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Of Nietzsche's Philosophy of History

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By

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The Eternal Recurrence of the Same: A Historical Account
Of Nietzsche's Philosophy of History

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The interpretation of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy has been a source of controversy ever since his lapse into insanity at the beginning of 1889. One aspect of his thought, in particular, has been a point of contention among scholars since the 1930s—his thought of the eternal recurrence. This is when scholars first devoted considerable attention to the difficulty of interpreting this teaching within the context of his philosophy as a whole. The works of Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, and Karl Löwith were instrumental in establishing the eternal recurrence as an important part of Nietzsche's philosophy. Among the three, Löwith's interpretation of the eternal recurrence has been most influential: for Löwith, the recurrence breaks apart into two incommensurable halves, a cosmological doctrine regarding the eternity of the world and an anthropological doctrine regarding human life. These halves contradict one another and cannot be brought together to form a coherent unity—a position largely accepted in the scholarship since Löwith's time.

This dissertation seeks to correct this interpretation by examining Nietzsche's works, beginning with the earliest and working its way toward his final writings (the opposite of Löwith's procedure). The result is a new interpretation of the eternal recurrence that illuminates the coherence of the doctrine.

The source of the thought lies in Nietzsche's reflection on the nature of science and its detrimental influence on life in *The Birth of Tragedy* and, significantly, the "History" essay (1874). Nietzsche's struggle to find a life-affirming scientific position results in what he calls the "gay science," which unifies science and life in the eternal recurrence. While this thought remains central in such works as *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, it seems to fade to the background in his later works. Careful examination of these later works, however, demonstrates that Nietzsche's critiques of truth, science, and religion in the "revaluation of all values" are dependent on the foundation of the eternal recurrence.

Reading Nietzsche's works chronologically not only yields an interpretation that demonstrates the coherence of the eternal recurrence, but also demonstrates the unity of his philosophy of history and philosophy of science.

This dissertation by Gregory R. Canning fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in philosophy approved by Holger Zaborowski, D.Phil., as Director, and by Michael Rohlf, Ph.D., and Richard Hassing, Ph.D., as Readers.

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Introduction

There is a definite temptation in the study of philosophy to reduce the thought of a philosopher to the conditions under which he or she wrote and thought. This danger increases exponentially when it comes to a careful consideration of the thought and writings of Friedrich Nietzsche. Since the onset of his insanity in 1889, those who studied Nietzsche's thoughts attempted to provide a biographical contextualization in order to understand his thinking. Due to his methodological insights in some of his writings, scholars have considered Nietzsche's philosophy as conditioned by the successes and failures, and even the mundane details, of his life: "*Every philosophy is a philosophy of a certain stage of life.* — The stage of life at which a philosopher discovered his teaching is audible within it: he cannot prevent it, however exalted above time and the hour he may feel himself to be."¹ His intellectual career can be divided into different "stages" or "periods" in accordance with the vicissitudes of his life and the ever-changing direction and content of his thinking. Each scholar has his or her own determination of the number of these stages (and when one ends and the other begins)—a fact that indicates the arbitrariness of such a practice. Their guide to understanding Nietzsche's philosophy is, therefore, largely biographical and psychological—a point of "integrity" for those who adhere to the methods of the master himself.²

¹ All citations from Nietzsche's works (published and unpublished) are from *Nietzsche Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1967ff)—shortened to *KGW*, followed by the division, volume, then page number. For example, the citation for this quotation would be: *KGW* IV/3: 130. From *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 277. Unless otherwise cited, all translations are my own. The translation information will always follow that of *KGW*.

² One can see this in the following passage from Alexander Nehamas's otherwise excellent book: "When I claim that we must pay attention to Nietzsche's style, I am claiming only that his changing styles convey

The spirit of the biographical/psychological approach found more recently in the work of Alexander Nehamas has its source in Karl Jaspers's book *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity* [*Nietzsche: Einführung in das Verständnis seines Philosophierens*] published in 1936. As Jasper's indicates, his main intention in the book was "to marshal against the National Socialists the world of thought of the man whom they had proclaimed as their own philosopher."³ For this reason, Jaspers has the same goal as his contemporaries Martin Heidegger and Karl Löwith, who also wrote books and delivered lectures on the topic of Nietzsche's philosophy in the 1930s. All three of these scholars hoped to show that not only was Nietzsche a rigorous thinker—and not simply a poet-philosopher—but also that his thought could not be appropriated by the Nazis. Each had his own methodology proper to his investigation—in the case of Jaspers, it was the search for "*his whole way of thinking* throughout his *Existenz*" that provided the key to the interpretation of Nietzsche's thought.⁴

The foundation for Jaspers's understanding of Nietzsche, therefore, derives from a careful consideration of Nietzsche's life and thought, and how they complement one another. Insofar as he takes them as conjoined, Jaspers's approach is able to grasp certain aspects of Nietzsche's thought that would otherwise remain obscure. What is most important about this approach is that it affords one a glimpse of the whole of Nietzsche's thought—it provides

significant information to his readers. The point is not that we must pay attention to the (ill-characterized) 'literary' aspects of his work but that in addition to presenting his views, Nietzsche's varying, self-conscious writing enables the practiced reader always to be aware of *who* it is whose views are being presented, what personality these views express and constitute." From *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 37.

³ Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity*, trans. Charles F. Wallraff and Frederick J. Schmitz (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1997), xiii.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 15. Jaspers's emphasis.

one with the background of his thought. Life is indeed the context for all thought; one would be a bad reader of Nietzsche if one did not grasp this major theme in his works. The strength of Jaspers's interpretation, thus, lies in its capacity to present a general view of Nietzsche's thought. However, the misunderstanding of the relation between life and thought, which is a simple mistake, results in a superficial approach to Nietzsche's philosophy that misses the point.⁵ Context then becomes the tyrant. Thought is reduced to life or even the influences on Nietzsche (the books he happened to be reading). Nietzsche's claim to be "untimely" is dismissed because of the scholar's complete distrust of Nietzsche as a reliable source for information on his own life and thought in *Ecce Homo*—caution would be a better guide in this situation.

