



“In pursuit of understanding the nature of peace, I have studied the construction and operation of international orders ever since I was a graduate student well over half a century ago. On the basis of these studies, I am aware that the cultural, historic, and strategic gaps in perception that I have described will pose formidable challenges for even the best-intentioned and most far-sighted leadership on both sides. On the other hand, were history confined to the mechanical repetition of the past, no transformation would ever have occurred. Every great achievement was a vision before it became a reality. In that sense, it arose from commitment, not resignation to the inevitable... When Premier Zhou Enlai and I agreed on the communiqué that announced the secret visit, he said: ‘This will shake the world.’ What a culmination if forty years later, the United States and China could merge their efforts not to shake the world, but to build it.”

— Henry A. Kissinger, Epilogue: Does History Repeat Itself?, *On China*

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The Fifth World Order:  
Friedrich Nietzsche and Henry Kissinger

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This paper will attempt to—through the lens of Dr. Henry Kissinger’s own philosophy of history and practice of statecraft—illuminate and suggest new interpretations of Nietzsche’s ideas of the *Übermensch*, the eternal return, and transvaluation of all values in the context of humanity’s attempt to build a new world order.

### ***I. Statesmen as Übermensch***

As first described in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche’s concept of the *Übermensch* is his ideal superior person of the future who could rise above conventional Christian morality to create and impose his own values. Nietzsche saw this individual not as a present reality during his time, but a distant, aspirational goal that the majority would not reach, yet a few extraordinary individuals could strive toward. Dr. Henry Kissinger, America’s preeminent philosopher-diplomat, makes the case through his written and practiced philosophy that the greatest statesmen throughout history who have contributed toward the building of “world order” could be regarded as *Übermensch*. Ironically, according to Nietzsche’s own writings, the closest any individual has ever come to becoming an *Übermensch* was, indeed, a statesman himself from Germany—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. And though Nietzsche may not have been explicit about it—few other professions have the requisite resources to undertake a project of ambition as Nietzsche so demands. Rather than the sculptor with his chisel and stone, or the painter with his brush and canvas, a statesman wields war in one hand and peace in the other. Westphalian nation states are the largest units by which humans have organized themselves in the modern world since 1648, and thus the statesman is endowed with a vast canvas on which to create his art.

In drawing this direct analogy between the *Übermensch* and the statesman, the proposition is inherent that the state itself—during the brief period the *Übermensch* statesman controls the state as his agent—can take on qualities of the *Übermensch* normally reserved for human individuals. Just as international relations theory can be conceived as an enlargement of Hobbesian/Lockean philosophy from the scope of the individual to the scope of the Westphalian nation state, Kissinger’s application of Nietzsche’s political and moral philosophy from the human to the state offers new interpretations. As Nietzsche stipulates—*Übermensch* devote their lives to grand works of art that remain long after their physical death. Thus, the *Übermensch* statesman’s unifying project by extension briefly becomes the nation’s unifying project—intended to remain long after the death of their own state. Artists leave monuments to posterity in their sculptures, paintings, poems, novels, and architecture; the greatest use their



creativity to create things of value that endure for centuries.<sup>1</sup> For the statesman, such a project cannot simply be the task of mere statehood or the maintenance of the state, but rather *world order*—the creation of structures conducive toward peace and stability on a global scale. Kissinger says “world order” is “the concept held by a region or civilization about the nature of just arrangements and the distribution of power thought to be applicable to the entire world.”<sup>2</sup> Few countries and therefore individuals will ever attain positions to do this. In fact, Kissinger posits throughout human history, there have only ever existed three regional orders: “the Westphalian Peace born of 17th-century Europe (the subject of Kissinger’s doctoral thesis), the central imperium philosophy of China, and the religious supremacism of political Islam,” and one global order—“the current liberal international order of the U.S.”<sup>3</sup> If the statesmen as Übermensch analogy continues, Nietzsche might endow the status upon those individuals who created each of these four orders—Klemens von Metternich, Qin Shi Huang, the Prophet Muhammad, and FDR—respectively. Of these men, temporary as their work might be, their great accomplishments have been the creation of new patterns of relative peace and stability despite the vagaries of historical contingency. To tame the natural condition of chaos, the world desperately needs rules: a guiding philosophy that outlasts any single individual or society. Kissinger happened to rise during the “brief moment in human history when one could speak of an incipient global world order composed of an amalgam of American idealism (the global fourth) and traditional European concepts of statehood and balance of power (the regional first)”—the years from 1948 to the turn of the century.<sup>4</sup> Now he warns “the concept of order that has underpinned the modern era is in crisis” and the U.S. and China are now faced with the difficult task of jointly building a *fifth world order*.<sup>5 6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Greg R. Lawson, “The Statesman As Übermensch: A Nietzschean Perspective On Kissinger – Analysis,” *Eurasia Review* (blog), November 18, 2014, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/18112014-statesman-ubermensch-nietzschean-perspective-kissinger-analysis/>.

