Abhandlung

William Wood

Nietzsche on Reading Philosophers and Posthumous Friendship in *Beyond Good and Evil* 27–28

Abstract: This article presents a close reading of BGE 27 and 28, which concern how to read philosophical books and the kind of friendship such reading makes possible. In BGE 27, Nietzsche distinguishes three kinds of readers who have different paces of thought and life, comparable to rivers, frogs and tortoises. While he implies a hierarchy by saying some are "at best" comparable to frogs, he does not state explicitly which type is best. Most commentators assume "rivers" are ideal, but the article argues that Nietzsche is deliberately misleading; though he provokes this misinterpretation, he actually implies that "tortoises" are the best readers. Tortoise-like readers are often posthumous, reading authors who are already dead, but they enjoy a kind of friendship with the deceased unavailable to most contemporaries, who lack the right "nature." The transition from BGE 27 to 28 reflects the shift from "good friends" among the living to true friends among the dead. The article also explores the idea of posthumous friendship in Nietzsche more broadly and suggests that his ideal of friendship as "shared joy" (*Mitfreude*), rather than "compassion" or "shared suffering" (*Mitleid*), is best realized in posthumous friendship with philosophers, which takes the form almost exclusively of shared joy.

Keywords: Reading and writing, Literary style, Friendship, *Mitfreude*, Machiavelli

1. Introduction

Nietzsche often talks about how to read philosophers in general and how to read him in particular. Thus, in *Ecce Homo* (1888), he speaks of "a reader such as I deserve, who reads me as good old philologists read their Horace" (EH, Books 5).[1] In *On the Genealogy*

1 For Nietzsche's published books, I use the following translations, occasionally modified for accuracy: *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York 1969; *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, trans. Ronald Speirs, Cambridge 1999; *The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York 1967; *Daybreak*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Cambridge 1997; *Ecce Homo*, trans. Duncan Large, Oxford 2007; *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York 1974; *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York 1969; *Human, All-Too-Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Cambridge 1996; *Thus Spoke*

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of Morals (1887), he says that an aphorism is not understood until it has been subjected to "rumination" (GM, Preface 8). It must be chewed over as a cow chews over its cud. This claim seems to apply to other writers of aphorisms as well as to Nietzsche himself, but he gives an example of the art of "exegesis" (GM, Preface 8) which *he* demands from *his* readers in the third essay, where he follows an "aphorism" (the first section: GM III 1) with its detailed interpretation (the remaining 27: GM III 2–28). Zarathustra says: "He who writes in blood and aphorisms does not want to be read, he wants to be learned by heart. In the mountains the shortest route is from peak to peak, but for that one must have long legs. Aphorisms should be peaks, and those to whom they are spoken should be large and tall of stature" (Z I, Reading). In the preface to the second edition of *Daybreak* (1881), Nietzsche states that he wants to be "a teacher of slow reading" and that he writes "slowly" (D, Preface 5). There are also some interesting remarks on this subject in Nietzsche's notebooks, such as his claim that he does not write essays because such are for "asses and journal-readers" (Nachlass 1885, 37[5], KSA 11.579). In the same fragment, Nietzsche says that "between and behind short aphorisms" stand "chains of thought" which the reader must disinter.

Nietzsche's remarks about reading and writing differentiate him from most philosophers before him; it is an explicitly reflexive aspect of his writing which represents what is called his "modernist" sensibility. It is in this context in which one must understand the pair 27 and 28 in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886). These aphorisms clearly belong together; they both concern translation and the related themes of reading, writing and understanding. They each suggest that in order to translate a writer properly, one must understand him, and in order to understand him, one must think and live in a comparable manner. They suggest that Nietzsche's general remarks about reading, writing and understanding apply to *him* in particular, as well as having broader, general application.

Further, this pair also concerns posthumous friendship. This is a somewhat unusual theme; when we think of friendship, we do not usually think of posthumous friends; we may think of what relation we might have to our friends when they die, and what relation our friends might have to *us* when we die, but we do not usually think of friendship as something that might be *essentially* posthumous. It is well known that friendship was an important theme in ancient philosophy, even as it is somewhat marginal in modern philosophy.[2] Aristotle dedicated two books of his *Nicomachean Ethics* to friendship; Plato wrote a dialogue, the *Lysis*, about this theme; the question of the wise man's

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Zarathustra, trans. Adrian Del Caro, Cambridge 2006; and *Twilight of the Idols and The Antichrist*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, London 1990. For Nietzsche's letters and notebooks, translations are my own.

2 This is not to say that this theme is completely absent from major modern philosophical writers; e. g., Kant discusses friendship in his *Lectures on Ethics* (trans. Peter Heath, Cambridge 1997, 184–90) and *The Metaphysics of Morals* (trans. Mary Gregor, Cambridge 1991, 261–4) and Jacques Derrida devotes an entire book to *The Politics of Friendship* (trans. George Collins, London 2006). But it does not hold the rank it enjoys in ancient philosophy. This is in large part a consequence of the ancient emphasis on philosophy as a way of life, in contrast with the modern emphasis on philosophy as a form of inquiry.

friends was a central theme in Epicurus' reflections, and it has even been argued that making room for friendship compelled Epicurus to revise his principles, so important was it to him.[3] By contrast, modern philosophy often focuses on the conditions of moral action, understood, e. g., as "autonomous" and undetermined by inclination (Kant) or as contributing to the greatest good of the greatest number (utilitarianism); whether the philosopher has friends seems a secondary consideration, perhaps of great empirical importance, but of no strict philosophical consequence. However, when Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus and other ancient philosophers accord great importance to friendship, they appear to speak primarily about friendship with the living. The idea of posthumous friendship appears to be a rather idiosyncratic theme.

However, this idea plays a more important role in the history of philosophy than one might suppose. In a recent article, Helen de Cruz has shown that "friendship with the ancients" is an important theme in a variety of authors, such as Machiavelli.[4] It is a short step from imagining oneself enjoying a "parasocial" friendship, as de Cruz puts it, with those who are long dead to imagining the friendship one might enjoy with those who read one's books after one has died oneself. Joanne Faulkner and Willow Verkerk have argued that the establishment of a certain intimacy with his posthumous readership is an essential part of Nietzsche's art of writing,[5] while de Cruz points out that this technique is not unique to Nietzsche – the impression one might receive from Faulkner or Verkerk – but is present throughout the history of philosophy, often taking the form of implicitly claiming that one's future readers might enjoy a friendship with the author analogous to that which the author enjoys with the ancients. In fact, in a fascinating aphorism, Nietzsche suggests that anticipating the effect he will have on readers after he dies constitutes his principal enjoyment in *this* life:

> One reaches out for us but gets no hold of us. That is frightening. Or we enter through a closed door. Or after all lights have been extinguished. Or after we have died. The last is the trick of posthumous ones *par excellence* ("What did you think?" one of them once asked impatiently; "would we feel like enduring the estrangement, the cold and quiet of the grave around us – this whole subterranean, concealed, mute, undiscovered solitude that among us is called life but might just as well be called death – if we did not know what will become of us and that it is only after death that we shall enter our life and become alive – oh, very much alive! – we posthumous ones") (GS 365).

3 See Phillip Mitsis, *Epicurus' Ethical Theory: The Pleasures of Invulnerability*, Ithaca, NY 1988, 125–8.

4 Helen de Cruz, "Friendship with the Ancients," *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 11/1 (2025), 1–19.

5 Joanne Faulkner, *Dead Letters to Nietzsche, or, The Necromantic Art of Reading Philosophy*, Athens, OH 2010, and Willow Verkerk, "Is Friendship Possible with the Dead? On Love and Solidarity with Bataille and Nietzsche," *Journal of Friendship Studies* 8/1 (2024), 27–38. Verkerk shows how Bataille understood himself, not merely as a reader of Nietzsche, but also as his friend, and that Nietzsche deliberately sought out not just readers, but also friends.

Such anticipation belongs only to very few. The vast majority of people, even the vast majority of writers, cannot enjoy *this* life primarily through their anticipated effects on a posthumous readership. One must *know* that one has a reasonable chance of attaining immense and lasting fame through one's talents; even writers celebrated during their lifetimes, if they do not have exceptional literary skill, are likely to be forgotten soon after they are dead. However, posthumous friendship must be understood as an extension, albeit a strange and unusual one, of ordinary friendship; although they are very different, they are also closely related, as genus is to species.

In 1879, Nietzsche concludes the second volume of *Human, All-Too-Human* with an aphorism *Descent into Hades*, in which he claims that he sacrificed his own blood in order to speak with a number of figures, ancient and modern: "There have been four pairs who did not refuse themselves to me, the sacrificer: Epicurus and Montaigne, Goethe and Spinoza, Plato and Rousseau, Pascal and Schopenhauer" (HH I, VM 408). These figures are all traditionally regarded as philosophers except Goethe, although he also wrote theoretical works and might be regarded as an unusually philosophical poet or as a philosopher who chose poetry as his primary medium of expression. Nietzsche claims that the living "appear to me as shades" compared to these figures, who possess, not "eternal life," but rather an "eternal liveliness" in his estimation, even "after death," presumably to those who know how to *read* them properly.

