In his essay titled “Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History,” Michel Foucault notes the sense of security that people commonly expect from historians. He says, “We want historians to confirm our belief that the present rests upon profound intentions and immutable necessities” (Foucault, 155). History of course, is only possible by the aid of memory. That which is forgotten cannot be added to what a people considers its history. Nietzsche strongly believes that what is *not* forgotten in modernity, dominates the lives of those within it. In an effort to describe the link between memory and history, Nietzsche writes, “How little moral would the world appear without forgetfulness! (Nietzsche, WP, 514). Morality, memory, and history are concepts that are closely bonded for Nietzsche. In his work, morality as we know it in modernity exists because of the use of a particular *mnemo-technique.* In response to the question, “How does one make a memory for the human animal?” Nietzsche responds, “One burns something so that it remains in one’s memory: only what does not *cease to give pain* remains in one’s memory” (Nietzsche GM, 37). Once a memory of any sort has been burned into the psyche of a person or public, it becomes tyrannical. I take “tyranny” to mean the inability of a person or society to forget the memory which has been burned into them.

Nietzsche describes the tyranny of the “inability to forget” in this way, “Forgetting is hard to overcome because once a morality is formed it “enters consciousness as law.” (Nietzsche, WP, 514**)**. Laws in and of themselves have a historical component since they last through a span of time; they are moral because laws prescribe a code of “right” conduct, and finally they are memories because they have to be remembered.

In this essay, I investigate the conception of “memory” in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. My principal aim is to analyze the way in which morality, memory and history correlate within his larger goal of “self-overcoming.” Throughout his work, he mentions that there exists a degree of remembering that is unhealthy. Nietzsche also refers to the unhealthy influence of “excesses” of history.

In pursuing this aim, I first analyze Nietzsche’s conception of memory. Secondly, I investigate how his conception of “history” relates to social relations in modernity. Finally, I examine the fashion in which morality, memory, and history are integral to Nietzsche’s larger project of “self-overcoming” in both a personal and political context.

**Nietzsche, Memory, and Morality**

The concept of memory for Nietzsche is one that is in constant tension between learning and forgetting. He claims that “whatever we experience, learn, or take into ourselves enters just as little into our consciousness during the condition of digestion” (Nietzsche GM, 35). The fact that only a microcosm of information is actually taken in to the consciousness is because at work within the body is an active forgetfulness. Like the white blood cells within the body that fight germs, this active faculty erases learning experiences that it regards as not useful. Nietzsche describes this active faculty as a doorkeeper, “an upholder of psychic order, of rest…” (Ibid). Unlike a negative faculty that merely *suppresses* what enters the mind, Nietzsche’s forgetfulness prides itself as a “positive faculty of suppression” (Ibid). Unfortunately, for those whose positive faculty of forgetting is damaged they are left with the inability for happiness, hope, or pride. Forgetting, once a representative of a force of “strong health” (Ibid), now constantly malfunctions in such a way that a human being no longer wants to get rid of certain experiences and memories (Ibid). This malfunction Nietzsche attributes to the “memory of the will.” Active forgetting is not the opposite of memory; instead it is only another type of memory. This positive form of memory, which includes the possibility of forgetting, is unhinged by the memory of the will. In this type of memory Nietzsche’s active “healthy” forgetting is excluded.

It is at this point that the mind becomes jumbled and chaotic. The memory of the will is completely the opposite of what Nietzsche refers to before as the doorkeeper who functions as an upholder of psychic order and rest (Nietzsche GM, 35). In the memory of the will, a constant dissonance emerges that interferes with that a person’s capability to will anything at all. Justifying this claim, Nietzsche writes that in the memory of the will, “acts off the will may be placed without reservation between the original “I want,” “I will do,” and the actual discharge of the will, its *act*…” (Ibid 36). The memory of the will is produced by the infliction of pain. I have mentioned this before in the introduction by the mnemo-technique of “burn[ing] something in so that it remains in memory” (Nietzsche GM, 37). The philosopher emphasizes this principle as he makes the polemical claim that “whenever man considered it necessary to make a memory for himself it was never done without blood, torment, sacrifice; the most gruesome sacrifices and pledges…” (Nietzsche, GM, 38). Nietzsche argues that this is the setting in which memory developed, where by these violent processes “one finally retains in memory five, six “I will nots”” (Ibid). I point out here that Nietzsche does not use such devices as education, initiation, and rituals of belonging to his list of the ways that memories are forged.

