

Pol and Humanities ep 11

[00:00:00.12] TOM MERRILL: Hello, everyone. Welcome back to Politics and the Humanities, a podcast from American University. I'm Tom Merrill. I'm a Professor of Government at American University. And I'm here by myself today without my usual co-host, Sarah Marsh.

[00:00:13.92] But I am here with a guest who is Michael Grenke, tutor at St. John's College, sometimes in Annapolis and sometimes in Santa Fe. He's also an expert on Nietzsche and has translated-- published two books of Nietzsche translations, including prefaces to unwritten works on the future of our educational institutions.

[00:00:34.54] I understand he has more translations in the offing. But Michael, we're not here to talk about your work. We're here to talk about a book by someone that you knew well, Lise Van Boxel's *Warspeak Nietzsche's Victory Over Nihilism*, which is a book that is just out.

[00:00:55.02] And we should say something about the strange circumstances that lead us to be, you and I, talking about this today. Of course, we were colleagues together a long time ago. And I've always learn things and enjoyed your company. But tell us about Lise Van Boxel and this book.

[00:01:13.81] MICHAEL GRENKE: All right. Thank you very much for having me, Tom. Lise Van Boxel was my friend, my very good friend, for about a quarter decade. She was born in Canada and lived in a nickel mining town in the northern part of Ontario. Went to the University of Toronto and studied political science and literature.

[00:01:39.20] And I think particularly her interest in literature and her literary skills were very helpful to her in her own reading of Nietzsche. And after undergraduate, she went to the Boston College and got a master's degree in political philosophy and then back to Toronto and got her PhD in political philosophy, writing about Nietzsche.

[00:02:00.56] The book that we're about to talk about today came about as a kind of extreme revision of her dissertation that wasn't initially intended to be quite so extreme. But I think she discovered a lot of new thoughts while working on it and produced a substantially different work.

[00:02:20.46] The focus of her dissertation had been to show in Nietzsche *On the Genealogy of Morals*, that the two different major types of morality actually had a kind of implicit consensus about the human good. And so that was, by itself, I think a fairly significant thing to try to work out. And that's what her dissertation did.

[00:02:48.12] Now the work that became *Warspeak*, this book that Lise wrote, really was an attempt to try to go beyond that consensus about the human good, to try to figure out exactly what the good life for a human being really would be and what it would look like.

[00:03:14.08] So that was the big step beyond, I think. And in the consequence, that means the work turns out to be a very close reading of the *Genealogy of Morals*, somewhat selectively

presented, so not a detailed commentary at every point, that focuses on the central issue of nihilism.

[00:03:37.19] Understood, I think, not as a belief that nothing is true, but understood as Nietzsche presents it in *The Genealogy of Morals*, in the first essay, at the end of section 12. That is, that nihilism, what he calls nihilism today, which is a kind of weariness with respect to the human.

[00:04:02.03] I think it presents itself as a condition of being worn out with respect to hope for this world and for human possibilities within this world, primarily caused by an attempt that had been perpetrated on humanity, I would say, surreptitiously or secretly, to try to devalue the world. And a lot of this has to do with presenting what's good as belonging to some kind of other world, the after-world, or something like that.

[00:04:41.12] That has been a kind of dominant interpretive basis for human life for more than two millennia now. Constantly comparing our life with things that are transient, that come into being and pass away, against an imagined world of things that are always and never cease to be, has this tendency of devaluing what we have and what we know about our lives from our own actual immediate experience.

[00:05:19.40] And makes us begin to despair as to whether there's anything human beings can do for themselves in this world. So I think Lise rightly presents this version of nihilism as emerging out of people who are, out of, not people-- but out of the concepts that derive themselves from this after-world, from the notions of the eternal and the immortal. And from notions of the absolute.

[00:05:54.18] So I think contrary to the concerns of a lot of people who would be upset about and worried about nihilism, who think that the answer to nihilism is to embrace some older view that holds human beings as having access to some realm of absolute truth. This work shows, in part, that the belief in such a world, the belief in such an absolute world, leads to nihilism.

[00:06:27.39] It actually causes the problem that they're worried about. And so a return to these older thoughts is no sort of solution whatsoever. So Warspeak as Lise presents it is a kind of counter offensive against that effort that made human beings orient themselves outside of the world they live in, this imagined, static, eternal realm of being and truth.

[00:06:57.30] It's an attempt to overturn those concepts and to evolve a new positive, life affirming ideal that is, this worldly and humanly possible that makes us have realistic hopes for the human future and for our own ability to make human existence better and better.

[00:07:19.21] TOM MERRILL: So let me--

[00:07:20.58] MICHAEL GRENKE: Let me just say the last thing-- why am I here?

[00:07:23.21] TOM MERRILL: Why am I here? Why are you here?

[00:07:25.34] MICHAEL GRENKE: Yeah. Before Warspeak was actually published, Lise died of lung cancer. Up to her last day, she was concerned with the fate of her book.

[00:07:40.38] TOM MERRILL: Her child.

[00:07:41.77] MICHAEL GRENKE: A lot of the responsibility for this fell on me as her friend and as the executor of her estate. So I had to, after she died, I had to supervise carrying out the publication of the work and write the introduction that she intended to have on the book.

[00:08:01.96] And I had talked with her a lot about what she wanted with respect to that introduction. So I at least knew what she wanted. I didn't have the opportunity to present her a text that she could approve. And I supervised the very minimal editing that was done, mostly just to clear out remaining typographical mistakes.

[00:08:23.66] TOM MERRILL: Right. So we should, first of all, we should give a shout out to the guys at Political Animal Press for publishing this. Because it is a service to the world. I've read this book twice now and enjoyed it and learned a lot from it.

[00:08:39.06] And I want to talk about the summary that you gave. I guess the most controversial thing, just to put a pin in this, and for many of our friends who read Nietzsche, they think that Nietzsche is the arch relativist. And I take it that part of Lise's thesis, which is also your thesis, is that Nietzsche is not a relativist, that he has an account of the human good.

[00:09:00.53] That he thinks will be better off if we acknowledged and accepted and affirmed.

[00:09:05.54] MICHAEL GRENKE: Right.

[00:09:06.65] TOM MERRILL: But before we get to the substance, and I do want to talk about genealogy of morals. I just want to say something about Lise. I didn't know her well, nowhere near as well as you did. But I did know her and she was a very striking presence.

[00:09:21.32] If I'm not mistaken, was she a model at some point? She certainly had a--

[00:09:24.66] MICHAEL GRENKE: She was a runway model, yeah.

[00:09:26.18] TOM MERRILL: She certainly had a strong sense of style and a sense of presence and I think that style is a good Nietzsche-ian-- to give oneself a certain kind of look. But she had a real presence in the room. And that was impressive. You were in the were in the presence of a person with character, I guess would be one way to say it.

[00:09:48.24] And the other thing that was very clear, even from a distance, and I only really knew her from a distance, was that she loved Nietzsche. She thought that Nietzsche was saying something that was not only interesting in an intellectual sense, but that spoke to deep parts of the human spirit.

[00:10:04.89] And that perhaps, whether you think that her Nietzsche is ultimately persuasive or not, and that's an open question, but that allowed her to understand Nietzsche in a way that many people who only-- you do it as part of the canon or the drive by. I have to do Nietzsche and I have to do Kant, right?

[00:10:29.07] But it gave her a connection to the text in a way that many of us don't have.

[00:10:36.53] MICHAEL GRENKE: I guess I want to say, with this project, Lise thought she was not wasting time. That she was reading the best thinker concerning the best human life. And reading a central book that really pulled together the threads of his philosophy in a kind of way that made them coalesce and focus.