Returning to BGE 27–28, in this essay, I argue that this pair is also concerned with posthumous friendship. I must explain, then, why for Nietzsche translation, understanding, reading and writing are connected to friendship in general and to posthumous friendship in particular. I will argue that for Nietzsche, true philosophical friends, as opposed to merely "good friends," are able to understand each other, and this is the basis of their friendship.[6] More precisely: philosophical friends understand each other *and those who are not philosophers*, while others fail to understand, not only philosophers, but also themselves. Philosophical friends communicate their understanding of human nature; non-philosophical friends are brought together by their mutual *misunderstanding* of human nature, which may take either friendly or inimical forms, but is in each case a misunderstanding. Nietzsche implies that philosophical writers are also philosophical readers, but philosophical readers are not necessarily philosophical writers. Philosophical writers, however, like Nietzsche himself, are comparable to gods who create literary worlds for others to inhabit and enjoy – others who may be able to understand such worlds, even if they cannot create them (philosophical readers), or who may live in them without understanding them at all (non-philosophical enthusiasts of philosophical writers). This is not to say that Nietzsche believes that philosophers are omniscient, or that philosophy is radically systematic in the sense in which Kant or Hegel believed. Indeed, for Nietzsche the reflexive acknowledgement of the *limits*

6 For an interesting discussion of Nietzsche's reflections on friendship in several of his books, see Robert C. Miner, "Nietzsche on Friendship," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 40 (2010), 47–69.

of philosophy is paradoxically *more philosophical* than the conviction that philosophy must be able to solve every question it is driven to pose, because it involves greater knowledge *of* these limits, rather than the false belief that one can go beyond them. Nevertheless, even when Nietzsche emphasizes, e. g., the instinctual character of the "greater part" of conscious thought (BGE 3) or the vast realm of the unconscious behind the superficial dimension of consciousness (GS 354), it is *conscious awareness* of these characteristics of thought which he aims to communicate.[7] The rare ability to incorporate this awareness makes one Nietzsche's friend.

BGE 27–28, then, concern not just translation, understanding, reading and writing, but the kind of friendship these activities make possible and the posthumous form it may take. BGE 27 refers to one's "good friends," and suggests they *fail* to understand us, inviting us to imagine what kind of friendship is possible beyond this kind of failure. BGE 28 does not refer explicitly to posthumous friendship, but it concerns Nietzsche's enjoyment of a variety of authors, all of whom died before he was born – the earliest is Aristophanes and the latest is Goethe, who died about twelve years before Nietzsche's birth. BGE 28 implies that most people do not understand these authors, but Nietzsche does. The aphorism concludes with what was found under Plato's "pillow" *after he died*. The emphasis is on understanding after death – and the peculiar relationship to the dead it makes possible. However, all the writers mentioned in BGE 28 are extremely famous and influential, even as the aphorism emphasizes how true understanding of their activity, and the life and thought both expressed and concealed by their literary works, is extremely rare. The duality between unusual understanding by one's true friends and broad influence on one's much wider circle of "good friends" is also present in BGE 27. This duality is a central theme of both aphorisms.

2. BGE 27: Three Paces of Thinking, Living and Writing

BGE 27 is fairly short:

> It is difficult to be understood, especially when one thinks and lives *gangasrotogati* among human beings who think and live differently – namely, *kurmagati*, or at best "according to the pace of the frog," *mandukagati* – am I doing everything in order to be difficult to understand myself? – and one should be grateful from the heart for the good will to some subtlety of interpretation. Concerning "the good friends," however, who are always too comfortable and believe that precisely as friends they have a right to be comfortable: one does well to allow them a play-space and stomping ground

7 In GM, Preface 1, Nietzsche famously says that "we men of knowledge" are "unknown to ourselves." But it is precisely knowledge *of* this limitation which Nietzsche means to communicate with this statement. Furthermore, "we men of knowledge" are not necessarily the same as "philosophers." Nietzsche describes *himself* as a philosopher in the next section (GM, Preface 2), emphatically using the first person singular for the first time, which contrasts with the plural used in the previous section.

> [*Spielraum und Tummelplatz*] for misunderstanding – then one can even laugh – or abandon them altogether, these good friends – and still laugh!

Nietzsche speaks of three paces of thinking and living, those of the river Ganges (fast), the tortoise (slow) and the frog (somewhere in between) and says that those who think and live like the Ganges find it "hard to be understood" by those who think and live differently. Nietzsche appears to compare himself and those like him to the Ganges.[8] This is how Walter Kaufmann takes BGE 27 in a note to his translation.[9] This is also how Laurence Lampert, Douglas Burnham, Christa Davis Acampora and Keith Ansell-Pearson take BGE 27 in their commentaries on the book.[10] Indeed, this is how readers usually take the aphorism. This would appear to be confirmed by the next aphorism, which seems to ascribe to writers Nietzsche likes a speedy tempo akin to the one which he ostensibly ascribes to himself in this aphorism.

I suggest that BGE 27 has been misunderstood by most readers – just as Nietzsche leads one to expect in this very aphorism! Most readers assume that the aphorism which suggests that Nietzsche's books have no easy takeaway message itself has an easy takeaway message, without appreciating the irony involved in this assumption. I suggest that rather than comparing himself to the speedy Ganges, Nietzsche in fact compares himself to the slow tortoise. I give four reasons for this hypothesis.

First, while Nietzsche's statement entails the existence of a three-place hierarchy involving the tortoise, the frog and the Ganges, and that the frog is in second place, it does not entail that the tortoise is at the bottom of the hierarchy and the Ganges at the top. Nietzsche qualifies the frog's way with "at best." One assumes at first that he means this qualification to relate the frog to the Ganges; the pace of life of one's fellow human beings is "at best" like the frog, i.e., faster than the tortoise but not nearly as fast as the Ganges, which would be the best. But logically what he says is compatible with the *tortoise* being atop the hierarchy and the Ganges at the bottom. The only thing which the qualification "at best" directly implies is that the frog is in the middle. This alone is not a reason for the tortoise to be at the top; however, it is notable that Nietzsche's formu-

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8 The question of whether the characteristics which make the human distinct from the "lower" animals require the postulation of metaphysical faculties such as free will or can be understood as complex developments of essentially the same (*wesensgleich*, as Nietzsche puts it in BGE 2) elements is important for Nietzsche's thought. See Vanessa Lemm, *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy: Culture, Politics and the Animality of the Human Being*, New York 2009. Furthermore, Zarathustra's relationship to "his" animals, such as the eagle and the serpent, is crucial for understanding *Zarathustra*. However, in BGE 27, the frog and the tortoise serve a primarily metaphorical function, alongside the river Ganges, as elements in the threefold hierarchy developed in this aphorism.

9 *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York 1969, 39, n. 9.

10 Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Task: An Interpretation of "Beyond Good and Evil"*, New Haven, CT 2001, 66–8; Douglas Burnham, *Reading Nietzsche: An Analysis of "Beyond Good and Evil"*, Stocksfield 2007, 48–9; and Christa Davis Acampora / Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Nietzsche's "Beyond Good and Evil": A Reader's Guide*, London 2011, 65 and 104.

lation leaves this possibility open, when he could have chosen to exclude it definitively, through an explicit statement to the contrary. In an explicitly reflexive aphorism that is about reading and writing, it is plausible that this is deliberate.

Secondly, if BGE 27 refers to the difficulty of understanding *the common*, this aphorism continues the theme of the preceding BGE 26, rather than reversing it abruptly. Nietzsche says that it is "difficult" to understand those who think and live like the Ganges. Accordingly, one might assume that it is easy to understand those who think and live like the tortoise or "at best" like the frog; the contrast would be between the difficulty of understanding the few who are fast and the ease of understanding the many who are slow. But BGE 26 deals explicitly with the *difficulty* of understanding "the animal, the base [or the common: *die Gemeinheit*], the 'rule'" in the human being. Nietzsche claims there that if one never feels the need to escape to a citadel in which one is "redeemed" from the common run of human beings, one is not an exception, but if one never feels "an even stronger instinct" which impels one to say to oneself someday, "the rule is more interesting than the exception, than I – the exception!" then one was not "made or predestined for knowledge." Someone who "remains quietly and proudly in his fortress" is not "a knower in the great and exceptional sense." Someone who is such a knower, however, will engage in the difficult and "occasionally disagreeable" task of understanding the common or base in others, which also involves understanding this ugly phenomenon in oneself. Accordingly, the lesson of BGE 26 is that the one made for knowledge, the philosopher, understands himself *because* he understands the common, while the common or base person *and* the exceptional or noble person, while otherwise quite different, understand neither themselves nor the philosopher. As Lampert puts it, while the noble are "exceptions," the philosopher is "the exception among exceptions."[11] If, then, BGE 27 asserts that the non-philosopher is comparable to the Ganges, and that it is indeed "difficult" to understand them, and (finally) that this difficult task is accomplished by the philosopher, who is therefore *not* comparable to the Ganges – but rather, presumably, either to the frog or to the tortoise – then this aphorism continues the preceding one. Given that the frog, as we have seen, is explicitly placed in the middle of the hierarchy, we have reason to think that the tortoise represents the "knower in the great and exceptional sense," such as Nietzsche himself.