<sup>2</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, *World Order* (London: Penguin Books, 2014), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Tom Rogan, “BOOK REVIEW: ‘World Order,’” *The Washington Times*, October 13, 2014, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/oct/13/book-review-cultivating-order-in-a-changing-world/>.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Kissinger, “Henry Kissinger on the Assembly of a New World Order,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 29, 2014, sec. Life and Style, <https://online.wsj.com/articles/henry-kissinger-on-the-assembly-of-a-new-world-order-1409328075>.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey Goldberg, “World Chaos and World Order: Conversations With Henry Kissinger,” *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/11/kissinger-order-and-chaos/506876/>.

Kissinger foresaw this reality during his own time, even if it was impossible to identify China specifically. He says one year into his term as U.S. Secretary of State: “History has, I think placed me in a key position at a time when we are moving from the relics of the postwar period toward a new international structure.”<sup>7</sup> Now, the elder statesman warns that without the existence of such a joint Sino-American order, “chaos threatens side by side with unprecedented interdependence.”<sup>8</sup> But as Kissinger also counsels, this is natural: crises are opportune to shape history as “the elements from which policy is shaped suddenly become fluid, creating an unusual capacity for creative action.”<sup>9</sup> Crises are not objectively bad either; they are symptoms—for those that can recognize them—that the current order requires structural rearrangement.

## ***II. Eternal Recurrence, Affirmative Nihilism, and Amor Fati***

As history is the language of statesmen, it is useful to first revisit Nietzsche’s core philosophical ideas in the context of how the United States and China maintain opposing conceptions of historical thinking before arriving at the task of how to build such an order.

The Western approach treats history as a linear process of modernity achieving a series of absolute victories over evil. Time, in other words, is a straight line. As Nietzsche says, the current liberal international order’s de-facto underlying moral framework is Judeo-Christianity (*Judenchristlich*)—a structure he famously detests. The Christian framework is what gives the American view its definition—with a single starting point and a single endpoint. Christianity is firmly tied to time, for the incarnation of Jesus Christ, which gives meaning and a pattern to the whole of history, occurred at a definite point in time. Christian thought—and therefore Western or American thought—has the whole of history structured around a temporal midpoint and thus, that is why history in the West has traditionally always been seen as progress. Perhaps the epitome of this historical thinking is the publication of Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History?* which defines human history as a linear progression and argues 1991 saw the end of it upon the dissolution of the USSR: “the end-point of mankind’s ideological evolution.”<sup>10</sup> The recurring present was always unique, unrepeatable, with an open future before it, which could and would be affected by individuals whose destiny is to shape it.

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<sup>7</sup> Henry A. Kissinger and James “Scotty” Reston, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XXXVIII, Part 1, Foundations of Foreign Policy, 1973–1976* - Office of the Historian, October 6, 1974, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v38p1/d46>.

<sup>8</sup> Kissinger, *World Order*, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), p. 597.

<sup>10</sup> Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” (*The National Interest*, Summer 1989), [https://www.embl.de/aboutus/science\\_society/discussion/discussion\\_2006/ref1-22june06.pdf](https://www.embl.de/aboutus/science_society/discussion/discussion_2006/ref1-22june06.pdf), p. 1.

