

Nietzsche, Personal Honor, and the Concept of
Honor at Washington and Lee University

Allan Galis
Philosophy 493: Honors Thesis
4/7/2006

Introduction

Having spent four years at Washington and Lee University, I have been and continue to be impacted by our Honor System daily in both subtle and explicit ways. As a freshman, I heard the “Leave Now” speech in Lee Chapel and accepted the System without giving it too much thought. However, the more time I spent here, the more important I felt that it was to critically examine the System’s role in my life. Like most students, I would be lying if I said that I, in my time at W&L, had never been tempted to lie, cheat, or steal. Perhaps because of this, I have at times felt tension between myself as an individual and the System as a governing force. But most importantly, it has been integral to my development as a student and a person. Now, as I near graduation, I owe it to myself to deeply consider one of the most influential and important features of my W&L experience—the Honor System.

In this paper, I plan to evaluate Washington and Lee University’s Honor System and the concept of honor at W&L in terms of themes from Nietzsche’s philosophy. While I could have chosen any philosopher’s work as a lens with which to view our Honor System, Nietzsche’s attracted me because I hoped that it would be both difficult and provocative. By assuming a Nietzschean standpoint and critiquing the System, I am not implying that Nietzsche’s arguments have no weaknesses; nor would I attempt to argue that our System is without flaw. Oftentimes it seems that both contain inherent contradictions, yet both remain valuable and helpful for different reasons. It is my hope that this exploration will allow me to consider our Honor System from a unique vantage and return to it, for the better, having seen it in a uniquely different way.

The Honor System of Washington and Lee University

A Short History

Washington and Lee University has maintained a working honor system continuously from the mid-1840s (and possibly earlier) to the present. A letter authored by Richard Watkins, who graduated in 1844, describes a faculty governed honor system and is the earliest surviving evidence of the Honor System.¹ Since its inception, the System has functioned primarily to ensure that students do not lie cheat or steal, and to develop honesty, integrity, and morality in the students while fostering mutual trust in the W&L community.² Following the 1857-1858 academic year, or by President Robert E. Lee's administration, responsibility for the Honor System was placed primarily in the hands of the students.³ At this time however, the system outlined violations of honor more specific than lying, cheating, and stealing and it is unclear how distinct the honor system was from a disciplinary tool. In fact, faculty members monitored the dormitories to ensure that all rules were being followed and that the Honor System would not be needed to punish disobedient students.⁴

In 1905, the "Executive Committee of the Student Body of Washington and Lee University" was formed so that the honor system could be governed by an explicitly defined group of student leaders.⁵ The first Executive Committee governed trial for an honor offense occurred on March 8th and 9th, 1906 in front of the entire student body and decided by a jury of seven students.⁶ Currently, honor trials occur behind closed doors

¹ Gunn, John, *An Essay on the Honor System of Washington and Lee University*, draft: 2003.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Yates, Charles, *Honor Orientation Speech to Freshman*, draft: September 8, 2005.

⁵ Gunn, John, *An Essay on the Honor System of Washington and Lee University*, draft: 2003.

⁶ Ibid.

and the members of the Executive Committee rule on the outcome. On all graded work, students are expected to write "On my honor, I have neither given nor received any unacknowledged aid on this paper, exam, etc."

Nietzsche, The Will, and Action

Much of Nietzsche's philosophy is predicated on his notion of the will and its ramifications for the human situation. Specifically, the will in a Nietzschean context is used in two seemingly contrasting ways. It can be seen simultaneously as one's appetites or desires and also as that person's ability to control and channel appetites, desires, actions, and emotions towards a constructive end. In this sense, the will represents both man's unbridled passions and his capacity to harness these passions so that they can be made useful. Walter Kaufmann charges that "Nietzsche's psychological theory depends on his concept of sublimation...he found more power in self-control, art, and philosophy than in the subjugation of others."⁷ In short, Nietzsche's use of the term "will" is synonymous with sublimation in that desires are not manifested in destructive forms but in ways that can be useful. For example, Nietzsche would likely deride the wildly passionate individual who, although creative, has no self-control and allows his spirit to trample on the wills of others. He would, conversely, likely think little of the rigid individual who controls himself to the extent that he quashes his creative passions for fear of stepping on the toes of others. A strong-willed individual, for Nietzsche, is spirited yet masters his impulses; he lives, in a certain sense, between extremes.

⁷ Kaufmann, Walter, 'Nietzsche, Friederich,' *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Volumes 5 and 6* (Macmillan Publishing Co., New York, 1967), 511.

There have been many interpretations of Nietzsche's concept of the will, possibly because of his often elusive and inexplicit writing style. Kaufmann's interpretation is less severe than most, in that it includes this concept of sublimation which seems to exclude reckless violence.⁸ In considering Kaufmann's interpretation, a person cannot be said to be rightly expressing his will unless it respects the wills of others. This means that the project of self-control is undertaken in relation to others. However, Nietzsche also asserts that the strong willed individual "is bound to reserve a kick for the feeble windbags who promise without the right to do so, and a rod for the liar who breaks his word."⁹ Again, inconsistencies like this prevent any consensus on Nietzsche's will to power but Kaufmann's interpretation will be used for the purposes of this thesis.

Nietzsche argues that "the will, as an affect of command, is the decisive distinguishing mark of self-mastery and force."¹⁰ Intention or command directs the will. Intention, if purposefully directing, guides the will such that an individual's actions allow him to navigate existence in a meaningful way. Martin Heidegger asserts that "All Being is for Nietzsche a Becoming. Such Becoming, however, has the character of action and the activity of willing."¹¹ A person's continuous action which arises out of the will and intention, determines the nature of that person's ever-changing identity. Through creative action, the individual constantly remakes his self. The actualization of the will is action and the being, as the actor, is bound to the action itself; it is a consequence of

⁸ Nazis appropriated and selectively presented portions of Nietzsche's philosophy to suit their political ends. Interpretations of the will to power that allow for violence and destruction are also associated with interpretations made by Nazi Party members.

Kaufmann, Walter, 'Nietzsche, Friederich,' *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Volumes 5 and 6* (Macmillan Publishing Co., New York, 1967), 513.

⁹ Nietzsche, Friedrich, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 60.

¹⁰ Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Gay Science...bk V*, 1886; V 282.

¹¹ Heidegger, Martin, *Nietzsche, Volume I: The Will to Power as Art* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1961), 7.

the will's action. People are characterized by their actions. In Nietzsche's terminology, this characterization of identity can be interpreted through the will to power.