[00:11:10.58] So in this respect, I want to say that you can see a weight of seriousness that she brought to this project. And it's also, I think, something of the feeling of the publishers, that this is the sort of book that is the reason they want to publish books.

[00:11:27.17] TOM MERRILL: Right. So let me ask you a question about the title. So the title, Warspeak, is for those of us who know Genealogy of Morals is an allusion to the subtitle of Genealogy of Morals, a Polemic. Polemic coming from polemos, for war. But the title is also a pun, is it not? Wars peak, right, that you're at the height of war.

[00:11:50.42] And perhaps, one can think of lots of things in modern times, we're going to have a war against war, the war to end all wars. Right? And so perhaps there's a sense of an elevated moment in which everything's at stake, in which you have to decide whether or not you want to affirm conflict in human life or deny conflict in human life.

[00:12:13.43] Am I wrong, that was intended to be a pun?

[00:12:17.03] MICHAEL GRENKE: No, I think you're right. Though Lise never really writes it out explicitly. But there's lots of things that she's, I want to say, rather playfully but also pedantically not spelling out.

[00:12:30.38] TOM MERRILL: Correct. Yes. Part of the reason why I wanted to have you on, in addition to honoring Lise and talking about this book, is I love teaching Genealogy of Morals. It's a challenging text. I think on purpose it's a challenging text. But it's also a very rewarding text to read.

[00:12:51.79] And for some reason, I find it easier to get into with undergraduates than Beyond Good and Evil. And so maybe just make this observation about Lise's book, that the chapter that I found most remarkable is the last chapter, which is entitled Psyche Airborne.

[00:13:11.29] But I think in order to say why that's remarkable people have to understand something about how Genealogy of Morals works. And so I thought, if you'll indulge me, I have theories about this book that have never been tested with an actual Nietzsche expert. They've only been tested on undergraduates who don't push back.

[00:13:33.92] So I just wonder if we could talk a little bit about Genealogy of Morals as a way of preparing to say something about Lise at the end. Is that OK with you?

[00:13:42.49] MICHAEL GRENKE: Certainly.

[00:13:43.49] TOM MERRILL: And maybe start with this observation, that many of our friends who study in political theory, who study Nietzsche, teach this book as Nietzsche the relativist. They teach him as a kind of bad boy of modern political theory.

[00:13:58.48] If you don't have an absolute truth, you're going to end up like Nietzsche and that blonde beast from The Genealogy of Morals. And it's very much a cautionary tale. And that's very much not the Nietzsche that Lise finds, I think is a fair statement.

[00:14:17.81] And so maybe try this out. It seems to me that the structure of Genealogy of Morals has a spiraling character. It looks like it's three essays that are not really related but after you get to the end of the book and it looks like things are unfolding with an argument that was never spelled out at the beginning, at the references at the beginning of the book that show up again at the end of the book.

[00:14:42.80] And one such reference is the very first line of the book about we men of knowledge, right? That we men of knowledge, we don't know ourselves, right? And it seems to me that it sets up this theme of self-knowledge which I take it is part of the theme of the book, that shows up again in the last section of the book. Does that sound right to you?

[00:15:06.16] MICHAEL GRENKE: Well, yeah. I think the very first section of the preface is rather interesting because it draws that conclusion. I think that those who are pursuing knowledge, we knowing ones, are doing so in a way that makes it an almost inevitable, they won't know themselves. There's a part in the middle where they get disturbed, I think, by the sound of a clock.

[00:15:37.82] And they really don't know how many times the clock has rung because they've been immersed in-- I think the picture, by the way, of the first section of the preface is of a certain kind of pursuit of knowledge. That is, of what is understood to be the very respectable scientific approach of being disinterested.

[00:16:04.40] And I think the subsequent sections of the preface are very personal, biographical, and historical. And they are very much the depiction of someone who is interested and whose interests guide and shape and give a unity to everything that someone pursues. So to some degree, the distinction between the first section of the preface and the rest of the preface is a distinction between what Nietzsche would call scholars, human beings who have tried to become disinterested.

[00:16:40.67] They can't be successful, by the way, because if you become fully disinterested, you'd be rather fully non-human.

[00:16:46.64] TOM MERRILL: You wouldn't care. You wouldn't engage in your pursuit anymore.

[00:16:50.18] MICHAEL GRENKE: I think that's right. And it also means, I think, well, they're seeking not to care, in a way. It's a kind of, if one thinks it through, a kind of self undermining situation. It's connected to becoming un-egoist morally. That is, they seek to deny their self because they understand their self to be a kind of bias that gets in their way from seeing the things that are, as they are.

[00:17:21.41] But their model of seeing the things that are is the model, I think, of seeing how things would be without human beings.

[00:17:33.61] TOM MERRILL: We will not get in the way of messing things up.

[00:17:36.09] MICHAEL GRENKE: Right.

[00:17:37.18] TOM MERRILL: Yeah.

[00:17:39.70] MICHAEL GRENKE: And this is not uncommon, I think, especially as a scientific model, to think what we really want to see is what would these things be without our interference, without our adulteration, and without our particular biased perspectives?

[00:17:54.67] TOM MERRILL: So we could only know if we committed suicide.

[00:17:56.85] MICHAEL GRENKE: Something like that.

[00:17:58.76] TOM MERRILL: Right.

[00:18:00.40] MICHAEL GRENKE: Doesn't it makes sense that they want to see a world without the humans in it as it would be without the humans in it? But that means they don't realize that the world is it is because human beings are in it.

[00:18:16.14] TOM MERRILL: I mean, that's connected with something else. There's this other book that he criticizes called Origins of Moral Sensations which sounds suspiciously like a translation of Genealogy of Morals and it's this other guy, Paul Ree, is that how you pronounce his name?

[00:18:31.29] MICHAEL GRENKE: That's how I pronounce it.

[00:18:33.06] TOM MERRILL: It seems to me, the whole book, all of Nietzsche's book is, in a way, dialectical. Because he's pushing off against this other figure who turns out to be a kind of Darwinian progressive. Right?

[00:18:47.25] And there's this wonderful phrase that I love and I always talk about in class, in Paul Ree. The Darwinian beast and the ultra modern unassuming moral milksop-- this is Kaufmann's translation-- hold hands. The milksop no longer bites.

[00:19:03.81] And it always struck me that part of the point of Genealogy of Morals is to say-- it's a challenge to a kind of progressive egalitarianism that wants to say on the one hand, our theoretical foundation is Darwin, it's evolution. But our moral stance is egalitarianism and altruism.

[00:19:21.70] And one sees this combination all the time, still today. There are many people, in fact it may be even a dominant understanding of the world and of morality. But I think partly, Nietzsche just wants to say, well, if you think about those two premises, the theoretical premise of Darwin plus the moral premise of altruism, that really makes no sense whatsoever that those two things could be true at the same time.

[00:19:44.44] And many of the things that he says in the book that sound offensive are him trying to show that contradiction, to point out that contradiction again and again. Is that a fair statement, do you think?

[00:19:57.38] MICHAEL GRENKE: I've been reading Darwin rather recently, too. And thinking about it. And when I wrote my dissertation I devoted a chapter to Lamarckism and Nietzsche and some of the contrast. And maybe I'd say this, Nietzsche appreciates Darwin.

[00:20:17.41] Certainly, I think the conflict of principles that you describe is something Nietzsche is trying to present in this book, certainly. But I think also there's something that he thinks is maybe missing in Darwin that he also wishes to present.

[00:20:35.47] And maybe the easiest way to say this is, Darwin has a wholly external principle of change. The theory of natural selection suggests that living beings are subjected to forces that give differential outcomes for differential traits.

[00:21:00.79] And the consequence of that is then descent with modification and evolution.