Now I shall focus on the *actor* who is responsible for taking advantage of the “memory of the will” and using this to painfully burn into the human a memory. Nietzsche takes this actor to be *morality.* Just as Foucault mentioned earlier, people desire that history report that the present relies on profound intentions. Nietzsche finds a similar concept in the idea of morality. He notes the seductive quality of the moral to the human being as he confesses that there is a danger of “falling under its spell” and the “seductiveness of its beautiful gestures and glances” (WP, 146). To emphasize the seductive quality of the moral despite its punitive qualities, I now briefly turn to the work of Arthur Schopenhauer. I shift focus here briefly, to provide a context in which to approach Nietzsche’s disdain for contemporary morality.

**Schopenhauer, the Straightjacket of Morality, and Transfiguration**

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), a philosopher whom acted as an early influence for Nietzsche[[1]](#footnote-1), found no respite from angst in the moral forces of his time. In this I take “moral forces” to mean Christianity. Integral to his philosophy is the notion of the *will.* As this essay progresses I will make clear the influence between this concept and the Nietzschean concept of *will to power* and *self-overcoming.*

The philosopher Charles Taylor, in his book *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (1989), describes the Schopenhauerian will as “nothing but a wild, blind, uncontrolled striving, never satisfied, incapable of satisfaction, driving us on, against all principles, law, morality….an insatiable search for the unattainable” (Taylor, 442). In understanding Schopenhauerian will it is integral to emphasize that *b*y *will* Schopenhauer understands *impulse, striving* (the Greek θέλημα ) and *not*the capacity to deliberate and determine (the Greek βούλησιδ) (Höffding, 225). For Schopenhauer the will is “present in all things” (Höffding, 218) from the lowest things in existence to the higher beings, humankind.

Because the will can find no satisfaction yet still endlessly strives toward what it cannot achieve, humans are left miserable. The will, while present in all of nature is not a source of goodness in Schopenhauer’s estimation. This is in complete opposition to the doctrines of Christianity and Platonism where one finds that nature itself is inherently “good.” The German scholar Harold Höffding describes Schopenhauer’s blueprint of the will as existing in nature *and* man as follows, “the will, which is the essence of man, must also be the essence of the world. The world can only be understood through man. Our essence must be rooted in that which is not appearance, but the thing in itself.” (Höffding, 225).

While Christian morality cannot end the pain brought on by this eternal striving impulse, Schopenhauer believes that the will can be quieted by means of a transfiguration. By transfiguration I mean a total transformation of the self. This transfiguration in his theory comes through art which “quiet the will in us when we grasp the Ideas, the eternal forms which underlie the particular examples we meet in the world of objectifications of the will on their various levels” (Taylor, 443). It is in this moment of transfiguration through art where “all at once the peace always sought but always escaping us…comes to us of its own accord and all is well with us… We celebrate the Sabbath of the penal servitude of willing; the wheel of Ixion stands still.” (Schopenhauer, 196). Schopenhauer’s view of Christian morality is analogous with that of Nietzsche because both theorists aim to “revolt against the whole Christian-inspired requirement that we affirm the goodness of what is” (Ibid, 444). To them the world is not inherently good and worthy of praise.

Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, however, have different conceptions of the will and its perceived end. Nietzsche breaks with Schopenhauer in that the latter wishes to escape from the will altogether, the former wishes the opposite. Nietzsche criticizes Schopenhauer’s conception of the singular will existent within all things as he notes that “Schopenhauer has given us to understand that the will alone is really known to us, absolutely and completely known without subtraction or addition (Nietzsche BGE, 215). Instead of conceiving the will as something to flee from, Nietzsche would rather express the will in all of its fullness. Nietzsche seeks to “explain our entire instinctive life as the development and ramification of *one* basic form of the will---namely, the will to power” (Ibid, BGE, 238). Nietzsche takes this one basic form of will as something more fortified than Schopenhauer’s conception. Nietzsche describes the will as “above all an affect,” which is “is essentially the affect of superiority in relation to him who must obey” (Ibid, BGE, 215). When he asserts that in the power, humankind expresses *“l’effet c’est moi*,”\*[[2]](#footnote-2) Nietzsche, once and for all transforms Schopenhauer’s destructive unwieldy “hopeless striving” into a concept in where the cardinal drive in the living thing wants above all to “*discharge* its force” (Nietzsche, WP, 344). In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche uses his wandering Zarathustra to make this need for expression clear. The wanderer says, “Behold, I am sick of my wisdom, like a bee that has gathered too much honey; I need *hands outstretched to receive it*; I *want to give away and distribute…*” (Nietzsche, GS, 275) (emphasis added). To reiterate, for Nietzsche there is no desire to “turn the will off.” In contrast to Schopenhauer, the will is a striving making one yearn for an escape, it is instead a primal instinct that yearns for *expression*.

I state again that a link between Schopenhauer and Nietzsche exists in their belief that Christian morality does not deliver on its promises. For Schopenhauer this was because Christian morality did nothing to end the tragic, insatiable, striving involved in the will. For Nietzsche however, Christian morality is something much more tyrannical. Especially in that “the will to power can manifest itself only against resistances” (Nietzsche, WP 346). The will to power is itself a morality, infringed upon by Christian morality. Nietzsche asserts that “a philosopher should claim the right to include willing as such within the sphere of morals…” (BGE, 217). Here begins the antagonism between the will to power and Christian morality.

**Nietzsche on the Tyranny of Christian Morality and Its Relationship to Memory**

“*Guilt. Although the most acute of judges of the witches and even the witches themselves, were convinced of the guilt of witchery, the guilt nevertheless was non-existent. It is thus with all guilt”*

(GS, 97)

I have so far engaged the idea that memory is analogous to a “remembering machine” in Nietzsche. A healthy memory is able to filter out what is inessential for life. In other words, it allows for a “healthy forgetting.” On the other hand the memory of the will appears as the unhinging the possibility of healthy forgetting. I have also engaged the Nietzschean idea that the impression of memory onto the individual is always a violent process. This is apparent when he mentions that, “whenever man considered it necessary to make a memory for himself it was never done without blood, torment, sacrifice; the most gruesome sacrifices and pledges…” (GM, 38).

I have used Schopenhauer to introduce the concept of the will. I have attempted to demonstrate Nietzsche’s conception of the will in tandem with Schopenhauer because they both arise out of a disdain for Christian morality. This section of this essay is dedicated to further elaborate and establish the connections between Nietzsche’s concept of Christian morality, memory, and the will (to power).

First, I shall engage the idea of bad conscience. After that, I shall connect it with its use as a mnemo-technique employed by Christianity. Nietzsche takes bad conscience as something analogous to a person constantly hitting themselves in the head with a shovel. By this I mean, a form of behavior where one does not look outward for punishment, but instead punishes himself. In reference to what can be achieved by punishment against humans, Nietzsche writes, “an increase of fear, a sharpening of prudence, mastery of the appetites: punishment thus *tames* man, but it does not make him better” (GM, 56). In the previous section I mentioned that in Nietzsche’s theory, at the base of every living thing is the need to “*discharge* its force” (WP, 344). The concept of bad conscience begins to appear where instincts are not allowed to discharge themselves. Since humans are not allowed to discharge their energies because of the fear of punishment from an outside source, “all instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly *turn themselves inwards…*” (GM, 57). Furthermore, a person’s natural inclination to discharge its power, once suppressed begins to “finally discharge and vent itself only on itself:” and Nietzsche calls, “this, only this, is *bad conscience”* in its beginning” (GM, 59).

What has not been established at this juncture is the identity of the person that drives all others to self punishment. This “person” of whom everyone fears punishment from is the figure of the deity. Nietzsche admits that this relation of the creditor (deity) and debtor (human) has existed for millennia (GM, 61). Nietzsche makes clear that the feeling of guilt and personal obligation is seen in history for the first time in the relationship of the creditor to the debtor. Christianity takes this creditor-debtor relationship and all of the guilt that is associated with it into innovative horizons. Nietzsche even refers to this as “*Christianity’s* stroke of genius. The story of Christianity plays out in such a way that God sacrifices *himself*  for the guilt of man, the omnipotent being sacrifices himself for his debtor (humankind) that they may avoid unspeakable eternal evils (hell) (GM, 63). The trick of Christianity for Nietzsche is that man finds himself unable to repay his creditor. In this relationship, “the will of man to find himself guilty and reprehensible to the point that it cannot be atoned for” (Ibid) wreaks havoc upon the natural inclinations of man. In this I mean, his need to *discharge* his power.