History for the Chinese, then, is a radically different cyclical process of decay and rectification in which nature and the world could be understood, but never mastered. Kissinger observed that the Chinese hold a fatalistic view of infinitely repeating cycles of alternating political order and chaos—all beyond human control:

“... Chinese history featured many periods of civil war, interregnum, and chaos. After each collapse, the Chinese state reconstituted itself as if by some immutable law of nature. At each stage, a new uniting figure emerged, following essentially the precedent of the Yellow Emperor, to subdue his rivals and reunify China (and sometimes enlarge its bounds). The famous opening of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, a fourteenth-century epic novel treasured by centuries of Chinese, evokes this continuous rhythm: ‘The empire, long divided, must unite; long united, must divide. Thus it has ever been.’ Each period of disunity was viewed as an aberration. Each new dynasty reached back to the previous dynasty’s principles of governance in order to reestablish continuity. The fundamental precepts of Chinese culture endured, tested by the strain of periodic calamity... China maintained the ideal of empire and unity, but followed the practice of fracturing, then reuniting, in cycles sometimes lasting several hundred years.”<sup>11</sup>

But if societies and nations “cherish a tale of their origin,” when does time begin for China?<sup>12</sup>

Who fills in the East, the role of Jesus in the West? The first unification of the empire by Qin Shi Huang in 211 is perhaps the single most significant point in space-time in Chinese history—but it curiously never became *the* focal point in Chinese historical thinking the way the death of Jesus Christ did in the West because according to Kissinger, “Chinese history makes explicit that the Yellow Emperor is only re-establishing, not creating an empire. The concept of China predated even him and thus China strides into the historical consciousness as an established state requiring only restoration, not creation.”<sup>13</sup> Kissinger quotes French traveller Abbé Régis-Evariste Huc: “A special feature of Chinese civilization is that it seems to have no beginning; it appears in history less as a conventional nation-state than a permanent natural phenomenon.”<sup>14</sup>

The Americans and Chinese, then, both believe in some form of *inevitability*—just polar opposite kinds of inevitability—that progress is inevitable in the West and that cyclical renewal is inevitable in the East. Kissinger also believes in historical inevitability—the inevitability that all civilizations will at some point, like humans, decline because states become disenchant

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<sup>11</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, *On China* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2011), p. 6-7.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Abbé Régis-Evariste Huc, *The Chinese Empire* (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1855), as excerpted in Franz Schurmann and Orville Schell, eds., *Imperial China: The Decline of the Last Dynasty and the Origins of Modern China—the 18th and 19th Centuries* (New York: Vintage, 1967), p. 31.

with the intellectual maxims upon which they were built. A civilization's upward trajectory is not arrested because of any external force or another nation's rise, but rather exclusively because of internal attitudes—a fundamental disinterest toward a society's underlying values and social foundations. Kissinger believed that states, just like individuals, naturally undergo organic processes of birth, maturity, and death—and potentially endless more cycles of the same. Thus he advocates an inevitable view with elements from the American *and* the Chinese perspectives.

If the Western order was grounded upon a Christian framework of morality, Buddhism serves as an alternative moral framework underlying the Chinese conception of world order. Buddhism teaches that cosmic, biological, and social evolution are ever-renewed after periodic “nights of chaos” on the endless wheel of existence, but Nietzsche believes Buddhism is no better than Christianity. He writes in *Beyond Good and Evil*: “There is perhaps nothing so admirable in Christianity and Buddhism as their art of teaching even the lowest to elevate themselves by piety to a seemingly higher order of things, and thereby to retain their satisfaction with the actual world in which they find it difficult enough to live—this very difficulty being necessary.”<sup>15</sup> Both religions are nihilistic, life-denying philosophies that create a metaphysical higher order that simply does not exist and promise followers a place in a fake realm. For Christians, this is heaven and for Buddhists, it is nirvana. Nietzsche detests both moral frameworks for using inverted beliefs to tolerate what is intolerable in real life.

While the Judeo-Christian framework attempts to provide meaning through the quest of good triumphing over evil, such a struggle is less present in the Chinese conception of order because time is not seen as progress: “there was no New World to populate, no redemption awaiting mankind on distant shores. The promised land was China, and the Chinese were already there.”<sup>16</sup> But Kissinger as a philosopher and as a practicing diplomat struggled with such a strong good vs. evil theme in the United States—the enduring tension between American values and geopolitical necessities. He tried in his statecraft to avoid being so “excessively moralistic” and avoid either extreme because “a country that demands moral perfection of itself as a test of its foreign policy will achieve neither perfection nor security.”<sup>17</sup> Nietzsche agrees with Kissinger

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<sup>15</sup> Helen Zimmern, “The Project Gutenberg EBook of Beyond Good and Evil, by Friedrich Nietzsche,” Project Gutenberg, February 4, 2013, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/4363/4363-h/4363-h.htm>, Chapter III, Section 61, lines 25-27.

<sup>16</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, “Henry Kissinger on the China Challenge,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 14, 2011, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703864204576315223305697158>.