[00:21:05.41] TOM MERRILL: Right. Yeah.

[00:21:06.49] MICHAEL GRENKE: Nietzsche thinks that living beings have active principles of change built into them. So that they would change even if the outside world didn't do anything to them. And that's, in a way, aligned more closely to Lamarck's theories.

[00:21:24.81] That is, Lamarck thought there was an internal principle of change that caused living beings to develop ever more complexity over time. Nietzsche seems to think if there's nothing outside of living being that's stimulating, the living being would still have urges to do things.

[00:21:48.33] At least spontaneous activity in the sense that they have self starting motions that they will make regardless of the circumstances or the environment.

[00:22:00.96] TOM MERRILL: I mean, I guess the Darwin theory, if you looked at an organism, and you correctly interpret it, would be a kind of negative of its outside. There wouldn't be anything separate, right?

[00:22:13.35] MICHAEL GRENKE: Well I mean, there's all the long genealogical history of a sequence of these things. But I think what you're saying is correct. And so the thing that Nietzsche really thinks is missing in Darwin is what he thinks is the fundamental thing about life.

[00:22:28.59] That living things have an internal drive to do things beyond good and evil. The most important description of the will to power in anything Nietzsche wrote, I think, is where he says, the will to life is just an exception. It's just one form of the will to power.

[00:22:56.19] The fundamental form is, in German, [FOREIGN LANGUAGE], letting out. Expressing. That's it. A living being, regardless of what's possible, and regardless of whether circumstances favorite or disfavor it, they will try to do things that are, in a way, determined by their own internal urge.

[00:23:18.37] TOM MERRILL: Try to be themselves.

[00:23:19.50] MICHAEL GRENKE: Yeah.

[00:23:20.10] TOM MERRILL: Even if that means that they're going to use themselves up and die, right?

[00:23:22.98] MICHAEL GRENKE: Right.

[00:23:24.60] TOM MERRILL: Like the mother who gets killed by running in front of the car to save the child or something. There's a kind of--

[00:23:30.48] MICHAEL GRENKE: But even the dog, for instance, that chases the car and bites its tire, is the same thing. It's doing what it wants to do even if it's utterly stupid and squanders its possibilities.

[00:23:42.09] TOM MERRILL: Yeah. It seems to me that part of the shocking thing, and we should talk about essay one in Genealogy, right, because that's where he seems to be praising the barbarians the most, right? And this infamous phrase of the blond beast that I want to talk a little bit about.

[00:24:03.47] But if you think about it, he's talking to people who basically, their theoretical picture of the world is heartless competition and from that they infer a picture sort of like John Lennon's Imagine, right, if we could all just be nice to each other.

[00:24:19.83] And I think partly what's going on in essay one where he's really pushing it in your face about he wants the blond beast to be in the foreground, even though I think his own account is quite a bit more complicated than it seems there, is that he wants to say, look, on your own account, this is what must have been the case. If morality was created, there had to be someone before morality who had no moral compunctions whatsoever and did whatever they wanted.

[00:24:49.11] And was somehow at the origin of this long story that you're telling. Right? So there is something that I just find so humorous about-- I'm not sure if that's the right word for the horrible things that are discussed in essay one. But yeah. So tell me what you think about that.

[00:25:09.56] MICHAEL GRENKE: I think, by the way, we might laugh when we are discomfited. And maybe that's even the fundamental form of laughter. It's not always so clear to me that laughter is a pleasure. But I guess I want to say, about the blondes, if I could just say that. The blonde first appears in the genealogy as just one of the typical character traits by which a conquering race might distinguish itself from the race it conquered.

[00:25:49.11] So it becomes blondes against dark haired, black haired peoples. But I think that there it's just one example and it's not the primary example. The general designations have much more to do with being purer or being truer or something like this, rather. So this is one of the most primitive and obvious distinctions human beings might notice that mark their tribe as different from the tribe that they conquered.

[00:26:18.66] And that's the fundamental basis, I think, that Nietzsche traces moral invention back to. Is that one group conquered by another exhibits a kind of difference from their conquerors. And the conquerors discovering, I think, or embracing the great pleasure of naming things, that is the feeling of power that one has just by imposing your intellectual will on the world and framing concepts and naming things.

[00:26:56.85] That's the primary primitive origin of morality that Nietzsche finds is commanding, ruling, victorious tribes name things. And one of the things that they like to name is their feeling of separation and distance between themselves and those that they've conquered.

[00:27:18.89] So we have something like the origin of society, which has an intrinsic aristocratic character to it because the origin is the conquest of one group by another group. We get something like the origin of language that begins with society.

[00:27:40.57] The conquering group discovers the great delight of commanding the linguistic world into existence. And you get a very primitive account. I mean Nietzsche is looking backwards toward things, I think he knows, we have no full historical record of.

[00:28:01.93] That is, he's looking back into what we would properly call human prehistory.

[00:28:06.73] TOM MERRILL: Yeah.

[00:28:07.81] MICHAEL GRENKE: And trying to give a description of it that he finds plausible and rational and superior to the kinds of accounts that English psychologists have been giving and Herbert Spencer has been giving. And that may be the early modern political philosophers gave when they tried to reason back to a state of nature.

[00:28:30.10] He's trying to give. And I think he asks us to do something very hard, which is imagine a very primitive, but one might say, anatomically modern human being at the dawn of social life--

[00:28:49.01] TOM MERRILL: And of consciousness.

[00:28:50.69] MICHAEL GRENKE: --and of consciousness.

[00:28:51.71] TOM MERRILL: Perhaps even free consciousness.

[00:28:53.33] MICHAEL GRENKE: Right. Consciousness, language, and society come into being in the same time, in the same mix. And yes, I think especially the conquerors who didn't win because they were particularly smart, but won because of a certain kind of toughness and savagery.

[00:29:16.39] They are the beginning of thoughtfulness, we could say. And it's not very thoughtful.

[00:29:25.04] TOM MERRILL: So we should say, and this is what I think is one of the ironies of the first essay and why the people who read it as only about the violence, the blonde beast, are missing a big part. The great irony, of course, is that the slave morality turns out to win.

[00:29:41.41] That the slave morality turns out to be stronger. It turns out to brainwash the nobles, right? And so he gets the end of the essay and he's like, well, human history up till now has been, from a certain point of view, a struggle between, let's call it Rome, which would be the conquering, we are superior, we should conquer the world, exemplified by Rome.

[00:30:02.95] And Judea, which is that the poor people, the weak, shall inherit the Earth. All that kind of stuff. He says in Ecce Homo, as you know well, right, that this essay is about the birth of Christianity.

[00:30:15.90] MICHAEL GRENKE: Yeah.

[00:30:16.69] TOM MERRILL: Right? And so to think that somehow it's simply about the blonde beast at the beginning is to really miss. Why is it that the slave morality wins?

[00:30:28.97] MICHAEL GRENKE: I think because it-- well maybe I'd say this. Those who are in the underclass, the slaves, are compelled to become more intelligent. Because they're in the inferior position and they're acting as servants to another class of people, they have to pay attention to that other class in a way that the ruling class really doesn't have to pay attention to other people so much.

[00:31:02.73] They have to, for instance, place themselves in positions where they're close enough to be summoned and respond quickly. And where they might even have to anticipate the desires of their masters. And they have to also develop powers of patience because they can't act immediately on their desires and urges. They're not allowed to indulge themselves or assert themselves.

[00:31:29.63] So they have to become a being that develops an interior life that waits, that predicts, that is temporally stretched and projective. All sorts of complications. And also, they have to suffer internal frustrations in a way that the blonde beast does not.