More recently, this contextualizing approach to Nietzsche's thinking has gained momentum among some scholars. The biographer Rüdiger Safranski, following the guidelines of this approach, tries to reduce Nietzsche's thinking to the various stages in his life in his work *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*.⁶ Biography itself is problematic when it is applied to the philosopher: it will invariably attempt to undercut the thinker's claim to innovation by concentrating on the "historical" influences. Nietzsche himself warns that the overabundance of history will kill the subject so that it is no longer living—this is the demand of "objectivity," which freezes Nietzsche in his proper "historical" place in the history of 19th century German philosophy. Even as careful a scholar as Thomas Brobjer

⁵ This also leads to the tendency to mythologize Nietzsche's life and, therefore, misconstrue his status in the history of philosophy. To a certain extent, then, biographers of him run the risk of aggrandizing Nietzsche—thus, following in the footsteps of Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche, Nietzsche's sister, who manipulated her brother's literary estate for the pursuit of personal gain.

⁶ Rüdiger Safranski, *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, trans. Shelley Frisch (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003).

falls prey to this superficial approach in his most recent book, *Nietzsche's Philosophical Context: An Intellectual Biography*. Despite his claim that he will not reduce Nietzsche's thinking to "a string of excerpts from books," Brobjer nevertheless works within the same framework of contextualization: "More fundamental is the attempt to better understand and make known the general context in which Nietzsche thought and wrote and his dependence on this context."⁷ The massive list of Nietzsche's reading at the back of the book, while helpful for research, gives one the impression that his thought is determined by the books he read.⁸ Those whose books he checked out from libraries or owned himself (Brobjer names the six major influences: Emerson, Plato, Schopenhauer, Lange, Kant, and Rée) constitute Nietzsche's horizon of philosophical thought. The point is not that this may be true—I think that each of these thinkers had a decisive impact on Nietzsche's philosophy—but that this attempts to make Nietzsche all too "timely." His thought is reduced to his time (in the form of the books that he read); in this way, thought is reduced to life.⁹

As Martin Heidegger and Eugen Fink remind us, this diluted approach is psychologistic and, hence, only grazes the surface of Nietzsche's thought. It does not actually penetrate into the depth of his thinking and the variegated nature of his writing, but remains content with superficial psychological analyses that do not provide an exhaustive

⁷ Thomas H. Brobjer, *Nietzsche's Philosophical Context: An Intellectual Biography* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 2.

⁸ Nietzsche himself warns against the reduction of culture and education to "tables" in one of the *Prefaces to Unwritten Works*, entitled "Thoughts on the Future of Our Educational Institution," composed as a Christmas present for Cosima Wagner in 1872.

⁹ A notable exception to this general trend is Julian Young's *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). In general, Young does a good job of pointing out differences between the life Nietzsche actually lead and his philosophy; and he also indicates the points of convergence between the two. However, there are also points at which he repeats the tired old phrases about Nietzsche: for example, that his later works (those of 1888) were the products of megalomania, and Nietzsche was beginning to lose his mind—hence, they do not contain important material for an overall interpretation of Nietzsche's thought and may be ignored. For a discussion of the importance of these final works, see Chapter 5 below.

explanation of his thought. To the extent that one focuses on the thinker, one loses sight of the thought. This does not diminish the importance of Nietzsche's insight that one's thinking is invariably conditioned by the relation to a given society, political establishment, or other authoritative institution—i.e., the condition of life that is necessary for thinking. These conditions are always present but to varying degrees at different times and places. What never changes is the content of one's thinking when one does philosophy in the way that Nietzsche does. Heidegger believes that each philosopher thinks one thought in his lifetime *despite* the various conditions of his life; the conditions only turn the thought to one side or the other, reveal one aspect or the other, focus the reader's attention on one moment or the other. The thought itself transcends all of these changes—even in the case of someone who would deny that thinking has this kind of transcendence.¹⁰ This is no less true of someone like Nietzsche, whom Heidegger suggested ought to be studied as carefully and rigorously as Aristotle.

Fink emphasizes the fact that we need to immerse ourselves in Nietzsche's works so that we can engage his thought properly. The approach to his thought through his life has the tendency to obscure the focus of his work in some cases. No one would bother with

¹⁰ Heidegger's caution in regard to the interpretation of the various plans for *The Will to Power* in the *Nachlass* serves as a reminder for the proper interpretation of all of Nietzsche's writings: "These are not stages of development. Neither can the three fundamental positions be distinguished according to their scope: each is concerned with the whole of philosophy and in each one the other two are implied, although in each case the inner configuration and the location of the center which determines the form vary. And it was nothing else than the question of the center that genuinely 'maltreated' Nietzsche. Of course, it was not the extrinsic question of finding a suitable connection or link among the handwritten materials available; it was, without Nietzsche's coming to know of it or stumbling across it, the question of philosophy's self grounding. It concerns the fact that, whatever philosophy is, and however it may exist at any given time, it defines itself solely on its own terms; but also that such self-determination is possible only inasmuch as philosophy always has already grounded itself. Its proper essence turns ever toward itself, and the more original a philosophy is, the more purely it soars in turning about itself, and therefore the farther the circumference of its circle presses outward to the brink of nothingness." From his lecture "The Will to Power as Art," *Nietzsche Volumes One and Two*, trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 15-16.