This continuous action is a constant becoming and consequent self-overcoming. Zarathustra proclaims, "And life itself confided this secret to me: 'Behold,' it said, 'I am *that which must always overcome itself.*' Indeed, you call it a will to procreate or a drive to an end, to something higher, farther, more manifold: but all this is one, and one secret."¹² Life is something that must *always* be overcome; in accord with Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal return, this overcoming is perpetual.¹³ Life, indeed the self, overcomes itself in a way that is both creative and destructive, an endless cycle of birth and death. Weaker manifestations of the self are destroyed and buried as stronger are born and rise. Conversely, people often succumb to temptations when they should not which is a falling back into a weaker self; in this case, weakness overcomes a stronger self. In order to rise, man must have something to rise out of and this represents a constant struggle of self-improvement.

In more precise terminology, self-overcoming can be regarded in the context of Nietzsche's use of the term "will." It is no easy task to live passionately yet also to direct or dampen those passions when necessary. While it may be easier, and thus tempting, to allow these passions to freely flow unchecked or to completely constrain them, the strong-willed individual suppresses these urges. These inclinations towards temptation can be seen as failings in, or weak manifestations of, the self. Self-overcoming refers to

¹² Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), 227.

¹³ For the sake of brevity and focus, I have chosen not to go into great detail describing and evaluating the doctrine of eternal recurrence. Walter Kaufmann explains it by assuming that in "a finite number of power quanta in a finite space and an infinite time, only a finite number of configurations are possible. But no end has been reached yet; hence, unless we follow Christianity in positing a beginning of time, the same configurations must recur eternally."
Kaufmann, Walter, 'Nietzsche, Friederich,' *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Volumes 5 and 6* (Macmillan Publishing Co., New York, 1967), 512.

the struggle against and success over these temptations. It is a constant internal struggle because temptations are always present.

In accordance with the doctrine of eternal recurrence, man is never completed, assuming the completed man is the overman, and he must perpetually strive for self betterment. With every struggle to direct the will in a meaningful way, the individual attempts to overcome a weaker version of himself, and, thus, attempts self-overcoming. It is important to note that power is not the end goal of the will, rather a derivative product that emerges from the continuous self-actualization of re-overcoming that extends beyond the self. Moreover, power in this context does not refer to one's ability to control others, it is rather a sense of confidence and self-awareness that accompanies self-mastery.

Sessions' concept of Personal Honor

The concept of "personal honor" is necessary to make Nietzsche's philosophy of the will to power and the W&L Honor System compatible. Lad Sessions asserts that "Personal honor is a virtue of an individual in a certain social context...[it] is a matter of individual character...[and] is measured in terms of how deeply a person is able and disposed to live and act in terms of a certain conception of honor."¹⁴ Personal honor can be seen as an individual's dedication, or promise to one's self, to act honorably. An individual with personal honor wills himself to continuously adhere to his own sense of honor. Sessions emphasizes that the commitment of personal honor is a commitment that the individual makes both to himself and to the honor group.¹⁵ It is a direct relation of

¹⁴ Sessions, Lad, *Personal Honor*.

¹⁵ Conversation with Sessions, 3/15/2006.

trust and loyalty to others. The commitment is deeply felt and integral to that person's identity.

Übermensch

From the will and self-overcoming, Nietzsche develops the concept of the *Übermensch* or overman. Kaufmann describes the overman as the type of "human being who has organized the chaos of his passions, given style to his character, and become creative. Aware of life's terrors, he affirms life without resentment."¹⁶ In this sense, the overman is not a destructive brute who seeks to violently assert influence over others. He is fundamentally a creative being and not interested in unbridled destructive power bent on dominating others. The overman represents the ultimate strong-willed individual who has completely overcome his weaknesses. Because the will is fundamentally important in this quest for overcoming, sublimation represents an integral feature of this overman. Destructive tendencies would be seen as such a weakness and would consequently require overcoming.

Nietzsche does not intend for this to be an attainable goal or a way of being that can actually be achieved. The goal of the overman is to engage in a creative process of self-overcoming, not to achieve any sort of final state.¹⁷ Nietzsche's Zarathustra exclaims, "Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman."¹⁸ The overman functions like an ideal that guides this constant process, and progress can be made towards this example. Man is a developmental step on the way to becoming something greater.

¹⁶ Kaufmann, 511.

¹⁷ Higgins, Kathleen Marie, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra* (Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1987), 81.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 81.

The process of pursuing the overman is one of self-overcoming, and self-overcoming is an unending process. Because the process for reaching this goal is unending, the desired end of the goal, becoming an overman, can never be reached, but only approximated. Every individual constantly falls short of this unachievable goal. However, this endeavor is worthwhile in that it results in individual and, at a social level, communal betterment; Higgins posits that “the overman is a key to a comprehensive vision of the activities of one’s life, and that this vision links one’s own activities to those of others.”¹⁹ Every activity that one performs is an experiment in this constant re-challenging of the self. Higgins notion of communal betterment from individual creative activity is similar to Adam Smith’s metaphor of the invisible hand. The metaphor illustrates how individuals acting self-interestedly can benefit society as a whole. However, is it also possible that individual creative endeavors could result in social chaos? Progress towards this goal of an ongoing process of creative self-overcoming provides incidental side effects, or fringe benefits, for the group in which this person is involved in that he, through willful sublimation, directs his passions to useful and constructive ends. These individuals are not exempt from the everyday tasks that life requires. As Joseph Beuys once asserted, “I demand an artistic involvement in all realms of life...every sphere of human activity. Even the act of peeling a potato can be a work of art if it is a conscious act.”²⁰ In short, to be directed properly and creatively, the will must be sublimated.

¹⁹ Ibid, 81-82.

²⁰ Beuys, Joseph, *Interview with Willoughby Sharp*, Artforum 1969.

The Honor System as it Currently Functions

If a Washington and Lee student is found guilty of violating the Honor System, that student is forced to “Withdraw” from the University and the notation “Withdrew” is placed on her official transcript.²¹ The student is, in effect, forcibly removed from the school and the Honor System. Students at Washington and Lee University abide by the school’s Honor System for one or more of three basic reasons that are relevant to the development of this paper.²² First, a student may follow the Honor System out of a sense of personal conviction such that she maintains a strong sense of personal honor and does not allow herself to cheat. Second, a student may elect not to cheat because she fears the punishment that accompanies the transgression’s discovery (i.e. being forced to leave W&L). Third, a student could acquiescently abide by the System but do so without a true sense of personal honor or conviction.

There can be combinations of motives. For example, a student could act out of a sense of personal honor, but also fear punishment. While it may seem that acting out of fear and a sense of personal honor would taint or make impure the sense of personal honor, acting solely out of a sense of personal honor could be seen as an ideal, like the overman. Acting out of motives other than personal honor, such as fear, are wrong when they are insufficient to result in honorable actions. In other words, if a person would not act honorably without fear of punishment but would with a fear of punishment, then he would not be acting out of a sense of honor. There is a distinction between acting out of a sense of personal honor and acting *only* out of a sense of personal honor. Moreover, motives can change over time. For instance, a person could enter an honor group for the

²¹ The White Book

²² While there are certainly more than three motives for abiding by the System, the three discussed are most important within the context of this paper.

benefits but eventually act out of a true sense of personal honor. This is compatible with the ongoing process of self-overcoming in that the hope to act out of a sense of personal honor is similar to one's seeking the ideal of the overman.