Thirdly, while the next aphorism seems to ascribe to Machiavelli and those like him, such as Petronius, a speedy and thus Ganges-like pace of thought and life, a close reading suggests that things are not as they seem. We will examine BGE 28 more closely in the next section, but here let us note that Machiavelli is not distinguished by his Ganges-like mode of writing, but rather by the "contrast" or "contradiction" (*Gegensatz*) between his boisterous outer style, a kind of galloping *presto*, and the inner depth contained by *The Prince* (1532). The fact that Machiavelli "risks" a contradiction between external form and internal subject matter shows that Nietzsche does not believe that

11 Lampert, *Nietzsche's Task*, 71.

this happens without Machiavelli being aware of it. Rather, it is a deliberate stylistic choice. Further, to recognize this contradiction requires that one read Machiavelli's *Prince* slowly and carefully, not merely rush through its pages, enjoying the galloping pace of its prose. Nietzsche implies that Machiavelli tempts us to read him speedily, but rewards those who resist this temptation and read him slowly, just as he composed *The Prince* with patience and care. Machiavelli, then, is likened to the slow tortoise, not to the fast Ganges. While BGE 28 appears retroactively to justify placing the Ganges at the top of the hierarchy, really it supplies evidence for favoring the tortoise.

Fourthly, Nietzsche suggests elsewhere that his pace of thought and life, and his manner of writing books, is *lento*, like the tortoise, not *presto*, like the Ganges. In the preface to the second edition of *Daybreak*, Nietzsche not only describes himself as a slow writer who wants to be "a teacher of slow reading," whose habit is "no longer to write anything which does not reduce to despair every sort of human being who is 'in a hurry'" (D, Preface 5). Nietzsche also says: "A book like this, a problem like this, is in no hurry; we both, I just as much as my book, are friends of the *lento*." Not only is it reasonable to assume that the pace of a tortoise is more likely to be *lento* than that of the Ganges. Nietzsche makes this comparison explicit in a contemporaneous notebook entry, where he says that the pace of the Ganges is *presto*, that of the frog is *staccato* and that of the tortoise is *lento* (Nachlass 1886, 3[18], KSA 12.175). If, then, Nietzsche is a "friend of the *lento*," then he is a true friend – not merely a "good friend" – of tortoise-like readers. Insofar as books like *Beyond Good and Evil* are inherently difficult, it is partly because they involve an analysis of "the animal, the base [or common], 'the rule'" in the human being, which is in a certain sense the most difficult thing for us to gain distance on and thereby to understand.[12]

Taken together, these four reasons supply powerful evidence to posit that it is the tortoise who stands atop Nietzsche's hierarchy in BGE 27. Nietzsche is careful to retain this logical possibility with his formulation ("at best"), it continues the theme of the preceding aphorism and anticipates that of the next and accords with his claim that he is a "friend of the *lento*." So what exactly is Nietzsche's thought here? What do the frog and the Ganges represent?

In *The Gay Science* (1882–87), Nietzsche follows an aphorism on "the intellectual conscience" with an aphorism on "the noble and base" (GS 2–3). In the preceding BGE 26, Nietzsche also distinguishes the philosopher, "a favored child of knowledge," from both the base instance of the rule and the noble exception. However, while it is tempting to assume that the threefold distinction between the tortoise, the frog and the Ganges corresponds to the threefold distinction between the philosopher, the noble and the

12 "The great certainty of the natural sciences in comparison with psychology and the critique of the elements of consciousness – one might almost say, with the *unnatural* sciences – is due precisely to the fact that they choose for their object what is *strange*, while it is almost contradictory and even absurd to even *try to* choose for an object what is not-strange" (GS 355).

base, which can be found in many aphorisms in Nietzsche's books, including the preceding one, these distinctions do not map onto each other neatly. First, it would be strange for the frog to represent the noble and the Ganges the base. If anything, the opposite comparison would seem to be more apposite. Now, it is true that BGE 26 suggests that the noble is not simply "higher" than the base, but the relationship between them is complex. However, BGE 27 proposes a hierarchy, in which the frog *is* higher than the third term, which is normally taken to be the tortoise, but I have suggested is the Ganges. So, what is going on here?

Let us note that while the tortoise and the frog are both animals, the river Ganges is not conscious or sentient. The Ganges rushes without stopping to observe what is happening around it, while the tortoise and the frog both absorb information from the external world and respond to it. In the aphorism on the noble and base in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche suggests that most people rush through life, driven by their noble or base objectives, even as these objectives are quite different and they are pursued in different ways, the base person calculating the most efficient means to base objectives and the noble person driven toward noble objectives unreflectively, like an animal in mating season (GS 3). But it is only the person with an intellectual conscience, the philosopher like Nietzsche, who stops and thinks about the *value* of different ends (GS 2).

While the tortoise represents the philosopher, who stands still and examines phenomena carefully, the Ganges represents neither the noble nor the base alone, but rather most people, who rush through life driven by their noble or base objectives, moving from thing pursued to thing pursued, without stopping to think about their value. Further, while GS 3 and BGE 26 focus on the noble and base as pure tendencies, embodying them in particular individuals, and there are of course noble and base "types," these aphorisms also suggest that nobody is completely noble or altogether base, but that everyone incorporates some complex combination of noble and base elements, even if one element predominates. Noble people have "base" desires; even if a few, rare people are completely asexual,[13] even those gripped by the passion for love or justice still want to eat. The cynic of BGE 26 who "sees, seeks, and *wants* to see only hunger, sexual lust, and vanity as the real and only motives of human actions" is not consistent; his desire to see these phenomena as the only wellsprings of human actions is itself not explicable according to the terms of this very desire. This is a kind of desire to understand, even if misdirected, not an example of hunger, sexual lust or vanity.

Nietzsche implies that "the tortoise" accomplishes the difficult (but not impossible) task of understanding those who are like the Ganges, while the latter do not understand

13 They could be altogether different in other respects. Someone who has no sexual desires might be devoted to monastic, spiritual pursuits, or intellectual, philosophical pursuits, but they might also work as a supermarket cashier and spend all their free time watching reality television. Asexuality does not imply a noble way of life, nor does a noble way of life require asexuality; asexuality might help one focus on noble pursuits, but sublimating one's cruder sexual desires for the sake of artistic or intellectual achievement could itself be a noble pursuit.

either the tortoise or themselves. Nietzsche implies not that one must think and live like the Ganges in order to understand others who also think and live like the Ganges (a simple thought), but rather that one must think and live like a tortoise in order to understand *both* those who think and live like the Ganges *and* those who think and live like oneself (a far more complex thought).

But what about the frog? Let us recall that the aphorism is about different modes of understanding. Nietzsche contrasts three paces of thinking and living and implies, with his reference to the difficulty of understanding *him*, that they correspond to different ways of reading a book like *Beyond Good and Evil*. To represent different paces of thought and life, he uses three Sanskrit words, which must literally be translated word-for-word; he helps us by translating one of them. He thereby indicates playfully that a crude or political distinction between "the outside and the inside" (BGE 30)[14] *is* a crucial element of his art of writing – there are times when Nietzsche simply lies, forcefully expresses opinions he believes are questionable or false, encourages the crudest forms of misinterpretation, or overtly contradicts himself. One cannot ignore this dimension of Nietzsche's writing if one wants to understand him. To a limited but important extent, reading his books is comparable to the mechanical process of looking up a word in a dictionary – one must simply break through "the outside," the initially incomprehensible foreign word (or, in Nietzsche's case, the enigmatic literary maneuver), to reach "the inside," the meaning that the dictionary (or one of Nietzsche's books) contains.

However, only then does the truly interesting art of exegesis begin. For "the inside" of Nietzsche's books does not consist in a doctrine which could have been presented explicitly had he lacked a whimsical desire to make himself "difficult to understand." As Lampert says, "Nietzsche does not try to be hard to understand but simply is hard to understand."[15] Nietzsche uses various enigmatic literary stratagems, but he feels justified in doing so because he is not simply playing a game with his readers. Walter Kaufmann mistranslates Nietzsche's *question* about himself as if it were a simple *assertion* that he is trying to be "difficult to understand," replacing the question mark in the original with an exclamation mark in his translation.[16] Rather, "the inside" consists of Nietzsche's psychology,[17] which *could not be presented* in a straightforward manner that is easy to understand and to absorb.

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14 In BGE 30, Nietzsche says that "the difference between the exoteric and esoteric" consists "not so much" in that between "the outside and inside" and as in that in between "the lower and higher," in other words, it *also* consists in the former, even if not as fundamentally as in the latter. Thus, Faulkner is wrong to claim that for Nietzsche, the distinction between the outside and the inside does not apply *at all* to esotericism, even as she claims that (contra Nietzsche, she believes) it can be so applied. See Faulkner, *Dead Letters to Nietzsche*, 85–6.

15 Lampert, *Nietzsche's Task*, 67.

16 *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, 39.

17 In the nearby BGE 23, Nietzsche describes psychology as "the queen of the sciences."

Nietzsche writes in a way that often gives the impression of a passionate lack of concern with details and thereby encourages fast reading. To approach him in the way we tend to approach, say, Aristotle, Leibniz or Kant, weighing every choice of word and its place in a developing argument, seems to many readers to be missing the point. Anybody who has presented a careful reading of a Nietzschean argument to a group of non-specialist professors of philosophy knows this kind of reaction from their own experience. Readers tend to assume that careful attention to the logical implications of Nietzsche's prose is inappropriate. As Robert Pippin writes: "Given the great passion and energy of Nietzsche's polemical writing, his readers are often tempted to race through passages, as if that passion requires, to do it justice, such speed."[18] Many readers are primed to regard any contrast between faster and slower reading made by Nietzsche as necessarily favorable to the former.