Keeping in mind that the making of a memory involves the “most gruesome sacrifices and pledges” (GM, 38), Nietzsche refers to the memory making of Christianity “the kind of madness of the will in psychic cruelty that has absolutely no equal” (GM, 63). The will is turned in upon itself due to the painful burning in of the Christian morality. This morality by the act of its violent application imprints itself as *memory*. The masochistic language of memory formation in the context of Christianity continues. That Nietzsche asserts that throughout the ages, “the church fights passion with excision in every sense: its practice, its “cure is *castratism”* (TWI, 487). Christianity morality exploits the violent character of memory formation. To keep at bay the natural instincts of mankind, it employs techniques such as castration and extirpation (Ibid) to cause mankind to literally *cross itself out* (GM, 69). In Nietzschean philosophy the passions lie at the foundations of the will. It is there that they ferment and wait for their creative discharge. The mnemo-techniques of Christianity, in opposition to this “attack the roots of passion” which for Nietzsche means attacking the roots of life. Based on this major and minor premise, Nietzsche reaches the conclusion that “the practice of the church is *hostile to life*” (TWI, 487).

Let us briefly define what Nietzsche considers to be “life” before moving on. In *The Antichrist* Nietzsche defines life as an “instinct for growth, for durability, for *power”* (A, 572). Another one of Nietzsche’s premises is that “every healthy morality is dominated by an instinct for life” (TWI, 488). If we take the secondary premise of this syllogism as Nietzsche’s claim that “the church is hostile to life,” the necessary conclusion to this is the claim that “Christianity is an unhealthy form of morality.”

Finally, I bring this section to a close in such a way that reencounters the quote marking the beginning of this section. By this I refer to the quote that mentions that people are often convinced of their own guilt, despite the fact that guilt is merely an invention of Christian morality. An invention violently burned into the human psyche. In Nietzsche’s argument, this unhealthy morality is set up on corrupt foundations of every sort. Nothing but imaginary *causes* (God, soul, “ego…) influencing imaginary effects (sin, redemption, grace…) operate within the Christian memory (A, 582). The relationship between memory and Christian morality for Nietzsche comes to a head in that historically, Christian morality has sought a way to “lie itself out of reality” (Ibid).

**Morality and Memory and their Relationship to History**

In Foucault’s essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” the philosopher invokes Nietzsche to lend weight to his argument that history “operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times” (Foucault, 139). The last section of this paper closed with Nietzsche’s claim that Christian morality attempts to “lie itself out of reality.” The unification of memory, morality, and history becomes apparent in that the “entangled and confused parchments” of history are made to be so to fabricate the “origins of things”. Foucault adopted Nietzsche’s approach of the “genealogy” to “listen to history [to find] that there is “something altogether different behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated” (Ibid, 142). As I have stated before in this essay, Christian morality employs the violent techniques of memory formation to the degree that the two fuse and become “history.”

Nietzsche realizes that the search for *Ursprung,* or “origins,” (Ibid 143) for Western memory may only result in the discovery that “origin always precedes the Fall” (Ibid). That Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Good and Evil and that every Western moral conception, whether Christian or not, descend from this legacy. As the violent mnemo-techniques of Christian morality continually recreate themselves it “forms a history, the history of an error that we call truth” (Ibid, 144). What Foucault recovers from Nietzsche is a conception of history that conceives it as “the concrete body of a development, with its moments of intensity, its lapses, its extended periods of feverish agitation, its fainting spells…” (Ibid, 145). I have mentioned Foucault’s use of Nietzschean devices as a way to introduce Nietzsche’s conception of history. One where historical knowledge, constantly shaped through the union of morality and memory, “is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting” (Foucault, 154).