<sup>17</sup> Robert D. Blackwill, “In Defense of Kissinger,” *The National Interest*, no. 129 (2014): 39–50, p. 39.

and as he would write in *Beyond Good and Evil*, such a black-and-white moralistic creed is too simplistic—rendering it unproductive for the conduct of foreign policy.

Nietzsche holds a view of time, history, and eternity that can potentially resolve many of these aforementioned tensions present in the American and Chinese perspectives. Nietzsche's idea of the "eternal recurrence" outlines that the universe has been recurring, and will continue to recur, in a self-similar form an infinite number of times across infinite time or space: a circle. For Nietzsche, history is what mankind remembers, the most recent and only very small segment of the past. In the long run, all history—whether cyclical or linear—bends itself into a circle because short-term time horizons deceptively look straight or cyclical as they are such small portions of the whole. Since all moments are equal in the eternal becoming and passing away, history cannot have any direction and certainly not that of progress. Nietzsche believes that infinity itself has a direction—that of return. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche writes:

“‘See this gateway, dwarf!’ I continued. ‘It has two faces. Two paths come together here; no one has yet walked them to the end. This long lane back: it lasts an eternity. And that long lane outward—that is another eternity. They contradict each other, these paths; they blatantly offend each other—and here at this gateway is where they come together. The name of the gateway is inscribed at the top: ‘Moment.’ But whoever were to walk one of them further—and even further and ever on: do you believe, dwarf, that these paths contradict each other eternally?’—‘All that is straight lies,’ murmured the dwarf contemptuously. ‘All truth is crooked, time itself is a circle...’ ‘From this gateway called Moment a long eternal lane stretches *backward*: behind us lies an eternity. Must not whatever *can* already have passed this way before? Must not whatever *can* happen, already have happened, been done, passed by before? And if everything has already been here before, what do you think of this moment, dwarf? Must this gateway too not already—have been here? And are not all things firmly knotted together in such a way that this moment draws after it *all* things to come? Therefore—itself as well? For whatever *can* run, even in this long lane *outward*—*must* run it once more!—And this slow spider that creeps in the moonlight, and this moonlight itself, and I and you in the gateway whispering together, whispering of eternal things—must not all of us have been here before?—And return and run in that other lane, outward, before us, in this long, eerie lane—must we not return eternally?’”<sup>18</sup>

These thoughts terrify Zarathustra who “spoke, softer and softer, for [he] was afraid of [his] own secret thoughts.”<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, given such a conception of eternally recurring history, the terror

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<sup>18</sup> Adrian Del Caro and Robert B Pippin, *Friedrich Nietzsche: Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge University Press, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), <http://users.clas.ufl.edu/burt/LoserLit/zarathustra.pdf>.  
<http://users.clas.ufl.edu/burt/LoserLit/zarathustra.pdf>, p. 125-126.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

lies in asking what incentive, then, remains for man to set about on his Übermenschian project of constructing world order if, according to Nietzsche, a “return” is inevitable? Thus arrives the core of Nietzsche’s philosophy of time—what has been called “affirmative nihilism.”<sup>20</sup>

If eternal recurrence encompasses not only all historical events, but everything that can ever happen, the superman’s power lies precisely in that he affirmatively acts in moments, although completely conscious that the series of moments cannot have any aim or meaning. Nietzsche makes clear that will to power can only give significance to individual moments and not to history as a whole. Kissinger exemplifies Nietzsche’s affirmative nihilism in reflection of his time as a practitioner: “History is a tale of efforts that failed, or aspirations that weren’t realized, or wishes that were fulfilled and then turned out to be different from what one expected. So as a historian, one has to live with a sense of the inevitability of tragedy. As a statesman, one has to act on the assumption that problems must be solved.”<sup>21 22</sup> Statesmen have the unfortunate duty to act as if one’s country is immortal while engaged in statecraft.