[00:31:50.00] In fact, I think the paradigm of the blonde beast is when they get outside of their own society and they unleash themselves in explosions of violence on other people who aren't part of their group. This dissipates any internal frustrations they might have. And it tends to prevent them from developing any kind of complex interiority.

[00:32:16.94] And in fact, Nietzsche even suggests, after an escapade out amongst those who don't belong in their group of rape and pillage and arson, that they might come home with no disturbance of their consciousness whatsoever. As if they've been out on some kind of a fraternal prank or something like that.

[00:32:38.66] TOM MERRILL: Right.

[00:32:40.18] MICHAEL GRENKE: These are people who are stupid, made stupid by the-- preserved in their rather coarse primitive stupidity--

[00:32:49.90] TOM MERRILL: Yes.

[00:32:50.61] MICHAEL GRENKE: --are facing off against people who are becoming more and more interior, more and more delayed in their behavior, more indirect in their ways of getting things done, and much more intelligent. And those people invent a series of claims that try to put the noble masters at odds with their own natural urges.

[00:33:18.70] They try to convince them that the things that they want to do are wrong. Even their powerful ruling behaviors are fundamentally moral transgressions. And because the nobles are not good at reasoning or arguing, in fact, their use of language in this primitive state is primarily to command and they're not used to lying, either, very much. Because they're powerful and don't have reasons to lie.

[00:33:51.91] They can't understand. In fact, they would find it, I think, very dissatisfying to have to perform an action indirectly. Why can't I just go up and smash them, they'd say.

[00:34:06.34] TOM MERRILL: Right.

[00:34:07.66] MICHAEL GRENKE: You could see this if you look at Sophocles' Philoctetes.

[00:34:12.03] TOM MERRILL: I was going to say, if you look at high school students.

[00:34:14.77] MICHAEL GRENKE: OK. But I'll stay at the level of Sophocles. Odysseus tries to convince Achilles' son to go and lie to this poor crippled man in order to steal his--

[00:34:28.57] TOM MERRILL: The stinky man

[00:34:29.16] MICHAEL GRENKE: --very powerful bow. Yes. His powerful bow that they need to fight the Trojan War. And Achilles son, Neoptolemus, repeatedly says, can't I just go attack him?

[00:34:41.56] TOM MERRILL: Right.

[00:34:42.09] MICHAEL GRENKE: Has no objection, no objection at all--

[00:34:45.31] TOM MERRILL: On moral grounds.

[00:34:46.69] MICHAEL GRENKE: --defeating, with violence, a crippled foe.

[00:34:51.82] TOM MERRILL: Right

[00:34:52.99] MICHAEL GRENKE: But he doesn't want to go lie to the man. That's the kind of exemplar of this noble obtuseness.

[00:35:01.39] TOM MERRILL: Right. So it seems to me, I have to say, essay one reminds me a little bit of Hegel's master-slave dialectic. The master wins but the slave is the future. Right? And somehow, the slave morality-- Nietzsche is going to have lots of bad things to say about it.

[00:35:17.44] But even on his account, the slave-morality, somehow the matrix of what it means to become human, even for us still living today. And so at the end of essay one, one of my favorite lines, he says today in the 19th century, it's a mark of a higher, more spiritual nature to be a battleground of these two things.

[00:35:37.43] That they're both alive within our own heads. And so I think you would have to go back and reinterpret the essay as partly being a literal story about what happened in prehistory. But also about these archetypes that still live as characters in our mental dramas.

[00:35:54.92] And maybe just to say this. The person of presentiment who their understanding of themselves is defined by their hatred of the bullies. And you can tell a high school story that would be like this, right? There are some people who are blonde and beautiful, who are good on the football team, who get to date the cheerleader, and don't always follow by the rules but everyone still likes them.

[00:36:21.48] And then there's that the nerd who is offended by this and gets a chip on their shoulder and hates with a furious passion the head of the football team. But if you come back, at the high school reunion, the nerd has become Steve Jobs and rules the world whereas the high school quarterback is a pretty lousy real estate agent or something.

[00:36:47.15] But that burning hatred of the person presentiment is a powerful creative force and much more powerful, in a way, than the physical power of the original barbarians. And I guess you would say-- but to me, at the end of essay one, you're left with this conflict.

[00:37:06.70] The barbarians say yes to themselves. Or as we'd say, they have high self-esteem.

[00:37:12.84] MICHAEL GRENKE: Yeah.

[00:37:14.20] TOM MERRILL: And there's something that's attractive about that. The person of presentiment hates themselves but hates this other thing more. And they're able to conquer the world but they're completely miserable. They cannot affirm themselves.

[00:37:29.36] And so it looks to me like, in order to have true human flourishing, you would have to somehow combine the two. That would be a formula. Which is not to say that I know what that would look like worked out. But that, to me, looks like where essay one ends up.

[00:37:45.09] MICHAEL GRENKE: This makes sense to me, Tom. And also maybe starting from where you started with the comparison to Hegel's master-slave dialectic. There is this similarity. But I take it, there's this difference. Nietzsche doesn't like to throw anything away.

[00:38:05.84] He's the ultimate recycler, if I could put it that way. In a way, what Nietzsche sees when he sees something he doesn't like, is he sees a limit in his own power to make something good of it. So I think his dream is that nothing would be left in the situation where one would want to reject it or throw it away or leave it behind.

[00:38:37.48] Whereas I think the Hegelian dialectic actually really leaves the master behind. It's a certain development. It's a dead end. The dialectic continues out from the slave side. For Nietzsche, the model of self affirmation of genuine, saying yes to life belongs to the side of the masters.

[00:39:05.50] They look at themselves and they really say yes. And they're not deluded or something like this. They don't even understand vanity very well. They can't understand why someone would want to pretend to think better of themselves or have others think better of themselves.

[00:39:19.51] TOM MERRILL: Right.

[00:39:20.79] MICHAEL GRENKE: The slave side brings all the powers of the human intellect and its development, which initially is very weak. It has chance of working against someone who won't listen or someone who says stop talking and do what I say.

[00:39:41.16] TOM MERRILL: Right.

[00:39:41.46] MICHAEL GRENKE: But once human beings start developing these powers, one discovers, and I think it's not that strange to think, that it's mind that runs the world. And the beings that develop mind more fully have much greater capacity.

[00:39:56.28] But they have almost a built in dissatisfaction to that method because of the way it originates. It originates as something you don't want to do. It originates as frustration, as internal complication, as putting yourself at odds with yourself.

[00:40:13.66] Because there's what you want to do on the one hand and there's this thought that says, not now, wait. Or not that way, but let's do it some other way. Or, what about the long term? All of which win in the end. Or another way to say it, Odysseus wins the Trojan War, not Achilles.

[00:40:34.24] TOM MERRILL: Yes.

[00:40:36.63] MICHAEL GRENKE: That really, is hard to marry with liking yourself. I think even the name Odysseus, if I remember correctly, he's named by his grandfather. It means something like the hated one.

[00:40:53.05] TOM MERRILL: Yeah. That sounds right. To move from Nietzsche to a different level, we see this all around us. The people who are the most successful in the world are also-- what are the ills of our world? Anxiety and depression.

[00:41:09.33] On some level, we have to keep working so we can distract ourselves from the fact that we really don't like ourselves and we cannot look at ourselves and be at peace with ourselves. It just seems to me that, in some way, Nietzsche describes the world that I see correctly.

[00:41:26.08] Which is not to say that I know what it would mean to be able to affirm yourself in some fuller way. Right?

[00:41:32.88] MICHAEL GRENKE: Could I say something that might be a little bit of jump ahead of where we are right now but it's connected? The third essay of *The Genealogy*, which bears this question as a title, what is the meaning of the ascetic ideal?