However, Pippin goes on to add the qualification: "But much of what is actually said is, and is meant to be, puzzling, and that puzzlement, properly attended to, slows one down."[19] As we have seen, there is good reason to suppose that Nietzsche compares himself to the tortoise, not to the Ganges, and that he means thereby to indicate that his books are carefully written, represent a careful posture toward the world around him and can be understood only if they are read carefully even as, paradoxically, they provoke one to read them speedily. One reason why Nietzsche's style is characterized by this duality is that he wants to reproduce or imitate the challenge of philosophical thinking, which compels one to slow down in a manner necessary for understanding the world, even as it encourages us to be swept up in various noble and base objectives which *prevent* us from understanding it.[20]

The threefold hierarchy in BGE 27 represents three different ways of reading a book like *Beyond Good and Evil*. The tortoise-like reader is the philosophical reader, who may or may not be able to *write* a book like *Beyond Good and Evil*, but can understand it. The Ganges-like reader is the altogether unphilosophical reader, whether noble or base, who is completely unable to understand it. The connections between the aphorisms are blurred or obliterated by this reader, who is therefore comparable to a "river," characterized by a lack of consciousness and an uninterrupted, unidirectional stream. But what about those who read Nietzsche's books "according to the pace of the frog"? These are the readers who hop from aphorism to aphorism like a frog, reading his books more carefully than the impassioned "Nietzscheans" (or "anti-Nietzscheans") who are merely carried away by the force of his rhetoric, and trying but largely failing to understand

18 Robert B. Pippin, "Nietzsche's Masks: Philosophy and Religion in *Beyond Good and Evil*," in Paul S. Loeb / Matthew Meyer (eds.), *Nietzsche's Metaphilosophy: The Nature, Method, and Ends of Philosophy*, Cambridge 2019, 106–23: 109.

19 Pippin, "Nietzsche's Masks," 109.

20 Maudemarie Clark and David Dudrick argue that one reason behind Nietzsche's oblique and frequently difficult style is the pedagogical purpose of teaching the reader how to think. See Maudemarie Clark / David Dudrick, *The Soul of Nietzsche's "Beyond Good and Evil"*, Cambridge 2012, 245–57.

the hidden "chains of thought" which connect them as rigorously as the propositions in Spinoza's *Ethics* (1677).[21] And surely we must admit that most of the time we "friends of Nietzsche" are comparable to frogs when we read his "indiscreet" yet infuriatingly "taciturn" books, to apply to Nietzsche himself the paradoxical combination he applied to the Abbé Galiani in BGE 26,[22] even with the heartiest "good will to some subtlety of interpretation." Nietzsche's anticipation of this kind of frog-like "good friend" can be seen in his claim in BGE 246 that the art of writing involves the proper use of *staccato*, and his reference here to "two masters" of German prose, at least one of which must be Nietzsche himself. While Nietzsche employs aphorisms, and the reference to the hopping frog contains a humorous reference to this literary technique, his point is broader and does not apply only to aphoristic writers, but to any writer who employs a comparable technique of indirection and pedagogically conscious ambiguity, "masks and refinement," as he puts it in BGE 25. For example, Nietzsche's point would apply also to Plato's use of the dialogue form. The broader point is that only the slow reader can see the hidden connections between different parts of a truly philosophical book, e. g., Machiavelli's *The Prince*, which is mentioned in the next aphorism.

Nietzsche is nevertheless "grateful" to us from his very "heart" for trying to understand him, and he allows us plenty of space to "play" around in his books as in our own "stomping ground" (what Nietzsche scholar or enthusiast doesn't regard Nietzsche's corpus as his own private "stomping ground"?), creating a beautiful artificial world in which we can "live," even as we are scarcely able to understand it. But Nietzsche also "laughs" at our incapacity to understand him fully and turns away in the next aphorism to share some time with his real friends, the great thinkers of the past, such as Aristophanes, Machiavelli, and Lessing.

Lampert raises this question in relation to Nietzsche's suggestion that one may abandon one's "good friends": "Is this directed at Rohde and Lou and Rée and Overbeck, warning them not to presume special access to the writings through access to the writer?"[23] Lampert cites a passage in which Nietzsche claims: "The worst readers of aphorisms are their author's friends if they are intent upon guessing back from the general to the particular instance to which the aphorism owes its origin, for with this pot-peeking they reduce the whole effort of the author to nothing" (HH II, VM 129).[24] However,

21 In a letter to Georg Brandes from January 8, 1888, Nietzsche claims that *Beyond Good and Evil* represents "the long logic of an entirely determinate philosophical sensibility" and "not some confusion of a hundred varied paradoxes and heterodoxies" (no. 974, KSB 8.228).

22 Andreas Urs Sommer claims that while the cynics of BGE 26 adopted a direct form of expression which is straightforward and easy to understand, Nietzsche by contrast shows in BGE 27 that he will be difficult to understand. See Andreas Urs Sommer, *Kommentar zu Nietzsches "Jenseits von Gut und Böse"*, Berlin 2016, 235. But Galiani is said to be a cynic who combines indiscreetness with taciturnity; this combination is hardly a straightforward mode of expression which is easy to understand!

23 Lampert, *Nietzsche's Task*, 67.

24 Cited in Lampert, *Nietzsche's Task*, 67, n. 7.

as Lampert appropriately says: "This warning must have a wider range too and include those made good friends of the writer by the lure of his writings: we're deluded if we suppose that affinity for the writer gives us easy access to the writings."[25] Someone like Nietzsche may have closer "friends" among the dead and not-yet-born than among the living, share a more real intimacy with those whose books he reads and with those whom he anticipates will read him than with his "good friends" in the present – or his merely "good friends" among his future readers, people like you and me.

In its abrupt reference to "the good friends," BGE 27 suggests that there is a close connection between understanding, especially *how to read books*, and friendship. If the interpretation suggested here is correct, Nietzsche implies that the philosopher's friendship necessarily bifurcates into friendship with those who are and are not capable of understanding him. BGE 27 proposes a threefold (Ganges-like, tortoise-like and frog-like paces of life), while BGE 28 proposes a twofold distinction (those who are or are not like Aristophanes, Plato, Petronius, Machiavelli and Lessing). But BGE 27 anticipates the streamlining undertaken in BGE 28 by concluding with the suggestion that the philosopher "get rid of" (*abschaffen*) his "good friends," which is exactly what Nietzsche does in the next aphorism.

Finally, I do not mean to imply that the usual interpretation of BGE 27 as favoring the Ganges over the tortoise is merely accidental or (still less) a sign of Nietzsche's incompetence, his failure to communicate properly. Rather, Nietzsche deliberately provokes this misunderstanding. Why does he do this? I suggest that, as is appropriate for an aphorism concerning reading, writing and understanding, Nietzsche gives us a lesson in how he wants to be read. It is through *resistance* to the obvious way of reading this aphorism that one comes to appreciate what a dense, complex and difficult writer he is and how, in order to learn from him properly, one must resist the kind of speedy reading his rhetoric paradoxically also encourages.

3. BGE 28 on Translating Free-Spirited Writers

BGE 28 is much longer than BGE 27. Nietzsche begins with the theme of translation: "What allows itself to be translated most badly from one language to another is the tempo of its style, which has its basis in the character of the race, or to speak more physiologically, in the average *tempo* of its 'metabolism.'" Nietzsche appears to be speaking somewhat capriciously about translation, a theme with only a loose (albeit unmistak-

25 Lampert, *Nietzsche's Task*, 67. Werner Stegmaier takes the "good friends" mentioned in this aphorism to refer to *all* readers of Nietzsche's books, but Nietzsche distinguishes *three* ways of reading in BGE 27 and goes on in BGE 28 to talk about a variety of "exceptions," which implies a contrast with a "rule." See Werner Stegmaier, "After Montinari: On Nietzsche Philology," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 38 (2009), 5–19: 9.

able) connection, it seems, with the preceding aphorism. BGE 28 is linked with BGE 27 through the use of Sanskrit in the latter, a non-European language with which Nietzsche had only an extremely limited familiarity, but which he used to illustrate the point that his books are difficult to understand, as the Sanskrit language will be to the European reader. However, if we examine BGE 28 slowly, we discover that it is more closely connected with BGE 27 than appears to be the case.

BGE 28 is often anthologized in translation studies readers, but Nietzsche himself was not particularly interested in the problem of translation. As Duncan Large points out, although Nietzsche was an excellent classical philologist, who was used to translating ancient Greek and Latin into contemporary German, his knowledge of modern languages was spotty and weak. The German word for "translate," *übersetzen*, appears only sixty-four times in his writings. Large notes: "Of those sixty-four occurrences, the majority (forty-two) have nothing to do with what one might call translation 'proper,' interlinguistic translation, but are occasions where Nietzsche uses the term in a transferred sense."[26] Large notes that the most famous instance occurs in BGE 230, where Nietzsche speaks of "translating" the human being back into nature as the "insane task" which he has made his own.[27]

However, in BGE 28, Nietzsche makes it clear that his interest in translation is a window onto his deeper interest in "the character of the race" or "the average *tempo* of its 'metabolism.'" We assume there is a connection with the different paces of thought and life mentioned in BGE 27. However, while Nietzsche there suggested that there are three human types, one of which (seemingly the Ganges, but I have argued the tortoise) is far superior to the other two, in BGE 28, there are only two different human types implied – philosophers or free spirits like Aristophanes, Petronius, Machiavelli and Lessing and everybody else, who are incapable of "translating" them adequately.