When examining personal honor for students in an academic setting like that at Washington and Lee, Sessions charges that "The code is at best only a fragment of a possible honor code, or of a former honor code; the students don't constitute an honor group; and they follow the rules of academic honesty not as a matter of honor but out of self-interest."²³ In other words, while some students may follow the System out of a sense of personal honor there is another group of students who follow the Honor System acquiescently or out of a fear of punishment.

Indeed, some students' earliest encounters with the W&L Honor System come in the form of intimidation. Every year during orientation, freshmen gather in Lee Chapel to hear the (in)famous "Leave Now" speech. In the 2005 version of the speech, Executive Committee President Charlie Yates III closed the speech by proclaiming, "Perhaps you feel that you will need the occasional illicit crutch to get through college, and would rather go to the kind of place where such behavior is not wholeheartedly condemned. If that is the case, then Washington and Lee is not the place for you, and it is time for you to LEAVE NOW."²⁴ This proclamation is followed by a protracted period of silence allowing time for the unworthy to publicly, and likely humiliatingly, march out of the chapel alone, never to return to W&L. Nietzsche argues, "Wherever justice is practiced and maintained one sees a stronger power seeking a means of putting an end to a senseless raging *ressentiment* among the weaker powers that stand under it (whether

²³ Sessions, *Personal Honor in the Academy (III A)*.

²⁴ Yates III, *Honor Orientation Speech to Freshmen*.

they be groups or individuals)” and would likely see the Executive Committee, a maintainer of the justice system, as a central fault of the system.²⁵

Ideally, students do not cheat because they do not let themselves cheat; however, when coercion and punishment become influencing factors in the maintenance of the System, honor itself is bleached out of the System. The motivations of the honor group members are fundamentally important to the integrity of the Honor System. Ironically, honor is preserved unless the Executive Committee effectively does its job, and in doing that it acts as a police force, and fear becomes a motivating influence in the Honor System.

Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morals*: “Second Essay”

It is important to consider Nietzsche’s understanding of man’s socialization since the Honor System occurs within a social context. In the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche examines the person’s role in a community. He opens the essay by asking, “To breed an animal *with the right to make promises*—is not this the paradoxical task that nature has set itself in the case of man?”²⁶ A promise is an exchange that occurs between two individuals in a social setting, and the gathering of individuals signifies the birth of society. In other words, for promises, between individuals, to be made, people must first exist within a societal structure.

In this example, demands are made of the person making the promise. A will aimed at the perpetuation of the initial act of promising and confidence in one’s beliefs regarding the future are both necessary for a promise to be rightly kept, according to

²⁵Nietzsche, Friedrich, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 75.

²⁶Ibid, 57.

Nietzsche. Man must hold himself accountable to these two points if he desires to fulfill a promise. Nietzsche charges that, “with the aid of the morality of mores and the social straightjacket, man was actually *made* calculable.”²⁷ By holding himself accountable, man renders himself assessable and able to be gauged. This, he asserts, represents the origin of responsibility and man’s uniformity in society.

Parallels can be drawn between this notion of moral promise making and Sessions’ concept of personal honor. Sessions’ charges, “At the heart of personal honor is the virtue...*trustworthiness*.”²⁸ Trust is an essential component for the individual to function within the honor group; without trust, the group is not cohesive and cannot be sustained. This element of trust is accompanied by calculability. With a genuine sense of trust, a person can be expected to and “relied on by others to act in solidarity with and for the honor group.”²⁹ Trust and calculability function concomitantly.

Nietzsche’s example of man voluntarily joining a community is a non-historic one in the sense that, today, joining a society is not a voluntary venture. However, while people do not enter into society on their own accord, they can freely enter into different communities. W&L students, for example, voluntarily abide by the Honor System, thus entering a group that abides by it. In this way, Nietzsche’s non-historic example remains relevant to the W&L situation. Moreover, it is necessary for one to come to an honor group voluntarily, because his sense of personal honor would be unacknowledged if commitment was based on coercion.

Uniformity manifests itself in commonly held beliefs or an accepted code that governs the actions of the group’s members. Nietzsche understands this code to be

²⁷ Nietzsche, Friedrich, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 59.

²⁸ Sessions, Lad, *Personal Honor*.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

morally substantiated. Without these general guidelines, man is not predictable in the sense that other likeminded members of the group cannot evaluate his actions in relation to themselves. For example, without these commonly held beliefs, promises could be discarded when convenient rather than be upheld. These laws allow community members to interpret interactions between individuals which are inherent to societal structures. In short, there would be no group without a commonly held set of beliefs.

For example, when one joins an honor group she makes a promise and thus a commitment to abide by the generally agreed upon set of beliefs. Students at Washington and Lee make commitments to abide by the Honor System; their relation to the group is their commitment to abide by the commonly agreed upon System.

So, the ability to make promises is a consequence of man's becoming generally predictable by entering into society and accepting its moral system. One may be tempted to conclude that Nietzsche would condemn such an adherence. However, he argues that a desirable consequence, the sovereign individual, results when one properly orients himself in such a system. He describes the sovereign individual as "like only to himself, liberated again from morality of custom, autonomous and supramoral...the man who has his own independent, protracted will...a consciousness of his own freedom and power."³⁰ This person controls himself within society by mastering his own will; he is freed by overcoming himself and becoming his own master within the societal framework. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche writes, "To will liberates, for to will is to create: thus I teach. And you shall learn solely in order to create."³¹ Due to his ability to govern himself, this sovereign individual is responsible for the course of his actions.

³⁰ Nietzsche, Friedrich, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 59.

³¹ Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), 318.

Consequently, Nietzsche argues, responsibility and a governing instinct called conscience acts on the individual in a profoundly personal way such that it determines his actions.

Washington and Lee University's Honor System in Nietzsche's Terms

Parallels can be drawn between Nietzsche's account of individuals coming together to form a group and the event of people coming together as a freshman class of Washington and Lee students. When these people first join together as members of the W&L community, they agree to abide by the school's Honor System. That is, they all make a collective promise with one another to be honorable. For Washington and Lee University's Honor System to be successful, all of these students must will themselves to uphold the promises to be honorable that they made when they joined the community and they must be confident in their beliefs to continually reinforce their wills in the future.

There are consequences to willing the perpetuation of this promise. By adhering to this common system, these students make themselves predictable (i.e. they will abide by the system). In this way, students have a reference point for evaluating the actions of fellow students, and the group coalesces. Individual members of this group must continually will themselves to overcome weaker manifestations of themselves who could corrupt their intentions regarding the promise to be honorable. By perpetually overcoming themselves, these individuals become their own masters and free themselves from governance by laws in that they do not act out of a fear of the law but from a sense of personal honor and self-overcoming. Their consciences direct their actions.