In Nietzsche’s *Use and Abuse of History*, while written much earlier than *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morality*, shares with these books the idea of healthy versus unhealthy remembering. Earlier I mentioned that Nietzsche found that Christianity was “hostile to life.” In keeping with this concept Nietzsche in use and abuse vehemently criticizes the fashion in which historical study in modernity is hostile to life. The work examines, “The question [of] how far life needs such a service is one of the most serious questions affecting the well-being of man, a people, and a culture. For by excess of history life becomes maimed and degenerate, and is followed by the degeneration of history as well” (Nietzsche UAH, 12).

First, Nietzsche recognizes that for the purposes of memory, “historical study is only fruitful for the future if it follows a powerful life-giving influence…” (Nietzsche 1957, 12). This is in complete contrast to both Schopenhauer’s idea of the will and the hostility to life put forward by Christianity. This contrasts with Schopenhauer in that useful historical study must follow a *life-giving* influence, whereas Schopenhauer’s will is a force which one years to escape from. His concept of history is different to that of Christianity as Nietzsche desires to use history as a tool to *affirm* life and not *deny* it.

According to Nietzsche, an excess of history is dangerous as it maims and degenerates life. This should be a familiar concept in that it is coeval with the idea of “healthy and unhealthy remembering”. The tension between the two poles of an excess and dearth of history presents itself as Nietzsche claims that “history is necessary above all to the man of action…who needs examples, teachers, and comforters” (Ibid). In modernity, the “monumental” view of the past presents itself as knowledge that the great things that existed in times past are possible again. This “monumental view” is what Nietzsche titles his concept of the “monumental history.” This type of history attempts to follow the road set by those who in fact led the “high road for humanity through the ages” (Nietzsche, UBH 13). This is a very difficult hazardous way in which to interpret history, however. Nietzsche asserts in his discussion of this type of history, “monumental history lives by false analogy” (Nietzsche 1957, 16). In modernity, it is commonplace to hear statements that one person is the second coming of another. For example, the propensity in the early 1990s for one to hear one utter that President Clinton was the second coming of President John F. Kennedy. In modernity, the propensity for memory and morality to be so ingrained toward a Christian ideal, is problematic in that “the individuality of the past [is] forced into a general formula and all the sharp angles broken off for the sake of correspondence” (Ibid, 15).

Just as the monumental historians of Nietzsche’s period cared little for the great things that attempted to emerge within that time (Ibid, 17), an analogous situation is produced in modernity through the use of Christian imagery. By this I mean that throughout history, memory and morality are unified in such a fashion in that certain figures are deemed to be templates of which everyone should follow. Monumental history functions for example by searching for the “new Moses” to lead his people (or country, or population) into a promised land. For a contemporary example of this I note the propensity of African-Americans often waiting for the “next great black male leader.” With the establishment of monumental history, it becomes difficult to exist in an age where one does not look to emulate what history has established as worth imitating. One who emerges in his time to be a “new” type of teacher or thinker is greeted with “malice” as “the new is always *the evil*” (Nietzsche GS, 93). That the “new is always the evil” speaks to the fact that the constant recreation of archaic moral values into memory place a diachronic straightjacket around what is considered healthy and what is considered pure evil.

I now turn to Nietzsche’s conception of *antiquarian* history. In the attempt to use history for life, it is not explicitly mentioned exactly how much *should* be remembered. When Nietzsche mentions antiquarian history he implicitly defines it as a type of history that “degenerates from the moment that it no longer gives a soul and inspiration to the fresh life of the present” (Nietzsche 1957, 20). In his formulation it is possible that the reverence paid to times past “whether it be a custom, a religious creed, or a political principle” may prevent a person from attempting to go beyond these customs (Ibid, 21). This is hostile to life because it focuses more upon the past than the present. This type of history, unlike monumental history, does not make unreasonable comparisons but instead posits that everything ancient is good. It is as if “the fact that it has grown old carries with it a demand for immortality” (Ibid, 20). This reverence that this type of history places on the past puts in danger those, whom like Nietzsche, seek to “judge and annihilate the past” (Ibid, 21). Antiquarian history, by use of branding a particular type of morality into the human psyche long ago, leaves modern man with a shaken individuality where, in Nietzsche’s view, “the banishment of instinct by history has turned men into shades and abstractions” (Ibid, 29). Of course, this is his assertion that Christian morality has burrowed itself into the memory of the time in such a way as to cement man’s horizon in a single viewpoint.