Nietzsche if his work were simply the expression of his tormented life; he would only be an interesting person at best. He could then be brushed aside as a man whose experiments in thought pushed him to the extremes of rationality and, from there, over the edge into insanity. One would not need to take his thought seriously. But what if Nietzsche is a philosopher, i.e., “someone who spiritually safeguards our humanity and the truth of our existence” through his thinking? We would then be unable to avoid an engagement with him and would have to ask ourselves: “Where does he stand as a thinker? We can never find an answer to this question by focusing intently on Nietzsche’s personality, by accumulating reports about him and by having recourse to the most penetrating psychology. Only the reflection of his philosophical thought can experience where Nietzsche is located in the history of Western thought and gains a glimpse of the seriousness of his questions.”¹¹ We need to meet Nietzsche in terms of his thought primarily. His life will always remain a secondary phenomenon that is connected to his thought, one which can never adequately serve as a substitute for his work. To follow the path of his thought through his writings rather than the course of his life leads one to the question of whether Nietzsche is merely an “inverted metaphysician” or someone who achieves a new “ontological understanding.”¹²

Philosophy is a lifelong endeavor, as Nietzsche rightly recognizes. One would be more true to Nietzsche’s thinking if one remained on the path of his thinking, the entire time keeping his main thought within one’s view. The main thought that guides his way of thinking and structures all of his “later” philosophy is that of the “eternal recurrence of the

¹¹ Eugen Fink, *Nietzsche’s Philosophy*, trans. Goetz Richter (London & New York: Continuum, 2003), 5.

¹² *Ibid.*, 6.

same.”¹³ This thought is present in all of the “stages” of his philosophy—even from the earliest days at Schulpforta. It may only be inchoate (i.e., a question rather than an answer, a “doctrine” [Lehre]) at this point in his life, but the outlines of his “most abysmal thought” are already present when Nietzsche is young. Of course, this does not change the fact that the same thought finds its most precise articulation in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and the *Nachlass* of the 1880s. All that changes is that Nietzsche’s thinking can be seen to have a definite direction and coherence of structure. If one pursues the diluted biographical and psychological methodology of “stages” of thinking, one exchanges the grandeur and unity of Nietzsche’s vision for details of his life.¹⁴ (Although to a certain extent this approach is unavoidable.)

Among the three scholars writing on Nietzsche in the 1930s, Karl Löwith devotes himself to the task of a detailed explanation of the nature of the doctrine of the eternal recurrence. As the first book-length study of the eternal recurrence, Löwith’s approach has cast a long shadow over developments in the scholarship on this topic since its publication—anyone who wants to understand this is indebted to the groundwork of this scholar. However, there is a flaw in his approach since it results in the conclusion that the doctrine is incoherent. As the work stands, it remains backwards because he ignores Nietzsche’s own advice about reading and understanding his thought as it is presented in his works. Löwith believes that Nietzsche’s “genuine philosophy,” the doctrine of the eternal recurrence, can

¹³ “The thought of the eternal return is the foundation for Nietzsche’s main thoughts. These are the doctrine of the will to power, the death of God and the overman.” Ibid., 102.

¹⁴ In his, unfortunately, overlooked work on the philosopher, Friedrich Georg Jünger comes to a similar conclusion with regard to the unity of Nietzsche’s thinking: “Whoever returns from reading the last works to ‘Birth of Tragedy’ will be surprised about the unity of this thinking, which is absolutely one with the determination of this thinker.” From his book *Nietzsche* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1949), 2-3.

only be found in the “third period” of his philosophizing after *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.¹⁵ He begins with the doctrine as it is formulated in *Zarathustra* and then proceeds to read this doctrine back into Nietzsche’s earlier writings (including his high school essays “Fate and History” [“Fatum und Geschichte”] and “Free Will and Fate” [“Willensfreiheit und Fatum”]). However, such a procedure is backwards according to Nietzsche’s own warning¹⁶ and no interpretation of Nietzsche’s thought ever surfaces from this. Löwith’s methodology reduces the doctrine to contradiction between cosmology and anthropology: “On the one hand the idea of the eternal recurrence teaches a new purpose of human existence beyond human existence, a will to self-eternalization; but it also teaches the exact opposite: a revolving of the natural world in itself, a revolving that is just as selfless as it is goalless, and that includes human life. The cosmic meaning clashes with the anthropological meaning, so that the one contradicts the other.”¹⁷ Under the influence of this assumption, scholarship for the past 70 years has been left in the awkward position of affirming the eternal recurrence as either *practical* or *theoretical*, but not both.

But in defense of Löwith, he never said that the doctrine of the eternal recurrence breaks into two sides: the *practical* and the *theoretical*. He said that it breaks apart into an *anthropological* and *cosmological* aspect. It is all too easy to make the elision from Löwith’s

¹⁵ “The third period [of Nietzsche’s intellectual career] begins on the foundation of the idea of the eternal recurrence, with *Zarathustra*, and ends with *Ecce Homo*. This period alone contains Nietzsche’s genuine philosophy.” From *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, trans. J. Harvey Lomax (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 23.

¹⁶ Nietzsche’s warning concerning the difficulty of reading his polemic in the “Preface” to *On the Genealogy of Morality* is applicable to all of his later writings: “If anyone finds this script incomprehensible and hard on the ears, I do not think the fault necessarily lies with me. It is clear enough, assuming as I do, that people have first read my earlier works without sparing themselves some effort: because they really are not easy to approach.” *KGW VI/2*: 267. *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 9.