These conscience-driven individuals have a responsibility to their own fate which is intertwined with the fate of the community. These sovereign W&L students will

respect other sovereign individuals who rightly and continuously will themselves to perpetuate their promises to act honorably. On the other hand, these same sovereign W&L students will not tolerate the weak-willed individuals who fail to uphold the identical promises that they made. This results in punishment.

Nietzsche argues that, in these social systems, people created entities representing higher ideals of justice both socially (e.g. courts and legal systems) and divinely (e.g. the gods) to insure that suffering and violence would not occur futilely. He charges that people “imagined the eyes of God looking down upon the moral struggle...virtue without a witness was something unthinkable.”³² However, once this overseeing authority is introduced past transgressions are not forgotten and the punished forever carries his guilt with him. The conscience that directs one’s actions also afflicts him resulting in the current concept of guilt that is laden with negative connotations.

While Nietzsche’s proposal sounds fine in the abstract, how could this analogy function in the context of Washington and Lee’s Honor System? Sessions articulates this modern concept of guilt as contextualized by personal honor within an honor system. He charges, “Dishonor, or loss of honor, involves not only guilt over one’s responsibility for breaking or failing to live up to the internalized honor code, but also shame over falling short in the eyes of the other members of the honor group and abusing their trust.”³³ If an individual fails to overcome himself and, in doing so, violates his promise to act honorably as accepted by the honor group he breaches the community’s concord. This person’s dishonorable actions, in effect, remove him from the honor group because his membership in the group depends on his ability to abide by the agreed upon values. By

³² Nietzsche, Friedrich, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 69.

³³ Sessions, Lad, *Personal Honor*.

disavowing the system, he has fallen outside of it and is no longer a member of the community. The dishonorable actions themselves result in the person's expulsion from the Honor System. In another sense, he also becomes a debtor to the System. Nietzsche charges that "the community...stands to its members in that same vital basic relation, that of the creditor to his debtors."³⁴ This debt or unmet promise is rectified by punishment. The violator must give-up something that he owns of sufficient value to level his transgression. In Nietzsche's context of the community, "the community, throws him back again into the savage and outlaw state...it thrusts him away."³⁵ The person's exclusion from the honor group is deemed sufficient punishment for the disruption of the honor community.

Ideally, the individual's expulsion would happen in practice as it had functionally—that is, his physical removal from the group would occur concomitantly with the breach of promise. In theoretical terms, a student removes himself from the Honor System when he elects to operate outside of its bounds. But since most individuals who violate the honor code do not leave W&L of their own volition, an authority of justice is needed to ensure the integrity of the Honor System. At W&L, the Executive Committee fills this capacity. Nietzsche would contend that this overarching entity bears witness to the punishment of offenders so that the suffering is not senseless but also, as a consequence of observing, induces shame and guilt. The offender stands in judgment before his elected peers behind closed doors. The individual is violated and gives something of himself (e.g. his identity as a W&L student) to adjust the proverbial balance sheet: The community bears witness to this punishment when flyers are posted

³⁴ Nietzsche, Friedrich, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 71.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 71.

about the campus detailing the nature of the offense. In other words, they are assured of the system's integrity, which allows for their continued belief in the future maintenance that the promise to act honorably will be upheld. Practically speaking, the EC's role as an exacter of justice is necessary to maintain the System.

The Herd and The Importance of Personal Honor

In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche introduces the concept of the herd. He argues that elements such as guilt, sin, and condemnation from an overarching justice system reduce individuals who are not sovereign (i.e. individuals who are not willfully overcoming themselves) to members of the herd. Other sick, but more powerful individuals use this system to suppress the wills of the herdsmen and augment their own powers. Nietzsche calls these people ascetic priests. The ascetic priest offers comfort from the hardships of life but no cures for them; by doing so, he perpetuates the enslavement of the herdsmen.

In Nietzsche's eyes, these herdsmen are sick and "*harmless*, to work the self-destruction of the incurable, to direct the *ressentiment* of the less severely afflicted sternly back upon themselves—and in this way to *exploit* the bad instincts of all sufferers."³⁶ The wills of these sick individuals are neutralized by a system of sin and guilt or transgression and punishment. They do not question this system because they believe, as they are told to believe by the ascetic priests, that salvation from the system lies in the system itself. Nietzsche contends that although they are imprisoned by the system, they falsely understand it as a means to ultimate liberation. The system could ultimately be good, but herdsmen will nevertheless be imprisoned by the system because their wills are

³⁶ Ibid, 128.

rendered impotent. Freedom only occurs when an individual wills himself to overcome himself. These people cannot be sovereign as long as they unquestioningly buy into this system of transgression and punishment as instituted from an external power (i.e. a power that is not of the self).

The misdirection of the will and a failure to overcome the self result in one's falling prey to the ascetic priest and being corralled into the herd. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche contends that grammatical systems mislead people from correctly understanding the true nature of the will and its relation to identity. More specifically, he argues in the first essay that it leads people to wrongly believe that subjects and predicates are distinct and able to be separated. In other words, actions and actors are one and the same; they are both manifestations of the will.

To illustrate this misunderstanding he cites an example using animals. Nietzsche imagines that lambs see birds of prey as evil because they kill lambs, and see themselves as good because they are the antithesis of birds of prey which are evil. He posits, "if the lambs say among themselves: 'these birds of prey are evil; and whoever is least like a bird of prey, but rather its opposite, a lamb—would he not be good?'"³⁷ However, a bird of prey is not evil because it kills; it is simply a bird of prey because it kills. It is what it is because of what it does—actions and identity are closely related. In another example, Nietzsche contends that the statement "lightning flashes" is misleading because lightening and flashing are inseparable.³⁸ The lightening is the flash. Nietzsche asserts "To demand of strength that it should not express itself as strength, that it should not

³⁷ Ibid, 44-45.

³⁸ Ibid, 45.

desire to overcome...is just as absurd as to demand of weakness that it should express itself as strength.”³⁹

In this way, the herdsman’s identity as a herdsman is a secondary manifestation of that person’s actions. While this appears logically circuitous it is a straightforward claim. One’s actions and his identity are two different forms of one common element, the will. Nietzsche asserts that “‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything.”⁴⁰ Action, being a consequence of will, is fundamentally important.

Next it must be examined whether this herd phenomenon proves problematic for a Nietzschean-tinted view of the Washington and Lee Honor System. From a Nietzschean perspective, one could argue that this honor system represents another system of transgression and punishment employed to neutralize the wills of those who adhere to it. Moreover, the fact that so many people abide by the same system of beliefs, and consequently act similarly, it seems that that the system reduces these individuals to herdsmen who cannot become sovereign.