[00:41:53.67] Nietzsche begins that essay, once it gets going past the first section, with a kind of interrogation of what a whole series of different human types have found to be the meaning for them in the ascetic ideal. The ideal that is essentially minimizing the effects of this world so that it becomes more like the other world, or the after-world.

[00:42:22.73] Trying to deny one selves all sorts of pleasures and indulgences, minimize life. There's a whole bunch of things that different kinds of people find in that ascetic ideal. And I think what Nietzsche sees there, is though the ideal itself would seem to be life hating or life denying, living beings are the source of that ideal and the source of its continuance.

[00:42:49.89] And that means they are finding some mode of life expression for themselves in that ideal. So it serves a purpose for each of them. Even if the general and prevailing affect of this ideal is lasting weariness with human life and possible, a final sort of settling into despair about the human future.

[00:43:16.29] So what Nietzsche really does when looking at that, you'd think, let's throw away all these people who are attached to the ascetic ideal. Let's not do things the way they do them. But what Nietzsche actually presents in that essay is-- and I think Lise's book is very good at

pulling this out-- it takes what each of those types finds to be a mode of expression of their own life urge in the ascetic ideal.

[00:43:44.08] It takes each of those expressions and tries to combine them in a comprehensive human being who has just those expressions and none of the particularly negative orientation. So it's sort of trying to knit together the satisfactions that these nihilistic human types found in their nihilistic devotion and weld them together into a human being that could affirm itself because it's satisfied in many different ways.

[00:44:18.06] TOM MERRILL: Are you saying that's what Nietzsche is trying to do or that's what these different examples of the ascetic ideal are doing?

[00:44:25.68] MICHAEL GRENKE: I think Nietzsche's analysis advances from the thought that these are people who are anti-life or anti-world into the thought, no living being can be anti-life.

[00:44:38.98] TOM MERRILL: Yeah.

[00:44:39.45] MICHAEL GRENKE: It must be doing something for itself. Even if, for instance, all it does is go home and beat its children, right? That's some kind of expression of its own urge to live. It's a terrible one and it's got a bad future. But it is a way in which this being has found something that ties it to life and allows it to express its urge.

[00:45:06.96] And Nietzsche wants to take those expressions and combine them into a comprehensive being that is fundamentally affirmative. So I want to just say, he's not trying to reject these things, so much as repurpose them or redirect these expressions.

[00:45:25.31] TOM MERRILL: Let me ask about that. It seems to me, on Nietzsche's account, that you might say that to be a human being at our stage of history is to torture ourselves in various ways. And that we can give different accounts of what the meaning of that torturing is, different political theories or ideologies or what have you.

[00:45:48.90] But it's somehow part of what we do, is that we do these things. But the problem of nihilism is that when we can no longer give an account of what the meaning is, and to me this is the very powerful ending of the whole book, in which he says, people actually don't mind suffering.

[00:46:08.61] They don't mind suffering. They don't mind making other people suffer and they don't mind suffering themselves, so much. The thing that they really can't stand is when the suffering has no purpose. And you see this with students. Students are perfectly happy to get a C if you can explain to them, you didn't understand these four things.

[00:46:23.70] But if they think the class is BS, that's when they rebel. And that's a perfectly normal human response. So the human animal is the animal that makes itself suffer but that needs to give some account of itself of what is this for? And so far, we don't really have, according to Nietzsche, that's the drama of the third essay. We don't really have an account that's satisfying.

[00:46:50.64] MICHAEL GRENKE: Right. Yeah. There, I think Nietzsche seems to think that one of the virtues, I think, of the dominant morality that leads to nihilism is the presumptive value of truth. In some ways, I think Nietzsche wants to say, we have built into ourselves as a kind of evolutionary development now, a need for accounts.

[00:47:29.63] And a presumption that when we don't have an account, something's wrong. So dissatisfaction that's built into that. But it's also that the pressure for these accounts that is placed upon-- the claims that have been made about the world tends to undermine them. That is, they get exposed.

[00:47:53.24] Especially if one takes morality to have been invented by human beings. When it's exposed that it's an invention of human beings, that by itself undermines its claim of truth in a certain way. At least for a certain kind of knower. Maybe the knower that belongs to that first section of the preface.

[00:48:16.86] The whole book *Human, All too Human*, I think, is meant to, in many respects, to show that for many people, if you show that something has a merely human origin, you have devalued it. You have exposed it and collapsed its authority over them.

[00:48:32.39] TOM MERRILL: Yeah

[00:48:32.70] MICHAEL GRENKE: And then I think some attempt to try to show that there's a way in which we could be satisfied with a world that is substantially dependent upon human effort, human making. That is, if we didn't raise certain kind of unrealistic standards.

[00:48:52.23] What we are and what we do would actually be very impressive and very satisfying. Where, if we look at what we can do, this is one of the things Nietzsche says, if we look what the human animal can do and we don't measure it against what we hope, we wish the human animal could do, the human animal is very impressive. If we measure them against our hopes, the human animal looks rather pathetic.

[00:49:17.48] TOM MERRILL: Yeah. So let me close up one thing, and then I want to ask you about the last section of the third essay. I mean, just to say something about the second essay, which seems to me, in some ways, the most important. The theme there, one of the important themes there, is the internalization of human beings.

[00:49:34.05] And he's got this great line where he says, it doesn't happen in the blonde beast, but it couldn't have happened without the blonde beast. That somehow, you need the moment of tyranny that forces other people to turn inwards. And he calls it the bad conscience. And there's all kinds of metaphors of pregnancy.

[00:49:51.19] A feminist could go a long way in finding that somehow the feminine dimension of the human being is present there. That the womb of all art comes out of the bad conscience, comes out of this turning inwards. Which I think confirms what we were saying before about the master and the slave.

[00:50:14.12] So one of the things that's funny about this book is it seems to me that the peak is in the middle. That there's a sort of-- essay two has got this very rich discussion of internalization. And then the beginning of essay three has got this discussion of the philosopher who looks like he's the only person who can stand on his own two feet.

[00:50:30.06] That he would be the person who would somehow combine human self affirmation with the history that's been created by presentiment, right? And whether or not that works, that may be a question for another day. But that does look like-- I mean in a way, Nietzsche's like Plato. The philosopher should rule.

[00:50:50.70] That's the thing that many people-- he's not a relativist at all. He's sort of the opposite. But the weird thing about the book is that Nietzsche doesn't spell everything out. And the closer he gets to the end, he leaves us with a cliffhanger. He wants to, as the Marxists say, heighten the contradictions.

[00:51:11.61] And so as you get closer to the end, you start to have this, forgive me, Michael-- but the oh shit moment. Like everything is going to fall apart. And the theme is that he goes back to the, we men of knowledge, at the beginning of the third section. The third section of the third essay, he repeats that phrase.

[00:51:29.67] And so there's a sense in which everything that has been going on up until now has been digging underneath that very beginning point. Now we're back at the beginning with sharper eyes and with a stronger sense of what's going on. And the conflict that he presents there is, so you men of knowledge, you men of the enlightenment, you've destroyed Christianity.

[00:51:49.83] Or at least you've destroyed the Christian God. But you've done so because you've internalized this ascetic ideal because you think that the truth is something that's worth knowing for itself. That you still have faith. You still have something of an assumption that you haven't examined.

[00:52:06.66] And so you are contradictory in yourself. And then once you realize that, the wheels are going to come off. And there's no telling where we're going to end up. And the book ends. And that's a scary thing. And I think that he means it to be scary. Can you talk about that?

[00:52:29.61] MICHAEL GRENKE: I think the problem that we talked about earlier with the men of knowledge that are discussed in the beginning of the preface was this devotion to truth without interest, if we could call it that. And I thought the thing that Nietzsche began, in a way, very obliquely in the preface to criticize, was this the sense that the human concerns and human interests were somehow an intrusion or an obstruction of the attempt to get knowledge.