¹⁷ *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, 60.

distinction to that of the everyday distinction between theory and practice, which all too many scholars have done. One can already sense this elision in Gilles Deleuze's study *Nietzsche et la philosophie* (1962) when he divides the eternal recurrence between physical theory (speculation) and an ethical doctrine (practice): "The eternal return gives the will a rule as rigorous as the Kantian one. We have noted that the eternal return, as a physical doctrine, was the new formulation of a speculative synthesis [la synthèse spéculative]. As an ethical thought [pensée éthique] the eternal return is the new formulation of the practical synthesis: *whatever you will, will it in such a way that you also will its eternal return.*"¹⁸

Whether intentional or not, this elision of the cosmological/anthropological into the theoretical/practical has nevertheless come to color the subsequent discussions of the meaning and validity of the eternal recurrence. The specter of Löwith's interpretation remains in the background of these discussions (even if it goes unacknowledged in the bibliographies), and so does his thought that the eternal recurrence is incoherent if one tries to affirm simultaneously its theoretical and practical aspects.

Despite all the subtle distinctions and quibbling over the meaning and validity of the doctrine, all the interpretations within the past decades operate within the framework established by Löwith in his distinction between the cosmological and anthropological sides of the teaching. The vast majority of scholars have rejected the validity of the theoretical side of the doctrine and, for the most part, agreed that the doctrine only has practical/ethical meaning—a fact that attests to their agreement (albeit tacit) with Löwith's conclusion that the two sides cannot be combined in a coherent way. Ivan Soll's account agrees substantially

¹⁸ From *Nietzsche et la philosophie*, 5th ed. (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2007), 77. Deleuze's emphasis.

with that of the ethical/anthropological interpretation when he says: “The presentation of the eternal recurrence in the published works without any substantive argumentation for its truth indicates that it was not primarily the doctrine’s truth or theoretical content that concerned Nietzsche but rather people’s attitudes and reactions to this theory.”¹⁹ A paradigmatic representation of the doctrine as ethically (or anthropologically) significant is Bernd Magnus’s *Nietzsche’s Existential Imperative*. Work by Arthur Danto and Arnold Zuboff is in a similar vein (see bibliography for full references). J. Kreuger is also in agreement with this general line of interpretation.²⁰ Even more recently, Bernard Reginster has unwittingly contributed to the interpretation of the doctrine as practical: “My proposal is decidedly *practical*: the eternal recurrence tells us something about the nature of affirmation, rather than about the life to be affirmed.”²¹ The list could (and does) go on.

One should also note that Löwith’s teleological view of Nietzsche’s teaching of the eternal recurrence harbors ideological presuppositions that were the product of his experiences in Germany “after” the rise of Nazism. “Those who know Nietzsche’s significance for Germany can easily find the bridge that spans the abyss between the ‘before’ and ‘after’. It is indeed impossible to understand the development of Germany without this last German philosopher.”²² His keen insight into Nietzsche’s thought is, therefore, dependent on his own standpoint in 20th century history and, more importantly, his own

¹⁹ From “Reflections on Recurrence: A Re-Examination of Nietzsche’s Doctrine, *Die Ewige Wiederkehr Des Gleichen*,” in *Nietzsche: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert C. Solomon (New York: Doubleday, 1973).

²⁰ “Nietzschean Recurrence as a Cosmological Hypothesis,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 16 (1978), 435-44.

²¹ From *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 205.

²² Karl Löwith, *My Life in Germany Before and After 1933: A Report*, trans. Elizabeth King (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 6. See also “Another Epilogue” in this book for confirmation of this.

“critical encounter” with Heideggerian philosophy (especially in Heidegger’s esoteric interpretation of Nietzsche).²³ Hans-Georg Gadamer’s critique of Löwith’s accusation that Heidegger goes beyond the statements to provide a skewed interpretation is apt:

We cannot, as in a recent transposition, again play off nature against history if we are seeking to understand *the unity of Nietzsche’s thought*. Löwith himself does not get past establishing the unresolved conflict in Nietzsche. But must we not, in view of this, ask the further question how it was possible to get caught in this blind alley—i.e., why was it not for Nietzsche himself an imprisonment and a failure but *the great discovery and liberation*? The reader finds no answer in Löwith to this further question. But this is precisely what one would like to understand, that is, to carry out, through one’s own thinking.²⁴

One should seek the coherence and unity in a thinker rather than strive to illustrate only conflict and incoherency in his or her thought—the latter is no real interpretation at all because it does not strive for the whole in relation to its parts. This criticism is equally applicable to those scholars who believe that only half of the teaching of the eternal recurrence is coherent. The question of why Nietzsche considered this thought to be the “great liberation,” as he puts it in a section from *Twilight of the Idols*, is of the utmost importance for a proper understanding of his philosophy as a whole.

The following interpretation of the teaching of the eternal recurrence will avoid the basic errors that have resulted from the two main approaches prevalent in the scholarship on the eternal recurrence since the 1930s: the biographical/psychological approach of “stages”

²³ Ironically, Löwith’s criticism of the interpretations offered by both Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger applies equally in the case of his own: “The contemporary reader will draw the conclusion that Jaspers’ Nietzsche is not Heidegger’s Nietzsche, and that both interpreted Nietzsche in their own way, just as one does generally in order to understand others, namely from the standpoint of one’s own presuppositions, on which each must ‘decide’ for himself. In spite of all the historiological reflection on the part of modern understanding, the question of how Nietzsche himself decided and understood remains unasked because it is assumed that only such a presuppositionless movement beyond the text is capable of interpreting it.” From “The Unsaid in ‘Nietzsche’s Word ‘God is Dead,’”” in *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, trans. Gary Steiner (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 104.

²⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York and London: Continuum, 1986), 500. Emphasis added.

and the approach of Karl Löwith (and its diluted forms). If one uses an historical approach, one avoids these two extremes of superficiality, on the one hand, and the incompatibility between the theoretical and practical aspects of the doctrine, on the other. It is possible to see that Nietzsche's lifelong endeavor is the proper articulation of his "most abysmal thought," the eternal return. Remaining true to his path of thinking, from the earliest expression to the most mature articulation, renders a different reading from those that have been offered so far: the eternal recurrence is Nietzsche's philosophy of history. Much like Hegel and Schelling, Nietzsche formulates a rational approach to time and the human perception of it in the doctrine of the eternal recurrence. Rather than it being teleological and linear, time for Nietzsche is cyclical—a fact which completely transfigures the usual perception of time in terms of past, present, and future.