From the perspective of Washington and Lee’s Honor System, a Nietzschean would be seen to act without personal honor. His apparent dismissal of the System qua system make the two wholly incompatible. In Washington and Lee’s terms, students who abide by the Honor System are not considered sheep but model citizens. Those who agree with the System do not understand it to be a mere scheme of transgression and punishment but something vitally important for the health of the school and the moral development of the students.

³⁹ Ibid, 45.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 45.

Initially, it appears that Nietzsche's philosophy and the Washington and Lee Honor System are incompatible. The Honor System strives to provide a common good, and Nietzsche contends that the common good is of little value and is the road to sickness and subjugation.⁴¹ Is there no way for the exceptional person to be a member of an honor society? Could a Nietzschean rightly be a member of the W&L community?

Art as the Sublime Example of The Will to Power

For Nietzsche, art is a fundamental event of creative action directed by the will. He proclaims, "Art and nothing but art! It is the great means of making life possible, the great seduction to life, the great stimulant of life... Art as the *redemption of the man of action*."⁴² For Nietzsche, the creative and artistic life is the ultimate assertion of the will; he contends, "To will liberates, for to will is to create."⁴³ Consequently, a creative life represents liberation from weaker manifestations of the self that are subjugated by individuals with stronger yet misdirected wills, not because the self dominates something or someone else, but because it overcomes itself and manifests itself beyond itself. Simply put, artistic creativity represents passion harnessed and put to use in a project.

Heidegger argues that "For Nietzsche art is the essential way in which beings are made to be beings."⁴⁴ In this way, artistic actions exemplify the will to power. The creation (i.e. the act of creating) of art rather than the final product asserts the creator's identity. The artist, by the directive power of the will, creates, stands alone and states,

⁴¹ The W&L White Book asserts, "By demanding that all students act honorably, and thereby secure for themselves the resulting benefits, the System instills in men and women of Washington and Lee an enduring respect for the value of honorable conduct."

⁴² Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Will To Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 452.

⁴³ Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), 318.

⁴⁴ Heidegger, Martin, *Nietzsche, Volume I: The Will to Power as Art* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1961), 131.

“Here I am. Here is my work. How is this to be judged?” The final work of art should not, for the artist, be evaluated by anyone else. His is the only critic’s voice that he finds important; it is important to him only to remain true to his own artistic spirit.

Judgment and evaluation, other than his own, are irrelevant to the Nietzschean artist who creates art simply because that is who he is as inseparable from his will. Praise or indictment of the artistic product are irrelevant to the artist because the work itself is relevant only as an after-the-fact roadmap of the creative processes that shaped the work. In one sense, the work is only residue leftover from the act of creation and the assertion of the will. For this artist, the work could be destroyed after its completion. The product of creation is secondary as a representation of creative activity. Again, the act itself is fundamentally important.

The Nietzschean Artist in a Social Context

Nietzsche’s strong-willed individuals are often portrayed as rugged individuals who shun communities to seek their liberated mode of being. Because this thesis seeks to examine Washington and Lee’s Honor System in terms of Nietzsche’s philosophy, and this system takes place within a social context, this tendency to view Nietzsche’s approximation of the overman as wildly individualistic must be overcome and reconciled with the communal nature of W&L’s System.

Individual efforts of self-overcoming have repercussions at the communal level. In other words, when individuals living together work to better themselves, the group as a whole similarly is bettered and benefits. Higgins asserts that “The energetic, vibrant involvement with the life of the world demanded by the project of aspiration toward the

overman necessarily involves interaction with other human beings.”⁴⁵ In this sense, being with other people is a part of life and consequently part of the self-overcoming necessary for the approximation of overman. If an individual seeking the overman did not interact with other people he could misunderstand how people live within society and how society works; it is a way for him to understand society. Nietzsche’s strong-willed individual must be with others to confront his own social weaknesses and understand that part of human existence. For example, Zarathustra, rather than remain isolated and outside of a social context, descends from his mountaintop cave to share his message with others. Even if those to whom he preaches do not grasp his message, he perseveres because he regards social involvement as an integral part of the human experience.⁴⁶ To emphasize that the overman project has consequences that extend beyond the individual, Zarathustra states, “You cannot groom yourself too beautifully for your friend: for you shall be to him an arrow and a longing for the overman.”⁴⁷ So, the overman must experience social life. However, what sort of social life could this overman lead?

Nietzsche considers the artist the finest example of the creative will and self-positing. As Higgins characterizes overman, his “mode of being is continuously creative; the overman’s present being and all that he carries over from the past are squandered in acts of creativity towards the future.”⁴⁸ He is creatively and artistically future oriented and can be so in or out of a social context. Consider an artist colony such that artists live together as a vibrant group. They work, as artists, side by side. All of the artists pursue separate endeavors, but they meet as peers because they are each acting individually and

⁴⁵ Higgins, Kathleen Marie, *Nietzsche’s Zarathustra* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 82.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 82.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 82.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 81.

creatively in their own fields. Illustrating the uniqueness of each person's endeavor, Zarathustra charges, "Go your *own* ways! And let the people and peoples go theirs."⁴⁹ The individuality of each creative action makes codifying this setting inappropriate. Criteria for the judgment of the works, relevant to the individual artists, cannot be established.

Since the artists are all focusing on their own acts of creation that are beyond the relevance of evaluation, boundaries that correspond to a system like W&L's Honor System are eliminated. In short, the artist has no motivation, and consequently no temptation, to lie, cheat, or steal regarding his own work. Ironically and incidentally, if evaluated in terms of Washington and Lee's Honor System he would be deemed honorable.

However, it must be noted that this recognition of honor in the artist in terms of W&L's Honor System would merely be superficial. That is, someone objectively evaluating that person's actions in terms of W&L standards of honor would deem this person honorable whether he is or is not honorable. Doing what honor requires is not equivalent to acting out of a sense of honor. Sessions' work explores this sense of honor by way of the concept of personal honor.

Personal Honor and Nietzschean Integrity

Fundamental differences between the System's goal in honor and Nietzsche's approximation of the overman can be understood in terms of differences between Sessions' personal honor and what will be referred to as Nietzschean integrity. Sessions asserts that "belonging to an honor group means adhering to a set of rules that is socially

⁴⁹ Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), 321-322.

shared and publicly supported.”⁵⁰ Personal honor refers to one’s ability to live in accordance with a socially shared set of rules within the context of an honor group. The group is composed of others committed to living in accordance with the same shared set of rules. Personal honor requires a group or social setting because one’s personal honor is measured in terms of his commitment to the virtues determined by the group.

Nietzschean integrity can be understood as a commitment to a personal creative endeavor or an incorruptible adherence to a sense of one’s own artistic values. In another sense, this could be seen as a dedication to the approximation of the overman by continuously pursuing better manifestations of the self. Like the overman, this person of Nietzschean integrity would not be a physically destructive brute but would be dedicated to a personal project that represents an active representation of the will.

