approach to life may never be conclusively justified or acknowledged, can be considered as overhumans. The conviction regarding the spread of overhumans, which Nietzsche shows in the preface to *Human, All Too Human*, has thus, already, largely been fulfilled: “That such free spirits can possibly exist, ... I, myself, can by no means doubt. I see them already *coming*, slowly, slowly.”⁸³

That Nietzsche himself was an overhuman, a premature birth, is particularly evident in the light of his immense influence on two of the 20th century's greatest scientific movements: Psychoanalysis (e.g., Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and Alfred Adler), which emerged early in the century, and poststructuralism (e.g., Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida), which emerged late in the century, and which is still very vital. There are few philosophers in history that have such a bright future as Nietzsche. The present century will see many new overhumans and Nietzscheans being born.

⁸² See *The Anti-Christ*: §32 and *Beyond Good and Evil*: Chapter 5, The natural history of morals, §199.

⁸³ *Human, All Too Human*: Preface, §2.

Become what *you* are

But it must be remembered that Nietzsche, in *Ecce Homo*, emphasizes that he does not want to establish any religion, that he does not want any devotees: “I *want* no ‘believers’; I think I am too malicious to believe in myself; I never speak to masses.”⁸⁴ Thus, even though Nietzsche, with his suggestive style, provides the reader with an inspiring sense of insight and thirst for life, he also raises a warning that you may become a mere imitator if you cling to him too much.

Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* makes the same point when he formulates his mission to himself: “I need ... companions, who will follow me because they want to follow themselves.”⁸⁵ He wants to lure people away from the herd, but does not wish them to become a new herd under his rule. He merely wants fellow-creators, fellow-reapers and fellow-rejoicers. In a similar way, Pippi searches for accompanying creators, reapers and rejoicers, and finds them in Tommy and Annika. She pulls them away from their safe, conventional, mind-numbing bourgeois home and offers them inspiring new adventures. For sure, we all know that neither Tommy nor Annika will ever become copies of Pippi, no matter how hard they try, but at least they are transformed into something more exciting than they were before meeting Pippi.

In conclusion, becoming an overhuman is thus not about copying someone else, whether it is Nietzsche, Zarathustra or Pippi Longstocking. Just as there has only been one Christian, the one who died on the cross,⁸⁶ Nietzsche, or any other overhuman, cannot, and should not, be scrupulously emulated. Nietzsche’s portrayal of the overhuman is therefore only intended as a liberating tool, but does not really provide any content – that, you will have to create on your own. The

⁸⁴ *Ecce Homo*: Why I am a destiny, §1.

⁸⁵ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: Zarathustra’s prologue, §9.

⁸⁶ See *The Anti-Christ*: §39.

imperative, expressed by *Zarathustra*, is short and clear: "Become what you are!"⁸⁷

Literature

Nietzsche put a lot of effort into the choice of titles for his works. Thus, they have often been given a poetic timbre that attracts the reader. Here is a chronological list of the titles mentioned in this essay: *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872); *The Philosopher* (1872); *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense* (1873); *Schopenhauer as Educator* (1874); *Human, All Too Human* (1878); *Assorted Opinions and Maxims* (1879); *The Wanderer and His Shadow* (1880); *Daybreak* (1881); *The Gay Science* (1882); *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883); *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886); *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887); *The Anti-Christ* (1888); *Twilight of the Idols* (1888); *Ecce Homo* (1888); *The Will to Power* (1883-88).

In the preface of *Ecce Homo*, written at the very end of his career, Nietzsche clarifies that *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is his personal favorite among his works: "Among my writings my *Zarathustra* stands to my mind by itself."⁸⁸ However, this book, possibly in competition with *The Birth of Tragedy*, is his most inaccessible one. For those who want to read Nietzsche in the original, it may therefore be wiser to begin with *Human, All Too Human*, *Daybreak* or *The Gay Science*, three books belonging to his magnificent intermediate period. These are, like many of his other works, written in aphoristic form. If you prefer to read more cohesive analyses, the essayistic *On the Genealogy of Morality* might be more appropriate. Finally, *The Will to Power*, published posthumously, must also be mentioned.

For those who do not wish to read Nietzsche in the original, there is an excellent book by Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins, *What*

⁸⁷ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: Chapter 61, The honey sacrifice.

⁸⁸ *Ecce Homo*: Preface, §4.

Nietzsche Really Said, largely written as popular science.⁸⁹ Another recommendable book is Julian Young's *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, a comprehensive biography that places Nietzsche's thoughts in the context of his time.⁹⁰ Many well-known scholars have also presented their very own readings of Nietzsche, including Karl Jaspers,⁹¹ Martin Heidegger,⁹² Gilles Deleuze,⁹³ Michel Foucault⁹⁴ and Jacques Derrida.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ Solomon, Robert & Higgins, Kathleen (2000). *What Nietzsche Really Said*. New York: Schocken Books.

⁹⁰ Young, Julian (2010). *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*. New York: Cambridge University Press

⁹¹ Jaspers, Karl (1936/1997). *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

⁹² Heidegger, Martin (1936-39/1979). *Nietzsche, Volume 1: The Will to Power as Art*. San Francisco: Harper & Row; Heidegger, Martin (1939-46/1984). *Nietzsche, Volume 2: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

⁹³ Deleuze, Gilles (1962/1983). *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. New York: Columbia University Press.

⁹⁴ Foucault, Michel (1971/1977). *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*. In D. Bouchard (Ed.), *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

⁹⁵ Derrida, Jacques (1978/1979). *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

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