A historical approach to Nietzsche's writings places him within the tradition of Western thought in general and German philosophy in particular. Not only does it demonstrate that Nietzsche has a philosophy of history in the doctrine of the eternal recurrence—something that is not usually associated with his thinking, but it also shows that the teaching is coherent. Thus, my thesis is twofold: 1) Nietzsche is heir to the legacy of German philosophy from Leibniz to Schopenhauer and his work, therefore, constitutes a contribution to philosophy of history; 2) To read his works in chronological order results in a different conclusion regarding the coherence of the doctrine of the eternal recurrence than that of Karl Löwith. Thus, Löwith's reading forms the contrast of my own even though our procedures are mirror images of one another's: his goes from later to earlier writings while

mine goes from earlier to later. The entire purpose of this dissertation is to show how a different conclusion derives from standing Nietzsche's works on their feet, so to speak.

Although much of the secondary literature on this most ambiguous idea of Nietzsche's is unsatisfactory, there are two interpretations that illuminate his thinking. One of these is Martin Heidegger's; the other is that of Wolfgang Müller-Lauter. Both interpretations are impressive due to their scope and the seriousness with which the scholars treat their subject. Within the past 30 years, Heidegger's interpretation has gone out of vogue thanks in part to the influence of analytic interpretations of Nietzsche that have breathed new life into the psychological/biographical approach. However much scholars drift away from the approach of Heidegger, it is nonetheless true that his interpretation is helpful methodologically—he strives after the whole of Nietzsche's philosophy without leaving parts behind as “irrelevant.”²⁵ One need not share his main concern with the history of being in order to derive useful insights into Nietzsche's thought, as Müller-Lauter advises: “Heidegger's metaphysical/historical [metaphysikgeschichtliche] interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophizing is undoubtedly unfair; nonetheless, it gains him the fundamental thing, and what's more, it goes away entirely from it. In the treatise I attempt to acknowledge Heidegger's thinking in his interpretations of Nietzsche even by its own claims.”²⁶ Here, one can see that one of the most respected Nietzsche scholars acknowledges the debt owed to Heidegger for his own interpretation even though his philological approach

²⁵ For example, Heidegger was one of the first scholars to insist that the doctrine of the eternal recurrence was crucial for a proper understanding of Nietzsche's thought. Prior to his lecture courses on Nietzsche, Alfred Baeumler argued that the will to power was all that one needed in order to understand Nietzsche in his book *Nietzsche, der Philosoph und Politiker* (1931). For Baeumler, the official Nietzsche scholar of the Nazi party, the eternal recurrence was inessential.

²⁶ Wolfgang Müller-Lauter, *Nietzsche Interpretationen III: Heidegger und Nietzsche* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), ix.

differs from that of Heidegger. The philological approach of Müller-Lauter has its merits in that it strives for historical accuracy while maintaining the coherence of Nietzsche's thought. Insofar as his interpretation achieves accuracy, Müller-Lauter achieves what Löwith demanded of a "true" understanding of Nietzsche.²⁷

There is a point in common between Heidegger and Müller-Lauter—their mutual disdain for the psychological approach to Nietzsche's thought. For those who follow Jaspers's methodology, Nietzsche's life is the proper gateway to his thought. Everything that he writes (both published and unpublished material) needs to be considered from the perspective of his life. The inherent problem with this approach is that it assumes that one can know Nietzsche as well as (if not better than) he knew himself. Heidegger and Müller-Lauter, on the other hand, believe that Nietzsche's life can only be known *through* his works. This is what Heidegger advised those attending his seminar in 1938/9 on Nietzsche's second *Untimely Meditation*: "It is essential to grasp once and in all decisiveness his thinking; but, at the same time, his life story must be observed, although *not* in a biographical-psychological intention."²⁸ We are not in a position to determine the significance of Nietzsche's works within the context of his life since no one of us is the particular man, Friedrich Nietzsche. Anything that can be ascertained about Nietzsche the man can only be derived from his

²⁷ "The need to interpret a text as it was understood by its author, and to clarify what he himself said more or less clearly as well as what he did not say, is grounded in the authority of the matter to be interpreted, a matter which was at issue for the author. Whoever does not attempt to understand the ideas of another in the way that the other understood them himself, can also not adopt a critical posture toward the other in which one distinguishes oneself from the other, but instead will carry out the critique within an interpretation which is really a reinterpretation. One may call such a reinterpretation a 'productive transformation,' but this changes nothing in the fact that it is not a proper, critical interpretation. The requirement of understanding another as he understood himself, apart from its difficulty, remains justified if one does not assume *a priori* that the process of history places us beyond all prior thinking," (Löwith, "Unsaid," 104).

²⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Zur Auslegung von Nietzsches II. Unzeitgemäßer Betrachtung, Gesamtausgabe: Abteilung II, Band 46* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2003), 7.

writings. For Heidegger, then, we need to read carefully Nietzsche's works if we are to understand anything about the man. And this is especially true for his second *Untimely Meditation*, the only work of Nietzsche's to which Heidegger devoted an entire seminar course in 1938/9. Heidegger's thought here is the starting point for Müller-Lauter's own philological interpretation.