Nietzschean integrity is similar to Sessions’ notion of commitment honor. Sessions contends that in commitment honor “someone honors something by upholding it, by keeping it, by being committed to it.”⁵¹ It is one’s relation to something more abstract like a principle, promise, agreement, or other type of proposition.⁵² This commitment is maintained in both word and deed. A person’s unwavering commitment to his creative project could be evaluated as a form of commitment honor.

However, Sessions also asserts that commitment honor can also be “misguided commitment, to a defective principle [or an] inappropriate commitment, according too much or too little regard to one principle in relation to others.”⁵³ This is compatible with

⁵⁰ Sessions, Lad, *Personal Honor*.

⁵¹ Sessions, Lad, *Commitment Honor*.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

Nietzschean integrity in that neither allows for commitment to violently destructive ends that subjugate others. In short, both acknowledge limitations.

A Nietzschean Take on Personal Honor

That Sessions requires this state of personal honor to occur exclusively in social contexts appears problematic for Nietzschean integrity because these contexts are bound by socially shared rules. Indeed, systems inherently are constituted by rules. For Nietzsche, codes or rules demean the creative spirit in that they subjugate the will to power. Even systems without “explicitly codified” rules are governed by limits.⁵⁴ For example, the Washington and Lee Honor System is not thoroughly codified but “lying, stealing, and cheating are clear examples of breaches of the Honor System.”⁵⁵ While not all possible violations are outlined, these three acts function as broad examples that delineate the boundaries of the Honor System. From another perspective, they could be seen as the center or core of the System such that other breaches of honor build upon them. In any case, they act as general guidelines.

Systems are necessarily demarcated because without some rules, even informal ones, there could exist no system as distinct from any other. This boundary, despite its broadness, in a Nietzschean context, could be seen as a limit to the creative capacity and an affront to the will and consequently the self that stops short of the need for sublimation in the context of the will and overman. In other words, the System would determine a person’s sublimation of the will, robbing him of his ability to overcome himself. To adhere to this system *despite one’s self* would be a neutering of the will. In Nietzschean

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ The White Book, 2.

terms, someone abiding by the Honor System for the sake of the System itself and consequently being deemed honorable in the context of the system would be falling in line with the herd and denying his creative spirit. This represents a fundamental divide and breaking point between Nietzschean philosophy and Washington and Lee University's Honor System. It would *appear* that the two are incompatible. To examine this *apparent* incongruity, several hypothetical examples will be presented.

Two Characters

Consider the example of the seemingly model W&L student who abides by the Honor System in all facets of his life. Prior to enrolling, he thought that the Honor System would be one of the school's positive features, but beyond that he really did not give it much thought. Following the Orientation Week lectures and group discussions he decides, and thus wills himself, to follow it to the letter. In his time at W&L, he never does anything that, in terms of the System, would be deemed dishonorable. He does not lie, cheat, or steal and attempts, in all situations, to do what is honorable. This person could follow the system for, at least, one of two reasons: (1) he could abide by the system out of a fear of punishment or (2) he could, after reading the White Book and hearing the Orientation Week information sessions on the System, decide that it is simply easier to abide by the System than not abide by the System and that he, as a student at W&L, should follow the System. For this student, the perks of un-proctored exams and unlocked buildings would factor strongly into his decision to abide by the System. After all, honor pervades all aspects of campus life and everyone else seems to be following the System. This character will be called the acquiescent student.

Similar to the example of the artist in the artist colony, someone externally evaluating this student's honor in terms of the System's standards would deem him honorable. From the outside, in the context of the Honor System, this person would be viewed as honorable. However, Nietzsche would contend that this person falls in line with the rest of the herdsmen by placing his autonomy wholeheartedly in the hands of those in power. He neglects his creative spirit, and consequently his will, by giving himself over to the System's limiting rules. His creative spirit would be rendered entirely impotent and he would be reduced to a common herdsman, blinded and duped. Again, it must be noted that doing what the System requires is not equivalent to acting out of a sense of honor. This student has not personally appropriated and internalized personal honor as Sessions describes, but follows the System out of convenience and in virtue of the fact that everyone else seems to be abiding by it. In summary, this character would, externally, be deemed honorable by the Honor System, but have no Nietzschean integrity, commitment to self-overcoming, or fundamental consideration and acceptance of the System which would result in acting out of a sense of personal honor.

Next, consider a member of the Washington and Lee Student Body who chooses cheating as his artistic medium and the Honor System as his canvas. Focused on the act of cheating itself, rather than the outcome of supposedly good grades or high social standing, he wills himself to cheat the System in creative and masterful ways. He may see the System as one of transgression and punishment, and consequently a fear-driven system. Moreover, he could view it as corrupt and a diversion from the development of 'true honor,' which is why he meddles with it. He could arbitrarily choose this as his creative endeavor; the reasons behind the project are of little consequence in terms of its

application. This character will be called the artistic cheater. Superficially, he will resemble, in every way, the student who abides by the Honor System as an expression of personal honor or for any other reason. He will, if caught, accept his punishment of being forced to leave W&L, and in doing so honors the Honor System yet simultaneously flouts it.

But, does this artistic cheater represents Nietzsche's strong-willed individual? He perpetually overcomes himself in terms of his commitment to his creative project. The project is difficult and requires wit and guile. Like the acquiescent student, this artistic cheater would externally be deemed honorable. Indeed, the goal of his project is to appear honorable in the eyes of his fellow students; precisely because he cheats the System masterfully and his cheating is not detected he is deemed honorable. Clearly, this cheater is not acting out of a sense of honor and so he could not have personal honor as Sessions defines it in the context of this System, although he may or may not have Nietzschean integrity.

To understand whether or not this character represents Nietzschean integrity, it is important to consider the previously established notion of the will that underlies the artistic cheater's actions. This project occurs in relation to others. Is this project too damaging and reckless to be accepted as a viable artistic and creative project? Externally, the artistic cheater appears to be a model student, an example that others should strive to follow, and in doing so he contributes to the System's authority and maintenance. This could be a complex and ironic critique of the Honor System. He is willing to accept the punishment and in doing so operates within the bounds of the System. So, do these dubiously redeeming qualities support this project?

In the end, no. Nietzschean creativity should be beyond resentment or impulse towards destruction, even in this scenario of playing an ironic game with the System. In choosing this System, the artistic cheater's actions could be damaging and rancorous. He could ambiguously appear to have Nietzschean integrity in the sense that he would wholeheartedly pursue this difficult creative project, but it neglects the aforementioned definition of the will. This character has neither personal honor nor Nietzschean integrity.

Importantly, the Honor System, in terms of personal honor, and Nietzschean integrity look deeper than behavior—to intent. Considerations of behavior are considerations of appearances and appearances are of little value when judging whether or not one is acting rightly in terms of personal honor. One could act in accordance with the System, but do so for the wrong reasons rather than out of a sense of personal honor. These would not be truly honorable actions. A person could act in a certain way, but without a deeply considered commitment, he would not be acting out of a sense of Nietzschean integrity. Motives are fundamentally important.