[00:53:09.16] In a way, even Hegel exemplifies this, right? He wants to see the things without being separated from them. Right? Whereas being an interested living being with its own urges and purposes, imposing demands upon the world, that is, I think, compatible with knowledge on Nietzsche's standpoint. But not knowledge that has this kind of utterly absolute character to it.

[00:53:39.41] TOM MERRILL: It's not just the knowledge you would find in Plato's Phaedo, right?

[00:53:42.84] MICHAEL GRENKE: Right.

[00:53:43.76] TOM MERRILL: The surface teaching in Plato's Phaedo.

[00:53:47.18] MICHAEL GRENKE: Which is, the surface teaching is kind of Platonism of a certain sort, right? And in this respect, that version of Plato, where the forms are self subsisting beings of another world, eternal and unchanging, is just as nihilistic as the Christian God, if I could put it.

[00:54:10.36] At the beginning of the third essay, Nietzsche says the human being would rather will the nothing than not to will. And he ends the third essay with that same claim. And I think Lise, in her book, rightly points out, it seems to me, that in a way, at the end of the first section of the third essay, Nietzsche has already answered the question he's raised.

[00:54:40.63] But he finds it necessary to go through a longer way in order to make things more available. Or maybe to heighten the contradiction.

[00:54:48.82] TOM MERRILL: Can I say something about the will or nothing versus not willing?

[00:54:51.58] MICHAEL GRENKE: Yeah.

[00:54:52.25] TOM MERRILL: It seems to me, I mean two character types that we know from our world, the couch potato who has no activity of soul. And this is what Tocqueville was worried about with individualism. That's not willing. That's one option.

[00:55:06.80] But the other option would seem to be the school shooter who is actively willing nothing. If that's not nihilism, I don't know what is. The school shooter is kind of different from the serial killer. The serial killer wants to kill people and get away with it.

[00:55:22.13] The school shooter wants to kill himself and then kill. It's like suicide plus. That's the essence. But that's the central tragedy or fear of our time, is that those are the only options for human beings.

[00:55:39.60] MICHAEL GRENKE: Yeah, and I think probably, how to put it, Nietzsche is psychologically startling at times, in terms of the ways in which he analyzes human beings. I don't know that he analyzed a couch potato exactly. But maybe I can think of a certain set of connections.

[00:56:00.87] But it seems to me, even the couch potato, Nietzsche probably would think of as willing the nothing.

[00:56:07.62] TOM MERRILL: Because you can't actually not will.

[00:56:10.59] MICHAEL GRENKE: Yeah. This is the thing. This connects, I think, to the sense that being alive means that you have these active internal urges. That you're not merely a responder to external stimuli. But that left to yourself and unhindered or unlimited by external pressures, you will do things.

[00:56:33.26] The couch potato, I suspect, is a self-torturer as well. Who, in some part of themselves-- and of course, we have to, I think, talk when we talk psychologically here, of a being that has many parts or many sub-wills or sub-souls, drives, primarily, is what Nietzsche calls them.

[00:56:53.55] That being has some part of themselves that likes to root them to a couch, as if that part has captured the rest and is ruining it.

[00:57:04.08] TOM MERRILL: Yeah.

[00:57:04.74] MICHAEL GRENKE: But that ruination is empowering to the part that at least determines if. It's something like self mutilation. The self mutilator who would love to be beautiful but doesn't see any way that they could make themselves beautiful sees a very clear way that they could feel powerful by destroying themselves.

[00:57:28.70] TOM MERRILL: Right.

[00:57:30.08] MICHAEL GRENKE: And I suspect, ultimately, in a very slothful version of this, the couch potato is there on the couch, in some part, thinking, it's terrible I'm on the couch. And this other part that's saying, and I'm going to keep you there. This is the self-torture that you talked about before.

[00:57:50.99] Nietzsche even connects it in Beyond Good and Evil to philosophy.

[00:57:56.21] TOM MERRILL: Right.

[00:57:56.77] MICHAEL GRENKE: There's a part that likes to make you feel all the painful uncomfortableness of the things that are new and different.

[00:58:05.43] TOM MERRILL: You want to face up to the ugly truth, right? And you take a certain pleasure in the pain that you give yourself when you-- yeah.

[00:58:12.42] MICHAEL GRENKE: And it's not so much that the truth itself, necessarily, is ugly. Anything that's new and different is disruptive and, in a way, painful. At the same time, of course, Nietzsche, by the way, more than most people I've ever encountered, he loves to think. And he loves to understand things.

[00:58:33.59] And he expresses this, for instance, in Dawn 550, where he really indicates to certain people, himself, Plato, amongst others. Even Descartes, he says, and Spinoza. They love to know things, to come to know things. And it's an enjoyable experience.

[00:58:53.90] No matter what the character of the knowing is, even if it's ugly. There's something pleasant about knowing something. But I think, aside from that, there's something painful and challenging in forcing yourself to know what's different and new about something.

[00:59:13.98] And there, I think Nietzsche thinks there's some cruel will within us, a part of us that has discovered its own mode of expression, enforcing the rest of us to go through that. And there's lots of things like that.

[00:59:27.31] TOM MERRILL: Yeah. But he thinks that, in a way, as you say, knowing is maybe the fullest human life. But he's going to, because of his understanding of the rest of the world, he's going to reinterpret that as an expression of some kind of will to power.

[00:59:41.43] MICHAEL GRENKE: Sure.

[00:59:42.00] TOM MERRILL: Is that a fair statement?

[00:59:43.58] MICHAEL GRENKE: Well, I don't know. On the will to power, where is Nietzsche? How committed is he to the thought that the world is will to power and nothing else?

[00:59:56.48] TOM MERRILL: I don't know, Michael. You tell me. I thought that-- isn't that what he says, the will to power and nothing else, the aphorism from Beyond Good and Evil?

[01:00:05.73] MICHAEL GRENKE: So in Beyond Good and Evil 36, he goes through a sort of sequence of proposing that one could understand the whole world according to the will to power. But he starts with the thought that we could understand the world, our inner world of thought and perception, feeling, in terms of will to power.

[01:00:28.98] And then he proposes the possibility that we could extend that understanding of the inner world to the outer world. It looks like--

[01:00:35.92] TOM MERRILL: The primary would be psychology.

[01:00:37.32] MICHAEL GRENKE: Yeah. It just looks to me like the extension of the will to power to the understanding beyond the understanding of our inner experience, is at least hypothetical for Nietzsche there. Can we? And he asks, could it be pushed to the point of nonsense or absurdity in Kaufmann's translation.

[01:00:58.38] Could it be pushed to the point of [FOREIGN LANGUAGE]?

[01:01:00.71] TOM MERRILL: Right.

[01:01:01.99] MICHAEL GRENKE: And he suggests that the morality of method requires that we at least make the attempt to understand everything according to one principle. But he does indicate it might lead to nonsense. And he's not so committed there, I would say.

[01:01:16.74] So after that he starts saying the world is will to power and nothing else. But that's after a very hypothetical beginning.

[01:01:25.29] TOM MERRILL: But let me get this straight. So the primary evidence for will to power is human psychology, that it helps us understand ourselves better. And that will go along with the men of knowledge are not self-knowing. It's a deep theme of Genealogy.

[01:01:38.37] But I guess it's still an open question, whether will to power explains asteroids. Or space rocks or I don't know, space in general, right?

[01:01:50.18] MICHAEL GRENKE: Which might explain even our drive to knowledge or attraction to knowledge. I mean, that might be explained maybe even because of what you were saying earlier. The power of mind is much greater than the power of body. Much, much greater.