My hope in this work will be to combine these considerations of Nietzsche's thought in general so as to obtain a coherent interpretation of the thought of the eternal recurrence. In this way, I will preserve the profound insights afforded in Heidegger's consideration of the eternal recurrence while also avoiding the danger of transforming Nietzsche's thought into something that it is not. Müller-Lauter's sober approach to the subject is what preserves the integrity of Nietzsche's thinking as he himself understood it. The successful combination of these two methods is what I have already called the "historical approach," one feature of which is the chronological reading of Nietzsche's works (published and unpublished) and letters. Thus, I do discuss Nietzsche's thought in stages, but these are stages of work (not of life). My methodology is based largely on what Nietzsche himself advises concerning the reading of his philosophy in the "Preface" to *Daybreak* (added in 1886). His instructions are worth quoting at length:

It is not for nothing that I have been a philologist, perhaps I am a philologist still, that is to say a teacher of slow reading:—in the end I also write slowly. Nowadays it is not only my habit, it is also to my taste—a malicious taste, perhaps?—no longer to write anything which does not reduce to despair every sort of man who is 'in a hurry.' For philology is that venerable art which demands of its votaries one thing above all: to go aside, to take time, to become still, to become slow—it is a goldsmith's art and connoisseurship of the *word* which has nothing but delicate, cautious work to do and achieves nothing if it does not achieve it *lento*. But for precisely this reason it is more necessary than ever today, by precisely this means does it entice and enchant us the most, in the midst of an age of 'work,' that is to say, of hurry, of indecent and perspiring haste, which wants to 'get

everything done' at once, including every old or new book:—this art does not so easily get anything done, it teaches to read *well*, that is to say *to read slowly deeply, looking cautiously before and aft* with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers . . . My patient friends, this book desires for itself only readers and philologists: *learn to read me well!*—²⁹

According to Nietzsche, the reader is to blame if he or she does not understand what is being said in his works. It is for this reason that he admonishes his audience to read his earlier writings before taking on his later ones in the “Preface” to *On the Genealogy of Morality* (see n. 16 above). Any other approach to his thought is “bad philology,” for it does not look forward and backward—it does not look at the proper context for his thoughts within the whole of his published material.³⁰ If one does not read carefully in the manner prescribed, there is the risk of misunderstanding Nietzsche (something that he was well aware of, but nevertheless feared). The danger of misreading him on the eternal recurrence (like Löwith), as I have attempted to illustrate, cannot be avoided if one does not follow his instructions.

Following Nietzsche’s own instructions for reading and understanding his philosophy, I will attempt to reconstruct his teaching of the eternal recurrence so that it is possible to see it as a coherent philosophy of history. For this reason, I begin with his earliest unpublished and published writings and work my way toward his later works. Each chapter of this dissertation deals with his works in chronological order—“*looking cautiously before and aft*” in order to show that even in his earliest writings Nietzsche had the thought of the eternal recurrence in mind (even if it was in the form of a question).

²⁹ *KGW* V/1: 9. From *Daybreak*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 5. Emphasis added.

³⁰ It would be “bad philology” to take aphorisms or quotations from Nietzsche’s works and interpret them from the perspective of his life. Under his own instructions, as Babette Babich writes, it is absolutely necessary to have read “*all of it* [Nietzsche’s works]” in order to understand his philosophy. From her article, “Between Hölderlin and Heidegger: Nietzsche’s Transfiguration of Philosophy,” *Nietzsche-Studien* 29 (2000): 278.

The first chapter of this dissertation will examine a little more than a decade (1862-1872) of Nietzsche's writings. I will examine several different kinds of writings. First I will consider carefully "Fate and History" and "Freedom of the Will and Fate," two essays that Nietzsche wrote during his Easter break from Schulpforta in 1862. Next I will look at the major themes of his first publication *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). The complexity and nuance of this work prevent an exhaustive analysis so I will only pursue the task of examining this work in its relation to the thought of the eternal return as it is presented in its earliest expression. Then I will incorporate some of Nietzsche's writings in the mid-1870s that focus on the history of ancient Greek philosophy. The philologica and his unpublished material from this period are indispensable for a proper understanding of the doctrine of the eternal recurrence. Nietzsche's lecture "The Pre-Platonic Philosophers" (1872) and the unfinished work *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (1873) both point toward Heraclitus as the teacher of this doctrine. All of these works are connected in that they express the thought of the eternal recurrence in a similar inchoate way—as the question "What is Dionysian?" Most importantly, this chapter will point out how the "problem of science" was first approached in *The Birth of Tragedy*, a problem that Nietzsche considers to be of the utmost importance throughout his career. His contrast between the Dionysian, artistic interpretation of existence and the Socratic, moral interpretation that he first poses here sets the stage for his teaching of the eternal recurrence as a Dionysian philosophy.

In the second chapter, I will focus on Nietzsche's thoughts about history as presented in "On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life," the second of the *Untimely Meditations* (1873). This work is crucial for a proper understanding of Nietzsche's teaching

of the eternal recurrence as a philosophy of history. Contained in this short essay is the essential thought that history should “serve life,” which means that the distinction between theory and practice should be overcome through a proper relation to the temporal dimensions of past, present, and future. It is no mistake that Nietzsche is concerned with the status of educational institutions and how historicism has led to a domination of theory over practice (i.e., life serves history), for education as conceived by Plato ought to strive to eliminate the distinction between theory and practice in the way one led one’s life [*ethos*]. The turning point for understanding the later articulation of the eternal recurrence comes from this short essay on history. This short, but most “untimely,” essay is the anti-Hegelian text *par excellence*—precisely because it reveals the negation of the negation as *nihil*. Its main idea is what shatters the Hegelian dialectic of history, but leaves what will take its place ambiguous. The unarticulated in this essay is the idea of the innocence of becoming, the eternal recurrence. This essay sets the stage for Nietzsche’s answer to the question “What is Dionysian?” If one does not begin with this essay before examining the doctrine in its mature formulation, then one must arrive at the conclusion of Karl Löwith: the eternal recurrence is an incoherent doctrine that cannot reconcile theory and practice.