Risk and motive are essential in considering the examples of the artistic cheater and the acquiescent student. The acquiescent student, in adhering to the system, takes no risk and acts neither out of a sense of personal honor nor Nietzschean integrity. He takes no risk because he has no creative endeavor; he simply gets along with and in the System. Following the System is the safe way to maintain his supposed honor in that it cannot be jeopardized by doing so. There could be an exception such as being framed for an Honor Violation, but this is itself an Honor Violation.

In giving his will, and consequently self, over to the System's judgment of honor, he is nobody unless he can see himself as honorable in terms of that system. This person

feels that honor lies in the hands of the System and not with the self because it is judged in terms of how well he can follow the rules. In this sense, this acquiescent student is self-interested. By unquestioningly adhering to the System, he believes that he can maintain his sense of self by patterning his self after it. He represents the ultimate herdsman in that he feels success lies within the system itself. He has been duped into measuring his self-worth in terms of a system of transgression and punishment that confines his creative potential. Adherence and identity are bound together in this way and the self is lost.

The artistic cheater takes great risk in covertly not adhering to the Honor System. Because of the nature of his risk, he does not have a true sense of personal honor in terms of Sessions' definition. His risk is not that he will be kicked out of school, but that his project will fail. When his supposed honor is exposed as a sham, his artistic project fails in that his creative will was not strong enough to maintain it. He was not crafty enough to foresee all of the creative maneuvering that his project required.

Interestingly, this example differs from the artists in the artist colony in that a criterion for judgment is inherent in the project. Because his project is to fool a group of people, indeed an entire system, his project, and consequentially his creativity and will, can be judged in terms of how convincing it is. If the project is not convincing then it is a failure. While this artistic cheater may believe that he is creatively pursuing his individual project which lifts him out of the herd, he has merely duped himself. His misdirected will does not provide any sense of Nietzschean authenticity but relegates him to the herd.

Nietzschean Integrity Compatible With Washington and Lee's Honor System

Thus far, two characters have been examined in the context of W&L's Honor System. Both appeared to meet the System's standard of honor in that they externally appeared to abide by it. However, when all is made transparent it becomes clear that neither meet the standards of both Nietzschean integrity and Sessions' personal honor. The acquiescent student does not have personal honor because he is not acting from a sense of honor, nor does he have Nietzschean integrity because he does not seek to overcome himself by way of his creative will and falls in line with the rest of the herd. The artistic cheater appears to demonstrate Nietzschean integrity in that he is committed to an artistic endeavor, but he acts in a rancorous manner and disregards honor as interpreted by the System and consequently does not even approach its ideal.

Is it possible for a Nietzschean to live and operate in terms of W&L's Honor System? Could the System accommodate such an individual pursuit and could this pursuit rightly be directed within the System? Nietzsche asserts that "a virtue must be *our own* invention, *our* most necessary self-expression and self-defense: any other kind of virtue is merely a danger."⁵⁶ How can an adopted honor system be the adopter's invention? It appears that the System existed prior to the person's adopting it and so it would not be that person's creation. In this context, it seems that the virtue can belong only to the individual who created it and cannot be rightly derived in others.⁵⁷ But is this not a limitation on the sovereign strong willed individual?

If the sovereign individual is truly free, she should have the choice to regard a set of beliefs, evaluate them in terms of her own will, and decide whether to discard that set

⁵⁶ Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Antichrist* (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), 577.

⁵⁷ Foot, Philipia, *Nietzsche's Immoralism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 6.

of beliefs or internalize them as her own. For her not to be able to do this is a personal constraint and an affront to her sovereignty; if she cannot will this decision, she is, in effect, a captive of the system that she claims to be liberated from. The truly sovereign individual directs her will in ways oriented to perpetually overcome herself, and if this means evaluating and adopting a code of honor then it should be compatible with Nietzsche's philosophy concerning the will.

This has important implications for the identity of the honorable sovereign individual. Sessions asserts that "a person with a sense of honor regards her honor as...necessarily connected to her sense of self—without her honor she is diminished, defiled, reduced, or ruined."⁵⁸ This is analogous to Nietzsche's eradication of the distinction between subject and predicate in that Sessions' individual of personal honor is inseparable from her honor. Her sense of honor and her honorable actions are bound to her will to be honorable. Nietzsche would hold that her identity as an honorable person and her honorable actions are both manifestations of the will.

It then follows that there should be no restrictions on more than one sovereign individual adopting the same or very similar sets of belief. That is, multiple sovereign individuals could hold common beliefs. Referring back to Sessions' definition of personal honor, one can see that it is rooted in a social context; he argues that "[personal honor] is intelligible only in terms of a certain social backdrop."⁵⁹ Honor abstracted in the isolationist does not make any sense. To whom would this honorable isolationist act honorably and if he is unable to *act* honorably then what is to become of his will and,

⁵⁸ Sessions, Lad, *Personal Honor*.

⁵⁹ Ibid, *Personal Honor*.

consequently, his identity, his very core? Honorable action requires an actor, an event, and a party that is acted on; importantly action in this sense necessitates multiple parties.

How would this strong willed Nietzschean fit into W&L's Honor System?

Consider a third example whereby a student, before coming to Washington and Lee University, researches the Honor System thoroughly and debates its merits and its drawbacks. While she is aware of the benefits that accompany the System such as unproctored tests, a safer campus environment, and self-scheduled exams, she is not really interested in them, but instead decides that the ideals of the System would, in Nietzschean terms, be a way for her to overcome her self in a quest for the approximation of the overman.⁶⁰ She decides that appropriating and internalizing the Honor System will be her artistic endeavor and that all of her actions will be in accordance with the System and carried out from a sense of personal honor. In doing so, she accepts the System on her own terms and is immune from falling prey to the herd. Whether or not the System is one of fear—transgression and punishment—is irrelevant for this student, because she is not motivated by these factors but from a willed, creative goal to act and live in a sense of personal honor. She will be called the truly honorable student.

This person represents the nexus of personal honor and Nietzschean integrity, in that she acts out of a sense of personal honor and is committed to an artistic endeavor. Necessarily the creative project and the actions of personal honor in accord with the Honor System are one and the same. She has made the System her own and, consequently, would be deemed honorable by the System.

⁶⁰ While she does not necessarily have to think about it explicitly in Nietzschean terms these Nietzschean themes would be underlying motives in her decision. She would not even need to be aware of his philosophy to make a decision that agrees with it, but this decision will be examined in the context of these themes for the purpose of this thesis.

Moreover, this deeply personal sense of honor is, in all likelihood, what the Honor System seeks to instill in its students. The White Book contends that the “System instills in men and women of Washington and Lee an enduring respect for the value of honorable conduct,” but this is not enough in virtue of this truly honorable student. While respect for honorable actions will likely have communal benefits, respect alone could lead a student into the folds of the herd. Respect, like commitment honor, can be misguided in that it can be defective or misinformed.