In *The Uses and Abuses of History for Life*, Nietzsche argues exactly this—that the statesman needs examples of past greatness from history for illusion—to believe they can affect the present even if deep down, they know their efforts will not matter. Nietzsche elaborates on this contradictory nature of history. On the one hand, history can “inhibit the drive to live, strive, and create that it ought to reinforce.”<sup>23</sup> Greatness existing in the past can give rise to the thought that greatness *already* exists and need not be a goal for the present. It can also severely limit the range of worthwhile, unique projects. As Nietzsche puts it, “the path will be blocked and the air darkened, if we dance around a half-understood monument of some great past or other like truly zealous idolaters, as if we wanted to state: ‘See, that is the true and real culture. What concern of yours is becoming and willing!’”<sup>24</sup> But on the other hand, “history belongs, above all, to the active and powerful man, the man who fights one great battle, who needs the exemplary men,

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<sup>20</sup> Carl Pletsch, “History and Friedrich Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Time,” *History and Theory* 16, no. 1 (1977): 30–39, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2504576>, p. 36.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Beisner, “History and Henry Kissinger,” *Diplomatic History* 14, no. 4 (1990): 511–27.

<sup>22</sup> Bernard Gwertzman Special to The New York Times, “The Gloomy Side of the Historian Henry A. Kissinger,” *The New York Times*, April 5, 1976, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/04/05/archives/the-gloomy-side-of-the-historian-henry-a-kissinger.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Scott Jenkins, “Nietzsche’s Use of Monumental History,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 45, no. 2 (2014): 169–181, <https://doi.org/10.5325/jnietstud.45.2.0169>, p. 173.

<sup>24</sup> Ian C. Johnston, “Friedrich Nietzsche: On the Use and Abuse of History for Life,” 1874, <https://la.utexas.edu/users/hcleaver/330T/350kPEENietzscheAbuseTableAll.pdf>, p. 10.

teachers, and comforters and cannot find them among his contemporary companions.”<sup>25</sup>

Nietzsche describes history as taking the past to “appear possible a second time” which ascribes to history a belief in some degree of control over the future.<sup>26</sup> He says of the person who deeply considers the past: “fortunately history also preserves the secret of the great fighters against history, that is, against the blind force of the real, and thus puts itself right in the pillory, because it brings out directly as the essential historical natures those who worried so little about the ‘Thus it was,’ in order rather to follow with a more cheerful pride a ‘So it should be.’ Not to drag their race to the grave but to found a new race—that drove them ceaselessly forwards...”<sup>27</sup>

This is the reason why the study of history can be so dangerous, yet so important for Nietzsche and Kissinger. It has the dual power to both inspire and defeat an aspiring statesman. Seeing one’s own time as continuous with a glorious past and instantiating the same general patterns in human affairs provides the comfort of believing that one’s actions are not in vain. At the same time, it can sap one’s motivation, dull one’s creativity, and remove the “affirmative” from “affirmative nihilism.” Nietzsche’s answer seems to be that we need to be deceived into reasoning by historical analogy, even if no state of affairs in the past will be identical with what we confront in the present. Nietzsche says the past gives us no theoretical justification for an optimistic stance toward the future, but “that is the way it is now with all great things which never succeed without some delusion” and these illusions are fundamentally healthy for comfort and inspiration.<sup>28</sup> They allow the *Übermensch* to continue acting and striving—regardless of where he originates—the 244-year-old U.S. or the 5,000-year-old Chinese civilization.

Nietzsche thus serves as the motivation needed for Kissinger, and all aspiring statesmen, to embark upon a grand mission in life—the maintenance of an existing world order during his time and now the transition to a new one (Sino-American). Nietzsche’s ideas provide the comfort, the inspiration, but most importantly the *evidence* needed to know that greatness is possible and the journey to become the *Übermensch* and project your own qualities upon your state to create world order are worth it. Instead of overwhelming statesmen, history presents the *Übermensch* with past moments when great men imposed their will on its course. Kissinger writes, “Never granted any certainty, the statesman must peer into the darkness” and attempt to

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

loosen policy from the grasp of the past: “The heroic figures are those who construct new worlds for themselves, who look into the abyss and choose to try to bring order out of chaos or die trying. . . . Yet, even those who successfully establish new codes, new laws, new orders cannot truly overcome the fundamental purposelessness of the cosmos. . . . The tragic element of human life is that there is no cure for humanity’s condition.”<sup>29 30</sup> This core condition of man is—in essence—Nietzsche’s eternal return: “the events of future history will be of the same nature—or nearly so—as the history of the past, so long as men are men,” as Thucydides said.<sup>31</sup>