Nietzsche says that some "honestly meant translations" are "involuntary vulgarizations" of the original, and thereby "almost falsifications," because there is a radical difference between the "metabolism" of the translator and that of the original author. Nietzsche even says that some "races" are incapable of "free-spirited thought," and thus presumably of philosophy itself, because of the *tempo* of their metabolism, which is reflected in the language they speak. Yet Nietzsche's example is not, as one would expect from a nineteenth century racist like Arthur de Gobineau, say, the Oriental or the African race, but the German race:

> The German is almost incapable of *presto* in his language; thus, as may reasonably be inferred, also of many of the most delectable and audacious nuances of free, free-spirited thought. And just as the buffoon and the satyr are foreign to him in body and conscience, so Aristophanes and Petronius are untranslatable for him (BGE 28).

26 Duncan Large, "Nietzsche and/in/on Translation," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 43/1 (2012), 57–67: 60–1.
27 For a discussion of BGE 229, see Christopher Janaway, "Why Naturalism? Translating *Homo Natura* Back into Nietzsche's Text," *The Monist* 107/4 (2024), 307–21.

Nietzsche is being playful; he puts "metabolism" in scare quotes, qualifies his claim with "almost," and goes on to cite an exception to this rule: "Lessing is an exception." What made Lessing an exception? His singular personal nature, more precisely his "actor-nature," "which understood much and understood how to do much." What made Lessing an exception to the German "nature" was Lessing's own personal nature! We learn that philosophers are actors – they have a reflective distance from the socially recognized roles they inhabit which affects how they write and is rooted, not in their culture or race, but in their personal singularity. Nietzsche then asks the question of whether Machiavelli's style, which combines two things which seem not to go together ("long thoughts" and a galloping style), could be "imitated" in the German language, "even in the prose" of an exception such as Lessing. Nietzsche mentions Machiavelli's *Il Principe* by its Italian title, although as Thomas Brobjer points out,[28] he almost certainly read it in French translation:

> How could the German language, even in the prose of a Lessing, imitate the *tempo* of Machiavelli, who in his *Principe* lets us breathe the dry, fine air of Florence and cannot help but present the most serious subject matter [*die ernsteste Angelegenheit*] in a boisterous *allegrissimo*, perhaps not without a malicious artist's sense of the contrast [*Gegensatz*] he risks – thoughts which are long, difficult, hard, dangerous, and the *tempo* of the gallop and the very best, most mischievous temper? (BGE 28)

As I noted in the previous section, Machiavelli's peculiarity consists in the *contrast* between "the *tempo* of the gallop," "a boisterous *allegrissimo*," of his rhetorical style and the "long," "difficult," and "dangerous" thoughts he presents. They are accessible only to the reader who slows down and undertakes the difficult but enjoyable burden of working through them, not the reader who enjoys the more superficial pleasure of getting carried away by the gallop of Machiavelli's prose and his provocative apothegms, rushing from page to page with the speed of a fast-flowing river. Furthermore, Nietzsche does not quite say that such a contrast cannot be presented in the German language. Rather, he raises the *question* whether it can be presented in this language, in an example of galloping prose that seems to answer this question by giving an example of what the question suggests might be impossible. Nietzsche's own prose is characterized not by a boisterous *tempo* which reflects a thoughtless character, but by a contrast between the boisterous *tempo* of the prose and the depth of thought it contains, comparable to the one he ascribes to Machiavelli. This depth is accessible, Nietzsche tells us, only to the slow reader. His books "drive to despair" the type of person who is "in a hurry" (D, Preface 5).

However, to add to the complexity we have come to expect from Nietzsche, everything I have just said must be qualified by the sense in which the philosopher *is* comparable to the fast-flowing Ganges. It is precisely the unique combination of appar-

28 Thomas H. Brobjer, *Nietzsche's Philosophical Context: An Intellectual Biography*, Urbana, IL 2008, 104.

ent opposites, such as gravity and levity, slowness and speed, "taciturnity" and "indiscretion," characteristic of the philosopher which those who do not think or live in a philosophical way find difficult to grasp: "That genuinely philosophical co-presence of a bold, exuberant spirituality which runs *presto* and a dialectical severity and necessity which takes no false step is unknown to most thinkers and scholars from their own experience" (BGE 213). The reference to "two masters" of German prose at the end of BGE 246, one "whose words drop hesitantly and coldly, as from the ceiling of a damp cave" and "another who handles his language like a flexible rapier," which seems at first to be a reference to Heine and Nietzsche, is perhaps *also* a double reference to Nietzsche himself, i.e., to different *aspects* of his literary style. The contrast Machiavelli "risks" between the brisk *tempo* of his rhetoric and the gravity of his thought, which Nietzsche imitates in his own use of the German language, reflects both the contradiction between "the outside and the inside," accessible to the careless and slow readers respectively, and the contrast between "the lower and the higher," insofar as such a style manifests the combination of seriousness and play characteristic of the highest perspective: "He who climbs the highest mountains laughs at all tragic plays and tragic seriousness [*Trauer-Spiele und Trauer-Ernste*]" (Z I, Reading). Thus, while the initial impression of BGE 27, which seems to favor the Ganges over the tortoise, is undercut by the considerations that indicate Nietzsche favors the tortoise over the Ganges, this new evaluation is further qualified by his implicit suggestion that, ultimately, a complexity which allows for both speeds is necessary for a free-spirited way of thinking and living.

The serious point behind Nietzsche's nasty joke about the German race as incapable of translating free-thinking authors is that the difference between those endowed with the right kind of nature for such a task and those who are not is more fundamental than any differences among races, languages and historical epochs, even between antiquity and modernity, as indicated by the fact that he uses both ancient and modern writers as examples (Machiavelli straddles the boundary between the medieval and modern periods). I suggest that the "involuntary vulgarizations" to which Nietzsche refers are not attempts to translate, say, a Greek or Latin book into, say, German or English, which inevitably fail due to the spiritually constipated "metabolism" of Germanic over against Mediterranean "races." Nietzsche's own books would constitute counter-examples, as would English books by, say, Laurence Sterne or Francis Bacon, if Nietzsche's remarks on these authors are to be taken seriously.[29] Rather, they refer to attempts of the unphilosophical reader to "translate" the knower's speech into thought, which however earnestly intended will invariably result in an "involuntary vulgarization" of the knower's highest insights: "Nowadays all the world talks of things of which it cannot have any experience, and this is most true, and in the worst way, concerning philosophers and philosophical states: only the fewest know them, are permitted to know them, and all popular opinions about them are false" (BGE 213). Thus, when Nietzsche says that Aris-

29 See HH II, VM 113 (on Sterne) and EH, Clever 4 (on Bacon).

tophanes is untranslatable for the German, what he really means is that Aristophanes' deepest thoughts are inaccessible to most of us – a claim to which we can readily give our assent. However, this limitation may also have implications for the actual practice of translation, as we have seen with Walter Kaufmann's mistranslation of BGE 27, for example, replacing a question mark with an exclamation mark to better capture the meaning of the aphorism as *he* understands (or misunderstands) it.

Nietzsche says that it was "not for nothing" that Lessing was "the translator of Bayle" and that he "liked to flee" to "the vicinity" of Diderot and Voltaire and "still more" to "flee among" – or "conceal himself beneath," as *flüchtete unter* could also be translated – the Roman "writers of comedies" (BGE 28). Then he adds, "Lessing also loved free-spiritedness in its *tempo*, the escape from Germany." Nietzsche virtually identifies free-spiritedness with "the escape from Germany." The surface suggestion is that Lessing loved to escape from Germany because he loved free-spiritedness and Germans are metabolically incapable of freedom of thought due to their constipated physiology. But we have seen that this is a nasty joke. Furthermore, why did Lessing escape to "the vicinity" (or as Kaufmann translates *die Nähe*, "the neighborhood") of Diderot and Voltaire, as Nietzsche carefully says? (By contrast, he claims that Plato enjoyed Aristophanes *himself*; he had "an Aristophanes" under his pillow.) Was it to enjoy the company of Diderot and Voltaire? But in the immediately preceding aphorism, Nietzsche emphasized that Voltaire was not a deep thinker, and he will emphasize this still more strongly in BGE 35: "Oh Voltaire! Oh humanity! Oh stupidity!" The dedication to Voltaire in the first edition of *Human, All-Too-Human* in 1878 was removed by Nietzsche for the second edition in 1886. Diderot and Voltaire were the archetypical "free thinkers" in the modern Enlightenment sense which Nietzsche contrasts with "free, *very* free spirits" such as himself in the final aphorism of this part of *Beyond Good and Evil*: "We 'free spirits' [...] are something other than '*libres-penseurs*,' '*liberi pensatori*,' '*Freidenker*' and whatever else all these goodly advocates of 'modern ideas' like to call themselves" (BGE 44).