The development of personal honor within students, in the sense of this truly honorable student, should be fundamentally important. Nietzsche emphasizes the individual. When the System overrides the individual, the will is marginalized and the self is lost. However, when there is a unity of the self and the System, they can coexist without friction; the individual develops a strong sense of personal honor thus living up to the ideals of the System while maintaining autonomy of the will.

The System as Compatible with The Nietzschean Ideal

What would the union of Nietzschean philosophy and the Washington and Lee Honor System resemble if they were compatible? This model represents an extrapolation of the example of the student who acts out of a sense of personal honor and Nietzschean integrity. Every member of the W&L community must meet Nietzsche’s requirements to be sovereign individuals. That is, they cannot unquestioningly accept the Honor System. They must regard the System, evaluate it in terms of their individual wills, and choose to internalize the System by making it their own. They each must perpetually overcome themselves to continuously adhere to the system.

First, it must be noted that this System is an unrealistic ideal in that it seems that all members of this System would be overmen. It has already been argued that the overman represents an unattainable ideal. Man is inherently flawed, imperfect, and constantly falling short of himself. He is not overman. Moreover, there is no way to make clear the intentions of each student who joins the System. Transparent motives or intentions make calculability and trust measurable and thus provides a way to ensure their integrity which would be vital to this ideal System. Motives cannot be made truly transparent. Because the overman is an ongoing process, it appears that this ideal System would also be an ongoing process. But just as maintaining this challenge of the overman is a valuable and worthwhile endeavor, so is the consideration of this System, for even if it is unattainable as a final product, lessons can be learned from it.

For the System to actually be a unified and functioning system, these people must come together as likeminded individuals (e.g. come together as a freshman class). However, it must be noted that even though these sovereign people have come together the focus remains almost predominately at the individual level; after all, the individual overcoming himself makes possible the sovereignty necessary to rightly adopt this system. Sessions asserts, “a sense of honor also involves mutual recognition of the other members of the honor group: not only acknowledging their membership in the group but also monitoring and evaluating their behavior (according to the shared code).”⁶¹ In other words, behavior must be policed to ensure compliance and the perpetuation of the System.

While Nietzsche does assert that these sovereign individuals will respect other sovereign individuals within the System, he will not tolerate those unable to assert their

⁶¹ Sessions, *Personal Honor*.

wills to overcome themselves (i.e. people unable to act honorably).⁶² However, non-sovereign individuals cannot be members of this System and the System remain compatible with Nietzschean philosophy. It must be comprised entirely of sovereign individuals. Introducing weak-willed individuals could transform the System, in part, to one of transgression and punishment and could introduce acquiescent students.

If every member of the community is a strong-willed individual then it follows that the community as a whole will be strong concerning a collective will to remain honorable. Pertaining to the monitoring that Sessions argues is necessary in an honor community, Nietzsche contends that “As its power increases, a community ceases to take individual’s transgressions so seriously, because they can no longer be considered as dangerous and destructive to the whole.”⁶³ Simply put, the stronger a society becomes, the less the individuals in that society must be policed. A community comprised entirely of overmen should not need to police itself because each member of the group should monitor his own behavior to ensure that it is compatible with the commonly agreed upon concept of honor.

So, in a Nietzschean honor system external policing bodies are replaced by the internal consciences of each member of the group who will themselves to act honorably. In terms of Washington and Lee’s Honor System, this would render the Executive Committee, so far as it enforces the System, unnecessary. Ironically, the existence of the Executive Committee, among other characteristics, prevents the W&L Honor System from meeting Nietzschean standards. To meet these standards, the W&L community should be strong enough that individuals act honorably in the absence of such a body.

⁶² Nietzsche, Friedrich, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 60.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 72.

Sovereign individuals who consider, appropriate, and internalize the System and develop senses of personal honor simultaneously free themselves from the subjugation of the herd and join together into a supreme honor group. They become free as a consequence of their willing a self-overcoming and they necessarily coalesce into the group when they adopt codes of personal honor because personal honor must be regarded in social contexts. For this Honor System to work, it must be comprised exclusively of supremely strong-willed individuals who govern themselves, and who are not bound by any sort of police force.

Conclusion

Perhaps as a testament to Nietzsche's legacy, our age is marked by the technologically empowered individual. Technology provides individuals with unprecedented amounts of information regarding the world in which they live. Man seems to be perpetually retreating into increasingly personal and individualized spaces, yet he remains a part of a larger societal framework.⁶⁴ This juxtaposition can often lead to tension. Indeed, "individualism fears the specter of collectivism, the menace of the mob, the inauthenticity of the common herd."⁶⁵ The technologically empowered man, in his apparent autonomy, often seems to become increasingly alienated. In this age that places such a premium on individualism, where does an Honor System like W&L's, which appears to require conformity, fit in?

In my exploration of our Honor System and Nietzschean philosophy, I have concluded that individualism and a sense of honor in terms of the System are not

⁶⁴ Domains like facebook.com and myspace.com represent how technology provides space that can be personalized within a larger network.

⁶⁵ Sessions, *Academic Honor*.

mutually exclusive. The key is to live in the intersection of the two. It is possible to retain autonomy of the will while participating in the System if one participates on his own terms and out of a sense of personal honor. In the end it seems that this is really the only way to rightly function within the Honor System because it is the only meaningful way to partake. Will one find meaning by fearing the System or simply going along to get along? Unlikely. Is Nietzsche's radical individualism feasible? No. In the context of Nietzsche's philosophy, W&L's Honor System can be extremely beneficial in terms of moral development as well as contributing to a sense of communal trust so long as students conscientiously look to the System with one eye on the community at-large and the other on creative individual development of personal honor.

Bibliography

Beuys, Joseph, *Interview with Willoughby Sharp*, Artforum 1969.

Foot, Philipia, *Nietzsche's Immoralism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994).

Gunn, John, *An Essay on the Honor System of Washington and Lee University*, draft: 2003.

Heidegger, Martin, *Nietzsche, Volume I: The Will to Power as Art* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1961).

Higgins, Kathleen Marie, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987).

Kaufmann, Walter, 'Nietzsche, Friedrich,' *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Volumes 5 and 6* (Macmillan Publishing Co., New York, 1967).

Kaufmann, Walter, *Nietzsche: Philosopher Psychologist Antichrist* (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1956).

Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Beyond Good and Evil* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

Nietzsche, Friedrich, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Antichrist* (New York: The Viking Press, 1968).

Nietzsche, Frederich, *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Will To Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968).

Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (New York: The Viking Press, 1968).

Schacht, Richard, *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

Sessions, Lad, *Manuscript on the Concept of Honor*, draft: October 13, 2005.

Yates, Charles, *Honor Orientation Speech to Freshman*, draft: September 8, 2005.

The White Book, Washington and Lee University.