I now briefly return to Foucault to introduce Nietzsche’s answer to the question of how to use history for life. In searching for *Ursprung*, by the use of *critical history*, one is able to step back from one’s horizon and realize that “truth is undoubtedly the sort of error that cannot be refuted because it was hardened into an unalterable form in the long process of history” (Foucault, 144). This meaning that it *is* possible to discern that commonly accepted facts of history are nothing more than morality and memory solidified through the ages. In this sense, one does not truly search for *Ursprung* itself, but “identify the accidents, the minute deviations---or conversely, the complete reversals…that give birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us” (Ibid, 146). It is at this point where I tie Nietzsche’s concepts of memory, morality, and history into his larger critique of modernity. This totality of forces destroys man’s inner instinct to discharge its force, or its will to power, in such a way that can only be remedied by an overcoming of the self.

Nietzsche finds that the excesses of history produced by the union of memory and morality to operate in five dangerous ways. First, the personality of the modern man is weakened. Second, man begins to think that his era of history is so much more advanced than that of any previous time[[3]](#footnote-3). Third, the instincts of man are completely thwarted along with that of the nation. Fourth, man finds himself as “mere epigoni” (or an inferior imitation of the good things of time’s past. For example, one could overhear a statement like, “no one will ever surpass the quality of Jesus Christ.” In other words, modern man is defeated in what he (of she) may become before even given the chance to grow (Nietzsche, UBH 28). With this excess of the conglomeration of morality, memory, and history stated, it is no wonder Nietzsche remarks, “”how could we still be satisfied with *present-day man?”* (EH, 755). The only solution to this is that man must create truth. Man must become a destiny (Ibid, 760).

Nietzsche asserts that the historical sense of modernity has abandoned mankind in an abyss where it “wills no more and esteems no more and creates no more” (Ibid, 765). The overcoming of the self is in part employed by the use of the *critically historical sense* mentioned by Foucault and Nietzsche earlier in this essay. For Nietzsche, the human must *feel* that Christian morality is beneath him. This involves creating the proper critical distance “that requires a height, a view of distances, a hereto altogether unheard-of psychological depth and profundity” (Ibid, 787). Only by the use of critical history may the type of man arise who can separate the violence of morality’s historical subjugation of memory and “conceive reality *as it is*” (Ibid). Critical history is essential to Nietzsche’s project, as he makes clear that “*only in that way can man attain greatness*” (Ibid).

**Excess of History as an Enemy to Life in Modernity: From Nietzsche to Theorists of “The Crowd”**

In this final section of this essay, I briefly engage how theorists of modernity have appropriated Nietzsche’s call for self-overcoming. The authors I approach in this are Wilhem Reich, Jose Ortega Y Gasset, and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. It is important to recall that the need for self-overcoming is irrevocably tied to the concepts of morality, memory, and history. My aim in this section is to show that, though Nietzsche constantly makes it apparent that self-overcoming is something that cannot be taught, other critiques of modernity ignore this.

First, Nietzsche makes clear in *Ecce Homo* that “I *want* no “believers”; I think I am to malicious to believe in myself; I *never speak to masses*…” (EH, 782) (emphasis added). Juxtaposed against this Nietzsche calls for a revaluation of all values as his formula for the supreme act of self-examination. This self-overcoming, this use of the will to power engages the use of critical history. This idea is invoked when Nietzsche says, “I was the first to *discover* the truth by being the first to experience lies as lies—smelling them out” (Ibid). That Nietzsche admits openly to never speak to the masses, his project of self-overcoming, in all of its critical senses, should not be expected to be easily assimilated. That Zarathustra, whom Nietzsche says, “completely took over me” (Ibid, 754) found that he could not “make” men into *overmen*, then it seems illogical that other critics of modernity attempt this feat. Zarathustra mentions twice this very point. Once he remarks, “this is *my* way, where is yours?----thus answered those who asked me “the way.” For *the* way---that does not exist” (TST, 307). The wanderer also tells those who follow him looking for instruction that “there are many ways of overcoming: see to that *yourself!”* (Ibid, 311).