Nietzsche's claim that Lessing loved "free-spiritedness" and "the escape from Germany" to France or Paris, however imaginary, seeming virtually to identify these two things or at least to suggest that one follows ineluctably from the other, finds its parallel in his claim that Machiavelli "in his *Principe* lets us breathe the dry, fine air of Florence" and "cannot help but present the most serious subject matter in a boisterous *allegrissimo*," an Italian phrase that literally means "extremely happy" (BGE 28). The hasty reader who is carried along by Nietzsche's galloping rhetoric will get the sense that Machiavelli's allowing us to "escape" to Renaissance Florence when we read *The Prince* is a part of his presenting the deepest, most difficult thoughts in a mischievously boisterous *tempo*, as if such a combination were characteristic of "the dry, fine air" of Florence itself. But did Nietzsche believe that the average Florentine or Italian of the Renaissance epoch possess the free-spirited combination of seriousness and play which constitutes "the very best, most mischievous temper"? Was the average Florentine or Italian of Machiavelli's day "extremely happy," as Nietzsche says implicitly of Machiavelli himself? Rather, Nietzsche indicates that Machiavelli was just as much of

an "exception" among the Italians as Lessing and Nietzsche himself were among the Germans.

BGE 28 is not primarily concerned with different "races" or "cultures" and how free-spirited they may or may not be. Nietzsche was neither a Gobineau nor a Burckhardt. Rather, it is about the unique form of friendship enjoyed by "philosophers and 'free spirits'" (GS 343) as they communicate across the centuries. BGE 27 and 28 suggest that "translation" is indeed possible – from speech into thought and from one language or epoch into another. Let us note the short, cryptic aphorism in which Nietzsche says that neither the worst *nor the best* in a book is "untranslatable" (HH I 184). What one needs, however, to be capable of translating "the best" in a book is a careful, tortoise-like way of thinking, as BGE 27 implies, which is an unpredictable gift of nature, as BGE 28 confirms.

While the dialogue Nietzsche has with "his kind" in the past and future will in a literal sense be one-sided (his friends in the past can't reply to his questions, while his friends in the future can't hear them yet), if he has learned to read and write in a free-spirited way, there will be an important, albeit metaphorical, sense in which it is a real dialogue in both directions. The model for such trans-historical conversations is the Platonic dialogue, which was inspired by actual conversations with Socrates. Plato's founding of an enduring tradition ensured that all trans-historical conversations between philosophers would in a way be conversations with Socrates, even when they are explicitly directed *against* Socrates, as Nietzsche's writings often are. The early Nietzsche acknowledges this when he writes, in an 1875 fragment: "Socrates is so close to me that I am almost always fighting with him" (Nachlass 1875, 6[3], KSA 8.97). In BGE 28, Nietzsche acknowledges this when he says that "the buffoon and the satyr" are foreign to the German "in body and conscience." The idea that a buffoon or a satyr would have a distinctive "conscience" is startlingly odd – unless Nietzsche has in mind the intellectual conscience of a Socrates (GS 2).

BGE 28, then, continues a train of thought about reading philosophers which was started in BGE 27 by giving examples of tortoise-like writers, who are like Nietzsche himself – Aristophanes, Plato, Petronius, Machiavelli, Bayle and Lessing. (Nietzsche mentions "Goethe's prose" but not Goethe himself, reminding us that even if how one writes *can* express how one lives, Goethe's writings remain one thing, even as Goethe is another; there can also be a disparity between how one thinks and lives and what one is able to put into writing.) Nietzsche suggests that all these people are "tortoises," whom "frogs" and "rivers" cannot "translate" adequately, i.e., they cannot understand their free-spirited ways of thinking.

In reading BGE 28, one must keep in mind Nietzsche's claim that some are born posthumously (A, Foreword), i.e., through the dissemination of their writings. The final sentence mentions Plato's "deathbed," under the "pillow" of which was found, not "a Bible" or anything comparably mystical, "Egyptian," "Pythagorean" or "Platonic," as one might expect given the influence of Plato's metaphysical doctrines on the emergence of Christianity, but rather "an Aristophanes," presumably a volume of his writ-

ings.[30] Nietzsche uses this anecdote[31] as a metaphor for what reveals itself to the reader if one reads Plato's dialogues carefully: "How could even a Plato have endured life – a Greek life, to which he said 'no' – without an Aristophanes!"[32] Nietzsche's point is not that even an ascetically-inclined thinker like Plato, who repudiated the luxuriant Hellenic world around him (in fact, Nietzsche speaks here with uncharacteristic disgust of the pestiferous "swamps" of the "ancient world"), needed comic relief from time to time by enjoying the lewd humor of a bawdy playwright, like a monk with a stash of pornography hidden under his bed. Rather, Nietzsche's point is that all philosophers in one sense say "no" to the invariably common, vulgar world which surrounds them, whatever epoch they might find themselves in – one might think of Jorge Luis Borges' remark about Juan Crisóstomo Lafinur, "like all men, he was given bad times in which to live"[33] – but they still need friendship with other philosophers, even the great Plato, whom Nietzsche says possessed more "strength" (*Kraft*) than any other philosopher in history (BGE 191). Plato was fortunate enough to know Aristophanes and Socrates personally, whereas we know them only through books.[34]

However, the theme of trans-historical friendship does not exhaust this very rich aphorism. It is also concerned with the closely related question of historical diagnosis or what Nietzsche calls "the historical sense." It is no accident that Lessing not only "translated" Bayle, but in his imagination also "fled to the vicinity" of Paris, or that Machiavelli not only presents us with "the most serious subject matter" in a highly artistic fashion, but also "lets us breathe" the air of Florence. Similarly, *Beyond Good and Evil* is both a work of philosophy and a "*critique of modernity*" (EH, Beyond 2). As such a critique, *Beyond Good and Evil* must reproduce what it criticizes. Nietzsche suggests

30 However, Nietzsche does not say "a volume of Aristophanes," as Walter Kaufmann translates this, but "an Aristophanes" (*einen Aristophanes*). It is natural to take this statement as referring to a book, as when one says, "you know your Shakespeare well!" or "I have just bought a new Cervantes." Also, Nietzsche has just said that no "Bible" was found under Plato's pillow after he died. But given how carefully written *Beyond Good and Evil* is – and the fact that this pair of aphorisms deals with careful writing – this ambiguity may be deliberate; Nietzsche could be implying, as Leo Strauss would later argue, that Aristophanes is Plato's beloved and that this can be seen from a close reading of the *Symposium*. See Leo Strauss, *On Plato's Symposium*, Chicago, IL 2001, 254.

31 The anecdote is from Olympiodorus the Younger, *Vita Platonis* 2:22–7. Nietzsche could have discovered it in a variety of sources and may already have known about it in Schulpforta. See Sommer, *Kommentar zu Nietzsches "Jenseits von Gut und Böse"*, 242.

32 Leo Strauss notes that large parts of Plato's *Republic* closely resemble Aristophanes' *Assembly of Women*: "Plato's *Republic* […] is manifestly akin to Aristophanes' *Assembly of Women*." Strauss also notes allusions to the *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Lysistrata*. See Leo Strauss, *The City and Man*, Chicago, IL 1964, 61.

33 Jorge Luis Borges, "A New Refutation of Time," trans. James E. Irby, in Donald A. Yates / James E. Irby (eds.), *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, New York 1964, 217–34: 218.

34 Of course, Socrates did not write, but Aristophanes, Plato and Xenophon knew him personally and wrote about him. In a note from 1879, Nietzsche describes, not a tragedy by Aeschylus or Sophocles, nor Thucydides' history, nor even Plato's *Symposium*, but Xenophon's *Memorabilia* as "the most attractive book in Greek literature" (Nachlass 1879, 41[2], KSA 8.584).

that a diagnostic task was not introduced into philosophy by Hegel – philosophers and free spirits at least as far back as Aristophanes recognized the need "to comprehend their own time in thought," not because this task exhausts philosophy, as Hegel claimed, but because one must comprehend one's culture if one wants to overcome it. Therefore, Nietzsche says that knowledge of Wagner, though repugnant to someone of primarily noble taste, is "indispensable" for the philosopher:

> What does a philosopher demand of himself first and last? To overcome his time in himself, to become "timeless." With what must he therefore engage in the hardest combat? With whatever marks him as the child of his time. Well, then! I am, no less than Wagner, a child of this time; that is, a decadent: but I comprehended this, I resisted it. The philosopher in me resisted (CW, Preface).

Philosophers are impelled to flee into "vicinities" or "neighborhoods" other than their own, in order to gain distance on their culture, whether they do this after the fashion of Herodotus, or only in thought, like Socrates, who remained in Athens for his entire life when he wasn't on military campaign, but was always eager to speak with interesting visitors who were passing through.

There is even a remarkable letter to his friend Heinrich Köselitz from March 13, 1881, where Nietzsche toys with the idea of spending a year or two in a Muslim country: "I want to live for a while among Muslims, in the places moreover where their faith is at its most devout; this way my eye and judgment for all things European will be sharpened" (no. 88, KSB 6.68). (This desire never materialized.) It is for this reason that a philosopher's corpus will often combine historical diagnosis with psychological analysis of the philosophical type, sometimes in the same book. Think of Plato's *Republic*, in many ways the model for *Beyond Good and Evil* – they both end with a kind of mystical poem or religious myth.[35] But the deeper ontological dimensions of this problem, and the points of epistemological tension which a radically historical thinker such as Hegel or Heidegger would exploit, are only hinted at in BGE 28, with the playful reference to physiology and the emphasis on the singular natures of Lessing the "actor" and Plato the "sphinx," which enabled *them* to overcome *their* times in themselves.