[01:02:07.49] Our inner realm is a much vaster set of possibilities. And the realm of other human minds is a vaster set of possibilities than even the realm of other human bodies.

[01:02:21.02] TOM MERRILL: And that, in a way, points to the central importance of liberal education. That what we think about ourselves is quite important for what we actually are.

[01:02:30.99] MICHAEL GRENKE: I might say it's constitutive of the world.

[01:02:35.11] TOM MERRILL: Yeah. Well, forget about the world. All I care about is liberal education.

[01:02:39.00] MICHAEL GRENKE: Yeah.

[01:02:41.26] TOM MERRILL: So let's try to draw the circle closed. I want to say something about Lise's book, about that last chapter. Because the thing that strikes me as strange about Chapter 7 of the book, Nietzsche leaves us with this crisis, the crisis of nihilism. Which I think is not his final word, as you can't read the rest of the corpus and think that's his final word.

[01:03:08.38] But he wants to leave you with this cliffhanger. So he says in *Ecce Homo*, this is a fishhook book that's meant to get your attention so then you'll go back and read *Beyond Good and Evil* and *Zarathustra*. But what Lise does in that last chapter is she tries to spell out her understanding from within *Genealogy* of why the crisis that Nietzsche ends with, is not actually the end of the story. Is that a fair statement?

[01:03:37.07] MICHAEL GRENKE: Very much so.

[01:03:37.84] TOM MERRILL: And she has some very interesting interpretations that she interprets hints and she interprets things that are alluded to but that are missing that we don't have time to go into here. And to me it's remarkable because it's a very personal attempt to say that something like that has to be true.

[01:04:01.92] It's not clear to me that Lise's interpretation is the final word on it. I don't know enough about Nietzsche. I don't know enough about the world. But it's a remarkable text, that last chapter.

[01:04:13.92] MICHAEL GRENKE: So in one way, I guess Lise points to the strong sort of textural connections of repeated phrases.

[01:04:25.01] TOM MERRILL: Right.

[01:04:25.88] MICHAEL GRENKE: So if one finds the same sort of rephrase and it has the same sort of effect in each of the three essays, that's one way to connect them and looking at that is one way to unify each of the three essays. But I think the other suggestion really is-- maybe it's twofold.

[01:04:48.99] One is that there's a kind of promise of carrying out a history of morality that is assigned to a work that Nietzsche never wrote but maybe made some plans for in his notebooks and things like this. And Lise suggests that at least an example of that is carried out in the second essay.

[01:05:10.71] So that what Nietzsche is calling for and pointing to is in fact carried out in the second essay. And I think the other thing that is not unrelated is the presentation of a counter ideal to the acetic ideal. So if the problem of the acetic ideal, end of nihilism, is that in the absence of something to will, human beings will turn to willing the nothing.

[01:05:41.67] The nothing. And particularly, your example of the shooters is a good one. An active, willing annihilation.

[01:05:51.60] [INTERPOSING VOICES]

[01:05:51.96] TOM MERRILL: It's a way of thinking about the possibility for the world. Right? I mean it's a bad, horrible way. But yeah.

[01:05:58.50] MICHAEL GRENKE: I don't know, ultimately, which is the greater horror, especially if I'm right about couch potatoes. Is the world sunken into the couch potato death, that something like the heat death of the universe, of maximal entropy in the human form.

[01:06:17.97] TOM MERRILL: Right.

[01:06:19.44] MICHAEL GRENKE: That might be worse than human beings who at least-- Right. I think I'll just stay away from Morgan's work. They're both very bleak. One's more long lasting.

[01:06:32.97] TOM MERRILL: Yes.

[01:06:35.63] MICHAEL GRENKE: The counter ideal is the thing I think that Nietzsche's book is really calling for at the end. Something to will that isn't the ascetic ideal. Something that one could will instead of the nothing.

[01:06:50.88] TOM MERRILL: Can I ask a question?

[01:06:52.52] MICHAEL GRENKE: Yeah.

[01:06:53.78] TOM MERRILL: One phrase that does not appear in this book, eternal recurrence of the same.

[01:06:58.21] MICHAEL GRENKE: Right.

[01:06:58.80] TOM MERRILL: Why?

[01:07:11.18] MICHAEL GRENKE: I want to say I don't fully know. But in another sense, maybe I could say something. It doesn't occur in some of the later books of Nietzsche as well.

[01:07:32.86] Though the eternal recurrence of the same, I think, is some attempt by Nietzsche to present something about an affirmative ideal, it might not be the most concrete way to present an affirmative ideal.

[01:07:46.85] And I think the affirmation that Lise's book teases out of the genealogy is this attempt to construct a comprehensive human being that includes, for instance, the affirmative and rather healthy self-perspective of the primitive savage nobles with all the riches of the internal complexity of the development of the mind that comes out of the slave revolt, with all of its contradictions, but finding a certain way to make the many and contradictory parts work together and live together and lend their energy to each other, rather than spend their energy exhausting each other.

[01:08:37.75] So the construction of a positive affirmative ideal in the genealogy takes the form of tracing out the kind of evolution of the philosophic life, up to a point, I think, where there's this philosophic life that incorporates the virtues of warriors and incorporates the creativity of poets.

[01:09:04.54] And can say that it really does have, it comprehends, in the sense of containing awareness of the ways in which other kinds of human beings experience the world. And then some ability to deploy that awareness. To use the various perspectives at will to view the world from different standpoints that are really standpoints of feeling or standpoints of drive.

[01:09:37.59] That illuminate the world in terms of the respect of, it's sort of the full panoply of human experience. And that's combined with a kind of integral mastery over those possibilities.

[01:09:50.07] TOM MERRILL: You would say that you can't present the affirmative ideal as some free-standing abstract thing that would get you back into Platonism. But we see it in action in Genealogy.

[01:10:01.59] MICHAEL GRENKE: Well, I think especially the genealogical method of studying the coming into being of things and the various stages at which they arrive and persist for a while and then transform. That lends itself to this concrete presentation.

[01:10:18.73] TOM MERRILL: Yeah.

[01:10:19.64] MICHAEL GRENKE: I don't think the presentation of the eternal return as itself is necessarily too Platonic. But it has this character to it that I think maybe doesn't serve the purposes of the Genealogy as well as others. Primarily, the challenge to affirmation that's presented in the eternal return is the challenge of affirming the past.

[01:10:44.41] And the Genealogy has more to say about, I think especially again, as Lise is reading it, has more to say about what can we--

[01:10:53.29] TOM MERRILL: The future.

[01:10:54.10] MICHAEL GRENKE: --look at when we're predicting the future. That is, what is the present height of humanity and what sort of immediate future possibilities are suggested by that height?

[01:11:03.15] TOM MERRILL: Yeah. Well, so Michael, we're coming to the end of our time. Do you want to read something?

[01:11:09.52] MICHAEL GRENKE: Yeah. Let me read something from near the end of the second essay of the Genealogy. It's really the very end of section--

[01:11:19.37] TOM MERRILL: I will say, before you start, within Lise's book, there is discussion of a kind of immortality. I believe it's the end of chapter 5. We can't discuss it now, but we'll just let the listener come back and looking at it.

[01:11:32.66] MICHAEL GRENKE: No, that's good.

[01:11:33.63] TOM MERRILL: You have to go buy the book in order to find out about the immortality of life.

[01:11:37.46] MICHAEL GRENKE: Let me say just briefly, there's a series of I want to say Christian terms. Creatio ex nihilo. Spontaneity of sorts, immortality, transcendence, that I think Warspeak tries to appropriate in a way that's a little bit subversive.

