

For Nietzsche, the way toward a new human future lay through the ancient Greeks, pioneered by the *Übermensch*, or superman, a heroic figure who through great struggle would transcend the banalities of everyday experience. Baeumler had to make some twists and turns to get around other Nietzschean ideas, such as the philosopher's emphasis on the creative, Dionysian side of Greek culture (notably in music) over its more orderly Apollonian aspect. He based much of his argument on the posthumous *Will to Power* (1901), in which Nietzsche argued that the desire to dominate is the most essential human drive, surpassing even the will to live.

Baeumler called his simplified Nietzschean doctrine "heroic realism." Enmity and war were not

EXCERPT

Devotional Jihad

The dominant thread in Islam does see the extension of the faith . . . as a legitimate reason for deploying force: This is the conclusion of serious Muslim scholars and the literature is vast. So if, in the Christian just war tradition, there are criteria you have to go through—barriers, in effect—to the deployment of armed force, in Islam, you must search for ways to refrain.

—JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN, professor of social and political ethics at the University of Chicago Divinity School, in *American Behavioral Scientist* (May 2008)

unfortunate facts of the human condition, he declared, but its essential and perpetual characteristics. Violent conflict was the only path to ennobled human life. Baeumler then shifted the role of the *Übermensch* to the German *Volk* (people), hungry

for a political and cultural rebirth in the unhappy years after World War I: "The old task of our race reappeared before Nietzsche's eyes: the task to be leaders of Europe."

Baeumler was not alone among Nazi ideologists in drawing on Nietzsche—the philosopher Martin Heidegger shared his view for a time—but some sharply criticized the practice. (Nietzsche had, among other things, spoken out against anti-Semitism.) "Baeumler's depiction of Nietzsche . . . was certainly one-sided and myopic, but

it was neither incoherent nor absurd," Whyte concludes. National Socialism was not a cohesive doctrine, he adds, and understanding it, as well as Nietzsche's place in it, remains unfinished business for scholars.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Dad's Biological Clock

THE SOURCE: "Dad's Hidden Influence" by Tina Hesman Saey, in *Science News*, March 29, 2008.

DON'T HAVE BABIES WHEN you're too young, or too old. Avoid alcohol, and watch the coffee. No long hot baths and no drugs or even a single cigarette. Don't gain too much weight—or too little. And go

easy on fish—it might be laced with mercury. Women of childbearing age have long been warned that the effects of any unhealthful practices would be visited on their children. Now it appears to be men's turn.

A father's age and his exposure to chemicals can leave a medical legacy that lasts generations, writes Tina Hesman Saey, a geneticist who

writes about molecular biology for *Science News*. Infants with teenage dads face increased risk of being born prematurely, or even stillborn. And while researchers couldn't determine whether such results were related to the dads' socioeconomic status or physical health, they noted that fathers under age 20 often have more fertility problems than men a decade older. At the other end of the age spectrum, children of much older fathers face increased chances of having autism, schizophrenia, and Down syndrome. And babies fathered by

firefighters, painters, woodworkers, janitors, and men exposed to solvents and other chemicals at work are more likely to be miscarried or to develop cancer later in life.

Historically, women were blamed when something went awry in fetal development. But now the censure once reserved for “crack moms” can easily be extended to “crack dads.”

Men manufacture new sperm continuously throughout life, with each one living about 74 days. Scientists once thought that defective sperm were doomed to die with the roughly 40 million unrequited suitors in every ejaculation. But now it seems that some kinds of damage do not hinder sperm in their race to fertilization. The result can be embryos with high vulnerability to problems including autism and cancer.

Men’s reproductive health is most robust in their twenties, and after that it’s downhill. Each year after puberty, a man’s sperm-making cells divide about 23 times. By age 40, these vital human building blocks have gone through about 610 rounds of replication, each with a chance for genetic error.

Demographic studies have shown that babies whose fathers are under 20 or over 40 have slightly more health problems than children whose fathers were in their twenties when they were conceived. The reasons are not clear, but more and more evidence shows that current environmental factors can take a toll on the health of future generations. A gene doesn’t have

to develop an actual mutation in order to pass on unhealthy traits. Slight changes in chemicals can turn genes on or off at the wrong time, or label the genetic material improperly. “Scientists have discovered that chemical modifications to DNA and proteins can change the way genes are packaged and regulated without changing the genes themselves,” Saey writes. It may be that the older the individual, the greater the opportunity for slight anomalies to creep in. And changes caused by aging, or exposure to toxins, form a “molecular scrapbook” handed down—from dad as well as mom—to countless future generations.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Better Living Through Chemistry

THE SOURCE: “Better Brains, Better Selves? The Ethics of Neuroenhancements” by Richard H. Dees, in *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 4.

WHILE MOST PEOPLE ARE willing to give cosmetic surgery a free pass, the debate gets stickier when it comes to enhancing human brains through artificial means. As Richard H. Dees points out, “People think that altering our brains tinkers with the core of our personalities and the core of ourselves. It changes who we are, and doing so seems wrong.”

Drugs already improve humans’ ability to think. Amphetamines, Dees notes, can help people to “learn skilled motor tasks, like play-

ing the piano, more rapidly.” Other drugs help Alzheimer’s patients “improve their attention and memory.” Another class of drugs—Prozac is the best known—improve people’s sense of well-being, while beta-blockers, whose “widespread use among concert performers is legendary,” decrease stress and nervousness.

If individuals feel that neuro-enhancing drugs improve their lives and cause no harm either to themselves or anyone else, why object to them?

Critics dispute the “no harm” argument on several grounds. The drugs’ long-term effects, for instance, are unknown. But Dees, an associate professor of philosophy and medical humanities at the University of Rochester, believes that limiting and closely monitoring the use of neuroenhancers can counter this concern. Others question the unfair edge the drugs might provide. What if someone scores higher on an SAT under the influence of a memory-improving drug? Dees dismisses this objection by comparing using the drug to procuring the services of a tutor. The unfairness lies not in the advantage the tutor gives, per se, but in the ability of some to *afford* the tutor. While this affordability argument might be extended to neuroenhancers, he still finds it “an odd place to look for a deep moral objection.”

There remain two philosophical areas that present more troubling considerations: human dignity and authenticity. Do the drugs simply provide users with an easy way to overcome life’s difficulties? Consider a concert pianist, gifted with an