Perhaps the most famous description of friendship across the ages occurs in Machiavelli's letter to Francesco Vettori, to which Nietzsche perhaps alludes:

> I enter the ancient courts of ancient men, where, received by them lovingly [*amorevolmente*], I feed on the food that alone is mine and that I was born for. There I am not ashamed to speak with them and to ask them the reasons for their actions; and they in their humanity reply to me. And for the space of four hours I feel no boredom, I forget every pain, I do not fear poverty, death does not frighten me.[36]

35 Laurence D. Cooper argues in persuasive detail that the nine books of *Beyond Good and Evil* and its *Aftersong* are loosely modelled on the ten books of Plato's *Republic*. See Laurence D. Cooper, *Eros in Plato, Rousseau and Nietzsche: The Politics of Infinity*, University Park, PA 2008, 203–302.

36 Niccolo Machiavelli, Appendix to *The Prince*, trans. Harvey Mansfield, Chicago, IL 1998, 109–10.

Machiavelli's description of his "loving" reception by those who are long dead through the solitary activity of reading ends with an allusion to his own "being-toward-death," as Heidegger would call it, the distinctive character of the philosopher's interior self-relation and relation to the end of human life in the twofold sense of its purpose – "the food that alone is mine and that I was born for," i.e., knowledge – and its conclusion, its abrupt passing into nothingness: "Death does not frighten me." Nietzsche raises the same set of questions by his reference to Plato's "deathbed" at the end of BGE 28, which implicitly contrasts Plato's gentle, unforced death, while sleeping on a "pillow," with Socrates' martyrdom for philosophy. Nietzsche thereby prepares us for the themes of the next aphorism, BGE 29 – the free spirit's solitude and death (*zu Grunde gehen*) in the labyrinth of his own soul.

BGE 27 proposes that even if Nietzsche is extremely unusual, he is not perfectly unique. Rather, he is an example of a group, "tortoises," a very small group, to be sure, much smaller than "rivers" or even "frogs," but still a group of its own. BGE 27 suggests that only those who belong to this group are capable of understanding Nietzsche's thoughts and thus of true friendship with him – whether during his lifetime or, more likely, after his death. BGE 28 gives various examples of writers who belong to this small group and with whom Nietzsche enjoys a special intimacy, inaccessible to most of their readers, including most of their translators. Most of these "friends" did not know each other in their lifetimes, but Nietzsche refers to Aristophanes and Plato, who did know each other, and implicitly to Socrates, about whom they both wrote.[37] Nietzsche thereby reminds us that posthumous friendship is an extension of friendship with the living, even if those born with an "actor nature" or "sphinx nature" are more likely to find others like them among the dead than among the living.

4. Concluding Remarks

BGE 27 and 28 deal with how Nietzsche and those like him should be read. However, they are not merely a reflection on literary style independent of subject matter, but they show that subject matter itself affects style. BGE 27 and 28 also deal with friendship. Together, these aphorisms suggest that philosophical friendship is usually posthumous, even as there are exceptions to this rule, as Aristophanes, Socrates and Plato indicate. BGE 27 shows that the philosopher also constructs a world for his "good friends" to live in, even as they can only partly understand it. The tortoise reminds us of Nietzsche's praise of the *lento*, the Ganges reminds us that if his books are read

37 The view that the Socrates of Aristophanes' *Clouds* is merely a generic caricature of a sophist which tells us nothing about the actual Socrates is challenged by Leo Strauss, who argues that Aristophanes advances a subtle critique of Socrates as a profound thinker who is nonetheless insufficiently erotic, which anticipates Nietzsche's critique of Socrates. See Leo Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes*, Chicago, IL 1966.

speedily, as his rhetoric often encourages, his carefully constructed aphorisms collapse into a single, unidirectional flow which obliterates their complexity, and the hopping frog reminds us, comically, that even when one notices and attempts to understand Nietzsche's enigmatic aphoristic style, one mostly fails to bring to light the invisible "chains of thought" which "stand between and behind short aphorisms" (Nachlass 1885, 37[5], KSA 11.579–80), i.e., those thoughts which implicitly connect different aphorisms ("stand between") or which are implicitly contained in what is explicitly said ("stand behind").

Joanne Faulkner writes: "By means of a division of the text into an esoteric and exoteric address, commentators such as Stanley Rosen and Laurence Lampert put forward the thesis that not all who read Nietzsche penetrate to the core of his writings, and that Nietzsche is in this sense protected from the inopportune reader."[38] Faulkner claims that such a distinction between readers cannot be made. However, BGE 27 not only claims that such a distinction can be made; it also, humorously, gives us an example of Nietzsche's literary technique of concealment by giving the impression that the Ganges is atop the hierarchy implicit in this aphorism, while a close reading shows (if my arguments are successful) that it is really the tortoise which is on top. While this is a humorous, comically superficial example of grasping Nietzsche's real intention (the tortoise is number 1) and its contradiction with his apparent intention (the Ganges is number 1), this example illustrates the principle Nietzsche wants us to follow when trying to determine his intention concerning far weightier subjects, e. g., his reasons for rejecting "'freedom of the will' in the superlative metaphysical sense" (BGE 21), and many others. Faulkner's claim that there is no determinate hierarchy is simply false; Nietzsche's claim that some readers are "at best" like frogs shows that he does mean there to be a hierarchy, and the fact that most interpreters assume that the Ganges is atop shows that he is deliberately misleading as to his intentions. Faulkner claims that Rosen and Lampert take themselves to be privileged readers, but thereby delude themselves. This is an overly schematic statement which is probably true in some cases and false in others. All one can say in response is: one should try to interpret Nietzsche well, and this involves defending an interpretation of his real meaning with regard to this or that subject and criticizing those who disagree, as do Rosen, Lampert – and Faulkner herself. In this respect, Nietzsche is no different from any other philosopher, even as he adopts unusual, distinctive literary techniques.

BGE 27 and 28 encourage us to believe in two, if not entirely false, highly exaggerated assumptions about Nietzsche: that he prefers the speedy to the slow and the Mediterranean to the Germanic. As we have seen, Nietzsche is "a friend of the *lento*," even as he ultimately allows for a complexity that encompasses both the speedy and the slow. Nietzsche had a certain liking for the Mediterranean and its customs against what he regarded as the heavy, ponderous tendencies of the German people and their culture.

38 Faulkner, *Dead Letters to Nietzsche*, 76–7.

There is evidence for this throughout his letters and notebooks.[39] But close attention to BGE 27 and 28 shows that, although Nietzsche used this fact as material to be shaped in his writing, his deeper concern was with the difference between philosophers and free spirits on the one hand, including not just Aristophanes, Petronius and Machiavelli, but also Lessing and Nietzsche himself, and the rest of humanity on the other, including enthusiastic lovers of great writers, "the good friends," who unfortunately generally do not understand the writers whom they passionately love.[40]

Nietzsche is concerned with the experience of reading books written by free spirits, as well as the trans-historical friendship it enables. BGE 27 and 28 tell us that one must have a philosophical nature to do this properly, even as reading such books can help one develop this nature. They thereby represent a paradox (not necessarily a contradiction) which has often been noticed in Nietzsche's writing – the way he seems on the one hand to be exhortatory, asking his readers to change their lives, and on the other merely descriptive, telling his readers that they *cannot* change their lives, no matter what they do, because their ways of life are rooted in their unalterable "natures." Ironically, one must *be* a philosopher in order to understand a philosopher's books: "What a philosopher is, that is difficult to learn because it cannot be taught: one must 'know' it from experience – or one should have the pride *not* to know it" (BGE 213). BGE 27 and 28, however, do not explore the epistemological dimensions of this problem, although they remind us that it can be found in many of Nietzsche's great predecessors, such as Machiavelli, who tells us that only a prudent prince can be well-advised, even as a prince who is already prudent would appear not to *need* an advisor in the first place.[41]

Finally, I must include a brief discussion of the status of philosophy and free-spiritedness in Nietzsche's work. Throughout this article, I have taken for granted that these phenomena are, if not synonymous, closely related. This is a controversial stance. While few would claim that Nietzsche does not extoll free-spiritedness, many would claim that he does not think it necessarily goes together with philosophy; while Nietzsche occasionally refers to himself as a philosopher (e. g., GM, Preface 2), and seems to think that some individuals traditionally regarded as philosophers (e. g., Heraclitus and Epicurus) are to some extent free-spirited, he often seems to regard others (e. g., Socrates and Plato) as extremely constrained spirits. Further, many would say that Nietzsche is violently opposed to metaphysics, but believes that metaphysicians are philosophers and that some philosophers are metaphysicians. Some would even say that Nietzsche is an anti-philosophical writer, his occasional claims to be a philosopher notwithstanding (they can be regarded as examples of inconsistency, or the fact that "philosopher"

39 For example: "The German mixes, mediates, complicates and moralizes. The Italian has made by far the freest and most refined use of borrowed material, putting in a hundred times more than he has extracted: than the richest genius who had the most to give away" (Nachlass 1887, 9[5], KSA 12.341).

40 Plato illustrates this tendency comically with the example of Apollodorus, the desperately enthusiastic hanger-on of Socrates who doesn't understand him at all.