[01:12:02.43] Maybe more than a little. That is, there's an attempt to repurpose the terminology of the opponent. And so I think there's an immortality, but it's immortality of a certain sort.

[01:12:18.27] TOM MERRILL: Can I ask a pesky question? Do you think that Nietzsche thinks that some important truth about the human condition was revealed through Christianity? Maybe not by Christianity, but through Christianity?

[01:12:32.87] MICHAEL GRENKE: I do think so. Certainly. Even just that analysis of the ascetic ideal, in some way, is pointing to things that human beings are attracted to, things that offer them possibilities in life, things that they need.

[01:12:53.18] Although I think primarily, Nietzsche is more interested in active urges that aren't prompted by need. But he is, of course, aware that, in a way, a preponderance of human experience is founded on the basis of need. And so I think it's revelatory.

[01:13:10.25] But I also want to say, in a way, everything that lasts and that human beings can live with is an experiment worthy of being carefully observed, in terms of what it offers to show you about the human possibilities.

[01:13:27.08] TOM MERRILL: Yeah, OK.

[01:13:28.29] MICHAEL GRENKE: All right.

[01:13:29.16] TOM MERRILL: This is when I have to ask all these small questions.

[01:13:31.88] MICHAEL GRENKE: That's fine. Small questions lead to the big things, I think. That's the way I take it.

[01:13:38.04] TOM MERRILL: OK. So tell us where you are.

[01:13:40.23] MICHAEL GRENKE: I'm at the end of the 24th section of the second essay of the genealogy of morals. It's the last paragraph in Kaufmann's translation.

[01:13:52.59] TOM MERRILL: Got it.

[01:13:52.92] MICHAEL GRENKE: I don't think there are paragraphs, but that's OK. I'll just start in the second sentence, after this question Nietzsche raises. He says, but someday in a stronger age than this decaying self-doubting present, he must yet come to us, the redeeming man of great love and contempt.

[01:14:15.69] The creative spirit whose compelling strength will not let him rest in any aloofness or any beyond, whose isolation is misunderstood by the people as if it were flight from reality. While it is only his absorption, immersion, penetration into reality.

[01:14:34.54] So that when he one day emerges again into the light, he may bring home the redemption of this reality. It's redemption from the curse that the hitherto reigning ideal has laid upon it. This man of the future who will redeem us, not only from the hitherto reigning ideal, but also from that which was bound to grow out of it, the great nausea, the will to nothingness, nihilism.

[01:15:01.08] This bell stroke of noon and of the great decision that liberates the will again and restores its goal to the Earth and his hope to man, this Antichrist and anti-nihilist, this victor over God and nothingness, he must come one day.

[01:15:19.09] TOM MERRILL: So Michael, I have no idea what that means. But I'll make just some observations. So number one, this is a kind of answer to the crisis at the end of the third essay, right? It's a response to the crisis of nihilism.

[01:15:33.90] But number two, I just was noticing the bell stroke of noon picks up on the bell strokes from the men of knowledge at the very beginning.

[01:15:41.80] MICHAEL GRENKE: Very much so.

[01:15:42.48] TOM MERRILL: Yeah. It's a beautiful thing, right?

[01:15:48.82] MICHAEL GRENKE: I know we haven't talked enough about that. But in a way, the men of knowledge from the very beginning don't know themselves, in some ways. They're not paying attention to the things that are actually personal about them.

[01:16:03.60] And in the preface, Nietzsche suggests that for a philosopher, everything really is personal and is tied together by what is personal. And united, as if all the experiences and issues emerge from one single root.

[01:16:19.40] The men of knowledge are, in some way, rootless. They try to cut themselves off from the natural interests of their living beings. And then they try to pursue knowledge after that. And again, it's some attempt to redeem this world, to end the human.

[01:16:39.32] But I think the last things that Nietzsche's saying here, he wants to free the will up from it's being fixed upon the pathway of the ascetic ideal. He associates that with both nihilism and with God. And partially, I think because when God gets undermined by the love of truth, when the truthful human beings finally find they cannot believe in God, they're left with nothing.

[01:17:07.73] But they have a tradition of serving this ideal and of sacrificing things to it. They even have a religious ladder of cruelty, just to borrow a phrase from Nietzsche, a long tradition of sacrifice.

[01:17:21.05] TOM MERRILL: It's called the tenure process, sir. The ladder of cruelty, are you kidding me?

[01:17:26.75] MICHAEL GRENKE: That's right. So the end of this second essay, Nietzsche is really announcing, what we need is another ideal, a different ideal from the ascetic. And I think he says it late in the third. The only reason why human beings have been attached to the ascetic ideal is because there really hasn't been a robust and satisfying counter idea.

[01:17:51.58] TOM MERRILL: Right. Can I make one other interpretive point about section 24? So I hadn't noticed this before reading it this time, but since I'm interested in the we men of knowledge, because it's clearly rhymes from the beginning of the book to that last section.

[01:18:07.26] This section 24 is also about we men of knowledge, right?

[01:18:10.41] MICHAEL GRENKE: Yes.

[01:18:10.73] TOM MERRILL: And so earlier he uses the phrase, we modern men who are the heirs of the conscious vivisection, self-torture of money, I think that's we men of-- he doesn't use the exact phrase.

[01:18:19.76] But I think it's the same. So there's a way in which, it's like a clock. It keeps coming back to the same point but maybe in a deeper-- it's like a spiral or something. Does that seem right?

[01:18:30.65] MICHAEL GRENKE: It does seem right. I don't read too much into the circularity of it. I mean in this-- put it this way. I know an interpreter who would say, look it's a circle. It must be the eternal return. But I wouldn't say that. But what I would say is, of course it's crafted to do this.

[01:18:52.58] In a way, Nietzsche gets you started on something but doesn't let you finish. And then brings you back to that something with interludes. This is part of the musicality of his writing, its development of movements and themes.

[01:19:07.08] TOM MERRILL: Right. Well, we should end by saying something about Lise. The death is a horrible thing for the person and for the people who love the person. I guess if one were going to go, one would want to have done something beautiful. Right?

[01:19:30.54] MICHAEL GRENKE: Yeah.

[01:19:31.38] TOM MERRILL: And Lise didn't know, couldn't have known, but she did something that was humanly impressive. And that's a gift to the rest of us, right? And I just think it's important for us to, when I go, I hope that I go like that.

[01:19:53.93] MICHAEL GRENKE: Well, I'll say this. I had many opportunities, I guess, to read drafts of this work as Lise was working on it. And I'm still impressed by how it came together. The drafts didn't prepare me for the full power of the book, as it really came together.

[01:20:16.58] And I'm still learning from it. She's making me notice things. I have 38 years of devotion to Nietzsche under my belt. And I've paid a lot of attention to things people have said about it. This is a very impressive reading of Nietzsche.

[01:20:33.59] It can open up a lot of things for people. And I hope they pay attention to it. And I'm sure Lise would be very gratified by the way it's been treated so far.

[01:20:45.00] TOM MERRILL: Yeah. Well it is, to the conventional understanding of these things, this will sound the opposite. But it is a Nietzsche in virtue of gratitude of a certain kind.

[01:20:55.13] MICHAEL GRENKE: Yeah.

[01:20:55.73] TOM MERRILL: Yeah. OK Michael, I think that we're at the end. I want to say thank you to you for spending this time. It's been wonderful for me. I really enjoy it.

[01:21:05.27] And I appreciate the book and I appreciate what you've done in bringing it out and look forward to your other Nietzsche-ian writings and translations.

[01:21:12.61] MICHAEL GRENKE: Well thank you, Tom. I'm glad to renew our acquaintance and to talk with you this morning.

[01:21:18.20] TOM MERRILL: Good.