I claim that Nietzsche’s critique of modernity is in the end a tragic one. Not everyone may become the overman. Nevertheless, critics of modernity (also known as *crowd theorists*) write with a tinge of resignation at the reality of the lack of overmen in modernity. For an example of this I engage Wilhem Reich. In his polemic *Listen, Little Man!* (1974), he says:

“You’re afraid of heights and depths. Nietzsche told you long ago, far better than I can. He wanted to raise you up to be a superman, to surpass the merely human. His superman became your Führer, Hitler. And you have remained what you were, the subhuman. I want you to stop being subhuman and become yourself” (Reich, 26).

If Reich properly acquainted himself with Nietzschean theory, he would know that self-overcoming is not an option for all. To self-overcome requires the use of critical history. Jose Ortega Y Gasset, of the book *The Revolt of the Masses* (1930) notes the tragic quality of humankind in modernity. He notes that the nexus of morality, memory, and history are wound too tightly to be easily undone. When he writes that “*Man, in a word, has no nature, what he has—is history*,” he acknowledges the limits placed on man by what has come before him (Ortega Y Gasset, 157).

A tragic quality exists in the work of writers such as Wilhelm Reich and for that matter, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt of *Empire (2000)* and *Multitude* (2004). They adopt Nietzschean theory in support of their emancipatory political projects while ignoring that Nietzsche’s critique of modernity stands against this. In *Multitude,* Hardt and Negri engage Nietzsche to found conditions upon which their project of the “Multitude” is possible (Hardt and Negri, 189). Their project is designed to “want to destroy the sovereign by the common” (Ibid, 344) in such a way that a multitude of people all over the globe unravel the nexus of morality, memory, and history to form a body that is “always necessarily an open, plural composition and never become a unitary whole divided by hierarchical organs” (Ibid 190).

What stands in the way of their use of Nietzsche is that he is opposed to concepts of the “common” outright. In the will to power Nietzsche makes apparent that “I am opposed to socialism because it dreams quite naively of “the good, true, and beautiful” (Nietzsche WP, 397). Furthermore he speaks of democracy as analogous to history in that both are contemptuous to the “will to power” (Ibid). For Nietzsche man is something to be overcome, but the masses are necessary for humankind to exist. This is evident in that he says, “we must think of the masses as unsentimentally as we think of nature: they preserve the species” (Ibid, 399). Thus, in the end we find that Nietzsche bears a resemblance to Socrates in that his project of self-overcoming arrives at an impasse. While there are many avenues open toward the goal of self-overcoming, they are not open to all. And it is because of this that political projects invoking Nietzsche’s critique of modernity with a goal of “mass self-overcoming” are doomed to failure.

**Concluding Remarks**

In this essay, I have attempted to make clear the relationship between morality, memory, and history in Nietzsche’s critique of modernity. The inability to forget on the personal level becomes more apparent as it expands on the level of humankind. This we have seen, is due to the fashion in which morality violently marks behaviors into the memory. Of course, since Nietzsche confronts Christian morality most often, this critique is largely directed at the West. Finally, the intertwined coil of morality and memory evolve even greater as they become what is accepted as “history”. The overcoming of this triumvirate of forces, in part, may require usage of Nietzsche’s three conceptions of history. By this I mean the antiquarian, monumental, and critical approaches toward history. It is there that one may discover that, as Ortega Y Gasset mentions, “*Man, in a word, has no nature, what he has—is history*”.

1. See “Attempt at a Self-Criticism in the *Birth of Tragedy*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “I am the effect” (BGE, 216) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This is related to Nietzsche’s future critique of science in *On the Genealogy of Morality.* Just as Christian morality operates as a device that negates the will to power, in modernity, science does this also. Science purports itself to be an all inclusive truth, not much different from Christianity. Both work toward a teleological goal of an “absolute truth.” Nietzsche describes this as he states, “*science today is a hiding place for every kind of ill-humour, unbelief, gnawing worm, despectio sui, bad conscience--- it is the very unrest of being an ideal, the suffering from the lack of a great love, the discontent in an involuntary contentedness”*(GM, 104). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)