41 See Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chapter 23.

has a variety of senses in his writings). Most would say that even if Nietzsche admits the existence of free-spirited philosophers, he also admits the existence of those who are philosophers but are not free-spirited at all. Finally, it could be maintained that, even if I am correct that the tortoise stands atop Nietzsche's hierarchy in BGE 27, it is unwarranted to identify the tortoise with the philosopher, and that in BGE 28 Nietzsche distinguishes, not between philosophers and non-philosophers, but between free and constrained spirits, as his inclusion of Aristophanes and Petronius, who are not philosophers, and Machiavelli and Lessing, whose status as philosophers is highly ambiguous and controversial, demonstrates.

This is not the place to adjudicate this controversy, which would require a lengthy study of its own.[42] I will limit myself to a few remarks. There is much evidence in *Beyond Good and Evil* itself that Nietzsche regarded the philosopher as the highest human type, even as there is also some apparently countervailing evidence.[43] I do not have the space to argue for this in detail here, but one can maintain that Nietzsche is a consistent thinker, and that the apparently countervailing evidence should be interpreted in a way consistent with the hypothesis that he regarded the philosopher as the highest type.[44] In GS 343, Nietzsche speaks of "philosophers and 'free spirits,'" which closely links these concepts, even if it does not identify them. As for Aristophanes, Petronius, Machiavelli and Lessing, one way to interpret these examples is to claim that they indicate that Nietzsche does not have philosophers in mind, but one can also say that they indicate he has an unusual and challenging conception of what it *means* to be a philosopher.[45] Indeed, Kant and Hegel are often taken to be paradigmatic philosophers, but Nietzsche claims that, strictly speaking, they are not "genuine philosophers" at all (BGE 211). As for metaphysicians, one might argue that Nietzsche does not believe that a sincere metaphysician is a philosopher in the strict sense and that a true philosopher cannot be a sincere metaphysician.[46] As for Plato,

42 See Paul S. Loeb / Matthew Meyer (eds.), *Nietzsche's Metaphilosophy: The Nature, Method, and Aims of Philosophy*, Cambridge 2019, reviewed in this volume of *Nietzsche-Studien*.

43 One might contrast, for example, BGE 61–2 and 204–13, which speak extremely highly of philosophers, with 5–7, which seem to criticize philosophers as self-deceived.

44 Certainly, Nietzsche is not simply consistent on the surface in his attitude toward philosophy. One must either interpret the apparently countervailing evidence for one or the other interpretation as consistent with the contrary interpretation or convict him of incoherence.

45 For interpretations of Aristophanes and Lessing as deeply reflective thinkers, see Richard Velkley, *Heidegger, Strauss, and the Premises of Philosophy: On Original Forgetting*, Chicago, IL 2011, 142–55 (on Aristophanes), and Hannes Kerber, *Die Aufklärung der Aufklärung: Lessing und die Herausforderung des Christentums*, Göttingen 2021 (on Lessing).

46 In the programmatic contrast between "metaphysicians" and philosophers of the "dangerous perhaps" in BGE 2, Nietzsche is careful to apply the term "philosopher" only to the latter, not to the former, but he does not always follow this rule; e. g., in BGE 47 he refers to Schopenhauer, whom Nietzsche certainly believed was a sincere metaphysician, as a "philosopher." But in a notebook entry from 1885, Nietzsche, arguably speaking more precisely, says that Schopenhauer is "not a bad writer on philosophical issues" but "in himself no philosopher" (Nachlass 1885, 34[150], KSA 11.471). However, the claim that philosophers in the strict sense cannot be a sincere metaphysician is compatible with the possibility that

in a notebook entry from 1885, Nietzsche suggests that he may have possessed "absolute skepsis toward all traditional concepts," hardly the mark of the metaphysician (Nachlass 1885, 34[195], KSA 11.486–7).[47] Finally, I note that BGE 27 and 28 occur in a sequence where Nietzsche seems to be delineating the characteristics of philosophers. BGE 24 refers to "those of us who know better" and "the best science." BGE 25 is addressed to "philosophers and friends of knowledge." BGE 26 refers to "the life-history of every philosopher." BGE 30 claims that "the difference between the exoteric and esoteric" was "formerly known to philosophers – among the Indians as among the Greeks, Persians and Muslims." It is in *this* immediate context in which BGE 27 and 28 appear.

BGE 27 and 28 imply that the highest friendship is trans-historical friendship between philosophers which one enjoys through reading books written by the great minds of the past, and writing books which "translate" or "imitate" them, as Nietzsche does in *Beyond Good and Evil*, anticipating their future readership (thus Nietzsche refers to his "*unknown* friends" in GM III 27).[48] While a writer's "good friends" seek to possess him through reading him, as Apollodorus (and Alcibiades) wanted to possess Socrates, true friendship is based on shared understanding, expressed through conversations with the living or through books which one leaves behind, to be read by later generations:

> Here and there on earth we may encounter a kind of continuation of love in which the possessive craving of two people for each other gives way to a new desire and lust for possession – a *shared* higher thirst for an ideal above them. But who knows such love? Who has experienced it? Its right name is *friendship* (GS 14).

Such friendship, Nietzsche implies, is deeper than that which one enjoys with one's "good friends" in the present (or future). Willow Verkerk notes:

> If agonistic friendship depends on a shared goal, what happens when that goal is met? If it is primarily the goal that holds friends together, what chance to do they have of being loved for who they are? […] Since the goal of Nietzsche's friends of agon is "an ideal above them," which makes it beyond their reach, it seems unlikely this goal will be achieved.[49]

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they might propound metaphysical teachings in which they do not believe, e. g., Nietzsche claimed that Plato thought it was "expedient" to teach punishments of the soul after death, even as he did not believe that this teaching was true (Nachlass 1888, 14[116], KSA 13.292–3).

47 For more on Nietzsche's view of Plato, see Catherine Zuckert, "Nietzsche's Rereading of Plato," *Political Theory* 13/2 (1985), 213–38.

48 In the 1886 preface to *Human, All-To-Human*, Nietzsche admits that in this book, he invented "the free spirit" as a companion, because he didn't have a real companion, one might say a true friend, among his contemporaries. See HH I, Preface 2. In BGE 27, Nietzsche implies that a good reader of his books, no matter how rare such a reader might be, *would* constitute such a free spirit – and in BGE 28, he gives several examples of free spirits from the past, whose thoughts have been recorded in books no less difficult to penetrate than Nietzsche's own.

49 Willow Verkerk, *Nietzsche and Friendship*, London 2019, 49–50.

But Nietzsche writes: "He who attains his ideal by virtue of that transcends it" (BGE 73). In Nietzsche's view, the ideal of the philosophical life can never be transcended *because* it can never fully be attained[50] – other ideals, e. g., achieving recognition for one's gifts by winning a competition or being awarded a position, conquering a city or empire, can be achieved, but immediately become unsatisfying and replaced by another ideal, of the same general kind or of an altogether different kind, until one realizes – as most people never do – that only the ideal of philosophy cannot be transcended. Nietzsche had already become aware of this paradox in his first book, where he wrote: "Lessing, the most honest of theoretical men, dared to state openly that searching for the truth meant more to him than the truth itself" (BT 15).[51] Finally, posthumous philosophical friendship is the closest approximation to Nietzsche's ideal of friendship as "shared joy [*Mitfreude*]" rather than "compassion" or "shared suffering [*Mitleid*]" (HH I 499).[52] While one can feel compassion when one reads about Nietzsche's physical ailments, or even when one reads his often painfully plaintive and desperate letters to Lou Salome, one's primary relationship to Nietzsche, and to other philosophers with whom one enjoys posthumous friendship, is one of shared joy in analyzing and contemplating human nature. If one finds consolation from one's griefs and burdens when reading Nietzsche, this is because the shared joy of understanding helps us to forget these griefs, not because Nietzsche has compassion for our burdens any more than we do (mostly) for his.

The transition from BGE 27 to 28 represents the transition from ordinary to philosophical friendship, which usually, though not always, is from friendship with the living to posthumous friendship. For this reason, BGE 27 and 28 belong together and to *Beyond Good and Evil* itself, the closest thing Nietzsche wrote to a comprehensive philosophical treatise. *Beyond Good and Evil* approaches "the most serious subject matter"[53] from many different "perspectives," but always comes back to this subject matter, in one way or another. For Nietzsche said this toward the end of the book: "A philosopher – alas, a being that often runs away from itself, is often afraid of itself – but is too inquisitive not to 'come to' again, always back to himself" (BGE 292).[54]

50 See BGE 289: "an abysmally deep ground behind every ground, behind every attempt to furnish 'grounds'."

51 However, Verkerk is wrong to say that Nietzsche is concerned only with questioning and not with truth (*Nietzsche on Friendship*, 43). These concerns are inseparable; to question a claim means to examine whether its pretence to truth is justified. The paradox is that the philosophical life consists for Nietzsche in an endless quest for truth, which never rests in truth attained; thus, to love such a life means to love this pursuit. However, it remains pursuit of truth.

52 For exploration of this contrast, see Daniel I. Harris, "Friendship as Shared Joy in Nietzsche," *Symposium* 19/1 (2015), 199–221.

53 Nietzsche's claim in BGE 28 that Machiavelli's *Prince* treats of "the most serious subject matter" echoes his claims that BGE 25 is addressed to "those who are most serious."

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