The third chapter examines the writings of the “middle period” of Nietzsche’s philosophy—beginning with *Human, All Too Human* (1878-9) and ending with *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1885). It was here that Löwith thought the “genuine” philosophy of Nietzsche was located. And it was from the perspective of the mature articulation of the doctrine of the eternal recurrence at this point in Nietzsche’s career that Löwith judged the earlier works concerned with this teaching as “periods” of development. This approach,

however, results in a fundamental misunderstanding of the purpose of the teaching. The investigation in the previous chapter provides a foundation for the proper understanding of the teaching of the eternal recurrence as it is presented in §341 of *The Gay Science* (1882) and the oracular pronouncements and exhortations of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-85). The radicalization of science in Nietzsche's "gay science" is what makes the eternal recurrence inevitable, as "the *most scientific* of all possible hypotheses." It will be in this chapter that the internal coherence of Nietzsche's thought as a whole will be demonstrated through an examination of the relation between the thought of the eternal recurrence, the "death of God," the rise of nihilism, the overman, and the will to power.

Next, the writings of the later Nietzsche will be examined. *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) and *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887) contain sustained critiques of Christianity as a religion that devalues life in the present by positing all meaning of existence in a "beyond." Nietzsche's critical powers attain their height in these two works: he questions the value of truth and, along with it, the value of science, morality, and religion (especially Christianity). The force of his critique of the Western intellectual tradition derives its strength from his teaching of the eternal recurrence. As an ateleological philosophy of history, it is a standpoint beyond the moral interpretation of existence and is, therefore, capable of a radical critique of morality from the perspective of life. The linear-teleological view of history—as articulated in Christian eschatology and the Hegelian philosophy of history—is no longer feasible because it undermines life. The foundation for his overall project of dismantling Christianity, which divides the human being in two, is the eternal recurrence, a teaching that unifies and provides coherence to the human experience of *this*

world. The fervor with which he attacks Christianity in his last year of sanity (in works like *The Antichrist*, *Twilight of the Idols*, and *Ecce Homo*) can be explained by the faith he placed in his teaching to overcome all divisions in life that would devalue the present, the “earth.”

Finally, in the last chapter, I will discuss a few of the key themes of Nietzsche’s most rhetorical, and popular, writings, those of 1888. One of the most important of these is his critique of the virtue of “intellectual honesty/integrity” [Redlichkeit]. The eternal recurrence is the product of this virtue, which has its origins in the Socratic endeavor to “know thyself,” because it is characterized by Nietzsche as “*most scientific*.” However, it is also the point of critique for all that came before it. It serves the dual function of creation and destruction—this makes it Dionysian—because it destroys all that came before and creates the possibility for a new view of the world. The question of happiness becomes central once a new view of the world is opened up. This may explain why Nietzsche begins to speak of happiness in a physiological sense in *The Antichrist*. I will also discuss the reasons for Nietzsche’s critical attitude toward St. Paul and his radical Protestant interpretation of Jesus.

After reading Nietzsche philologically, as he himself recommends, I will discuss some of the implications this may have for the recent surge in studies on Nietzsche’s philosophy of science. This study of Nietzsche may necessitate a change in our attitude toward his philosophy and the way that he is studied. I think that Nietzsche’s philosophy presents a positive challenge to think once more about the roots of philosophical thought in the West. But, more importantly, reading and thinking through his philosophy encourages the reader to engage freely in philosophy.

Chapter 1: The “Inchoate Stage” of Nietzsche’s Philosophy

In this first chapter, I will discuss some of the early themes in Nietzsche’s philosophy by briefly discussing a few of the works written between 1862 and 1872. It was during this decade that he produced the greatest variety of works—this makes interpretation of his thought difficult at this stage. Within these years he wrote essays for high school, articles for professional philological journals, lectures for classes on ancient Greek philosophy, and published his first major work, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). His “first born” is the fruit of the labor of nearly a decade of intense study. In this work, he sets up the terms and distinctions that will govern his thinking until the first days of 1889 when he lost his sanity. The two major terms that are set up as formal markers are the “Socratic” and the “Dionysian.” The difference between these two approaches to the nature of existence is first outlined in detail in this seminal work. It is the task of this chapter to trace the genealogy of these two opposed views of the world and Nietzsche’s thoughts on Socratism, science, art, and the Dionysian.

1862-1872: Philology as Philosophy

As a prominent student at the illustrious Schulpforta, Nietzsche’s education compared to the standards of today was excellent. He was taught by some of the best educators in Europe at the time. However, he was not limited to what was taught in the classroom—he wrote continuously as a young man even when there was no assignment. This is clear from two essays that he wrote over Easter break in 1862 entitled “Fate and History” [“Fatum und Geschichte”] and “Freedom of the Will and Fate” [“Willensfreiheit und Fatum”]. His

education continued at Bonn and then Leipzig before he was awarded his doctorate in philology under Friedrich Ritschl and became a professor at the University of Basel in 1869. His popularity waned after his first major publication in 1872 *The Birth of Tragedy* [*Die Geburt der Tragödie*]; nevertheless, he persisted in his professional duties in the early 1870s, teaching courses on the pre-Platonic philosophers among other topics. During this time in his career he wrote short philosophical treatises imbued with a philological-historical bent for friends, like Richard and Cosima Wagner. And he wrote on topics for his own edification like *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* [*Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter*] that were never meant for publication.