Kissinger corroborates Nietzsche’s valuation of history: “Free from the shackles of a doctrine of historical inevitability, the nations of the West can render a great service by demonstrating that whatever meaning history has is derived from the convictions and purpose of the generation which shapes it” rejecting ideas which “reduce the statesman to a lever on a machine called ‘history.’”<sup>32 33 34</sup> One diplomatic historian writes of Kissinger’s outlook: “History’s necessity is embedded in the layers of past events, chance, habits, and inertia that shape the lives of men, women, and nations. For most, life’s path is set at birth: the human path bounded by parentage and social station; the paths of nations by location, resources, and the bedrock of history. This was grim business offering the individual little incentive for moral behavior or the opportunity to make a difference.”<sup>35</sup> History was “pitiless,” but a gifted and daring few—Übermensch statesmen—Kissinger believed, could break the bonds of necessity and “transcend,” infusing them with their own will and spirit.<sup>36 37</sup> Kissinger too was once a pessimist. He was quoted as saying he thinks of the U.S. as Athens and the USSR as Sparta. . . . “the day of the U.S. is past and today is the day of the Soviet Union. My job as Secretary of State is to negotiate the most, acceptable second-best position available”—an account he disputes.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 55.

<sup>30</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh, and the Problems of Peace: 1812-22*, University of Michigan Libraries (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015012330695&view=1up&seq=178>.

<sup>31</sup> Graham Allison and Niall Ferguson, “Why the U.S. President Needs a Council of Historians,” *The Atlantic*, August 4, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/09/dont-know-much-about-history/492746/>.

<sup>32</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, *The Troubled Partnership: A Re-Appraisal of the Atlantic Alliance* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1982), p. 251.

<sup>33</sup> Peter W. Dickson, *Kissinger and the Meaning of History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 74.

<sup>34</sup> Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh, and the Problems of Peace: 1812-22*, p. 324.

<sup>35</sup> Beisner, “History and Henry Kissinger,” p. 513.

<sup>36</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston, 1982), p. 791.

<sup>37</sup> Beisner, “History and Henry Kissinger,” p. 513.

<sup>38</sup> Gwertzman, “The Gloomy Side of the Historian Henry A. Kissinger.”



He believed that historical forces did not favor the U.S. and by the time he had come to Washington, the postwar American diplomatic consensus had already disintegrated.

Now in present-day, American and Chinese statesmen are trying to shatter the conceptions of time that have always bound their fate. The U.S. needs to believe it will not decline and against all odds, continue its linear historical progression of American exceptionalism. Having never experienced a single cycle before, the U.S. knows nothing else in its short 244-year-old history (the average lifespan of empires of the last three millennia is 250 years).<sup>39</sup> The Chinese on the other hand have been tempered through historical fire but face a different challenge: its statesmen must break free from the cycles of chaos and unification it has been trapped inside for 5,000 years. Both are betting against the inevitable—that history has no direction and they can take it where they choose. Both sides are trying desperately to convince themselves, their countries, and the rest of the world that “this time is different.”

Kissinger has been here once before and recognizes the courage it takes to believe one can reverse the flow of history: “as a historian, you have to be conscious of the fact that every civilization that has ever existed has ultimately collapsed.”<sup>40</sup> Although there is nothing to suggest he could predict China to be the entity with which the U.S. would ultimately be destined to jointly build the fifth order with, he recognized even before his time in government that he would ultimately—like so many other statesmen—become the captain of a sinking ship. His undergraduate thesis grappled with this very topic—the inevitability of tragedy—that although man has the ability to shape events to guide societies through difficult periods, “The statesman’s responsibility is to struggle against transitoriness and not to insist that he be paid in the coin of eternity. He may know that history is the foe of permanence; but no leader is entitled to resignation. He owes it to his people to strive, to create, and to resist decay that besets all human institutions.”<sup>41</sup> His thesis states, “Transitoriness is the fate of existence. No civilization has yet been permanent, no longing completely fulfilled. This is necessity, the fatedness of history, the dilemma of mortality.”<sup>42</sup> The statesman must therefore learn to love their tragic fate—*amor fati*.

### **III. The Herd, Slave Morality, and the Transvaluation of all Values**

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<sup>39</sup> John Bagot Glubb, *The Fate of Empires and Search for Survival* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1978), <http://people.uncw.edu/kozloffm/glubb.pdf>, p. 24.

<sup>40</sup> Gwertzman, “The Gloomy Side of the Historian Henry A. Kissinger.”

<sup>41</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 55.

<sup>42</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, “The Meaning of History: Reflections on Spengler, Toynbee and Kant,” 1950, <http://johnandrewferguson.com/documents/meaningofhistory.pdf>.<http://johnandrewferguson.com/documents/meaningofhistory.pdf>, p. 326.

Nietzsche believed creativity must not be held down by the herd because “the higher you climb the smaller you are to the eyes of envy.”<sup>43</sup> For Nietzsche, nations themselves cannot sustain an Übermenschian character because only the rare, solitary individual with the necessary creativity could fulfill Nietzsche’s will to power. Because Nietzsche’s Übermensch is the apotheosis of creativity—this creativity in moments of crisis must penetrate through bureaucracies if the Übermensch is to create anything of practical meaning. Bureaucracy represents this Nietzschean “herd” and will directly oppose the Übermensch. Kissinger hated bureaucracy precisely because an Übermensch’s creativity could never manifest itself inside of it. He writes that political institutions which govern the Westphalian state are “designed for an average standard of performance reducible to approximate norms. The impact of genius on institutions is bound to be unsettling of course. The bureaucracy will consider originality as unsafe, and genius will resent the constrictions of routine.”<sup>44</sup> This is an unfortunate reality because Kissinger warned “a society that must produce a great man in each generation to maintain its domestic or international position will doom itself.”<sup>45</sup> If the statesman’s role is to escape from the grasp of history, then he must avoid the chains of institutions that embody precedent and history. By nature, a bureaucrat is tethered to the status quo, approving small measures and celebrating incrementalism as wisdom. Because a bureaucracy “exaggerates the technical complexities of its problems,” it opposes new ideas as “unsound” or “risky.”<sup>46</sup> Kissinger writes that a statesman “creates policy the spirit of which is diametrically opposed to the spirit of bureaucracy. The essence of policy is its contingency; its success depends on the correctness of an estimate which is in part conjectural. The essence of bureaucracy is its quest for safety; its success is calculability. Profound policy thrives on perpetual creation, on a constant redefinition of relationships which can survive mediocrity. Policy involves an adjustment of risks; administration an avoidance of deviation.”<sup>47</sup>

Kissinger wanted to “purge our foreign policy of all sentimentality,” but such an overt rejection of ideology in foreign affairs is difficult for marketing to the public.<sup>48</sup> The ideals of “freedom” and “justice” mean more to the average citizen than the “liberal international order”

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<sup>43</sup> Caro and Pippin, *Friedrich Nietzsche: Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 47.

<sup>44</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, “The White Revolutionary: Reflections on Bismarck” (Daedalus, n.d.), [https://findit.library.yale.edu/images\\_layout/view?parentoid=11787059&increment=2](https://findit.library.yale.edu/images_layout/view?parentoid=11787059&increment=2), p. 889.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 889.

<sup>46</sup> Stephen R. Graubard, *Kissinger: Portrait of a Mind* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1973), p. 101.

<sup>47</sup> Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh, and the Problems of Peace: 1812-22*, p. 326-327.

<sup>48</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 191.

or any kind of world order.<sup>49</sup> Human rights resonate in people's hearts far more vibrantly than grand geopolitical strategy, but a complete Nietzschean transvaluation of values to replace the morality inherent in a state's foreign policy—the slave morality of the herd—is a difficult task indeed.

### ***Conclusion***

Friedrich Nietzsche was one of many intellectual giants Dr. Henry Kissinger turned to for inspiration in pondering these deeply complex questions about world order and to what extent any one man or woman could play in shaping it. More than any other foreign policy chief in U.S. history, Kissinger decided on his actions and measured his own accomplishments mindful of history's long arc and his own brief moment because very rarely do philosophers ever come to occupy positions of power that allow for application. Those who understand Kissinger's lonely mission may hold a greater appreciation of his contributions given the inevitable tragedy of statesmanship, yet others will still criticize him for falling short at the job he had trained his whole life for. Kissinger ultimately was caught in transition—an *Übermensch* who came too soon to build the Sino-American order he so eloquently writes about now, but too late to take part in the building of the international order he only ever maintained in its inevitable decline.

The individual *man* lies at the heart of Nietzsche's ideas, while the *state* is the core of Kissinger's philosophy. In fusing the two together, the Nietzschean-Kissingerian *statesman* emerges as a guide to any individual who takes up the task of building the fifth world order as Kissinger so challenges in the epilogue of *On China*—"Does History Repeat Itself?"—to save us from ourselves, but in the process, further illuminate our understanding and attempt to resolve humanity's eternal question.

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<sup>49</sup> Beisner, "History and Henry Kissinger," p. 525.