Despite the variety in the topics that he discusses in this decade, Nietzsche's thought remains concerned with history and the nature of historical education. Philosophy, as a topic of discussion or as a part of his methodology, is always present in his "juvenile" writings and his first book. A close examination of these writings reveals continuity between his "pre-philosophical" essays and publications and his "philosophical" writings (those works that were published after Nietzsche left Basel including *Human, All too Human* [*Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*] in 1878). It is, therefore, time to move beyond the theory of "stages" or "periods" in Nietzsche's thought because he is always doing philosophy even when he is writing for philological journals.³¹ This is clear from the limited range of topics discussed in his philological writings—most, if not all, touch on the subject of ancient philosophy in one

³¹ James I. Porter has been a voice for the view that Nietzsche's career is not divided in half between philology and philosophy. He argues that even Nietzsche's philology is a kind of philosophy: "Nietzsche's early motto, which he coined in 1869, is likewise an inversion of a phrase borrowed from a philosopher (Seneca), and it likewise addresses the relation of philosophy to philology. Only, now the inversion goes the other way: *philosophia facta est quae philologia fuit* ('what was once philology has now been made into philosophy')." From Porter's book *Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 14.

way or another. *Contributions to the Source Science and Criticism of Diogenes Laertius* [*Beiträge zur Quellenkunde und Kritik des Laertius Diogenes*] (1869-70)³², “The Pre-Platonic Philosophers” (lecture first delivered in the summer semester of 1872 but first composed in 1869), and the *Democritea* (notes from the late 1860s) are obviously concerned with the topic of ancient philosophy and its meaning in Nietzsche’s time.

Considering the amount of time that he spent with the ancient sources, Nietzsche can be said to have immersed himself in the teachings of the ancient philosophers—especially his favorite pre-Platonic, Heraclitus.³³ Nevertheless, his approach to the figures of the ancient philosophers remains historical—the “eternal recurrence,” for example, is understood as a teaching of Heraclitus, a doctrine that a historical figure might possibly have taught. His perspective of such a teaching is dictated by his formal historical training as a classical philologist. This does not mean that Nietzsche has no philosophical insights into the eternal recurrence at this “stage” in his career. What is significant is that Nietzsche has a profound interest in the nature of man’s relation to time, i.e., history, even from an early age. History forms the background of all of Nietzsche’s philosophizing so that one can go so far as to claim that his most profound insights are in the area of the philosophy of history.

³² Diogenes Laertius is crucial for adequate comprehension of Nietzsche’s relationship to pre-Platonic philosophy: “What is Diogenes to us? No-one would waste a word on the philistine features of this writer were he not, by chance, the guardian of jewels whose value he does not recognize. He is in fact night-porter to the history of Greek philosophy: no-one can enter unless Diogenes has given him the key.” Nietzsche learned a great deal from this “hasty and careless” Diogenes Laertius—so much so that he is one of Nietzsche’s constant reference points (even when he does not cite him directly) and whose approach to the history of philosophy influenced Nietzsche profoundly.

³³ It is surprising to hear Löwith affirm that “the philological papers, especially on the philosophy of Heraclitus, as well as the philosophical revision of these for the planned work on pre-Socratic philosophy, already contain all the principal features of his teaching that emerged ten years later.” *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, 115. If he thinks this, why would he start with *Zarathustra* and work his way backwards?

Nietzsche's philosophy is always a philosophy of history for the reason that his main teaching—the eternal recurrence—deals with time and the human relation to time.

This chapter explores a vast terrain of uncharted territory—a decade's worth of materials both published and unpublished that seem to have little in common with each other. However, this only seems to be the case. Upon closer inspection, one can discern a pervasive interest in man's relation to time and the meaning of history (directly or indirectly) within these articles, lectures, essays, and works. This is especially true when one considers the main opposition he introduces in *The Birth of Tragedy*: the "Socratic" vs. the "Dionysian." Adopting the historical approach outlined in the "Introduction," I will begin with the two high school essays noted above and work my way toward the incomplete and unpublished essay on *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section deals with the two high school essays exclusively; Nietzsche's letters to his friends, which concerns his break with Christianity, supplements the commentary on these essays. The second section jumps ahead to 1872 to examine *The Birth of Tragedy* and its significance for the development of a tragic worldview opposed to that of the perspective of Western science. I will then examine Nietzsche's philological essays and lectures on the pre-Platonic philosophers (both the 1872 lecture course and the unfinished *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*).

The series of lectures delivered in the winter semester of 1872 entitled "On the Future of Our Educational Institutions" is an important link between the seemingly incongruent concerns of Nietzsche in his philological work on the ancient Greek philosophers and in the second of the *Untimely Meditations* [*Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*], which he was

composing at the same time he was delivering his lectures. A discussion of these lectures prepares the way for the detailed examination of “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life” [*Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben*] (or more simply, the “History” essay). The affinity of the lectures and the later work, the latter of which mainly focuses on the deleterious effects of an education that gravitates around the historical, needs elucidation if what will be said in the next chapter is to make any sense. All that Nietzsche worked on between his first publication and the *Untimely Meditations* is essential to understand the transition his thinking undergoes in 1873.

Fate, Free Will, and History

As early as the age of eighteen, Nietzsche had lost his faith in Christianity. He ascribed his unbelief to the application of the historical-critical method to the tenets of faith. This was especially the case when it came to David Strauss’s *The Life of Jesus* [*Das Leben Jesu*] (1835)—a work that Nietzsche read as a young man at Schulpforta and which was largely responsible for his loss of faith in the transcendent claims of Western monotheism. In the first essay from Easter break of 1862, he writes: “Great revolutions are still imminent if the crowd has first grasped that *Christianity as a whole is grounded on assumptions.*”³⁴ Historical scrutiny of the ancient sources opens the door for serious criticism of the apodictic assertions of Christianity. For many of those in the 19th century, belief was undermined because the truth claims of the religion could be reduced to their historical origins. Rather than being transcendent in nature, the “truth” of Christianity actually derived from all too

³⁴ *KGW* 1/2: 433. Emphasis added. Compare this thought to his later reflections in §343 of the second edition of *The Gay Science* (1887). See Ch. 4 below.

human sources. This is what Nietzsche accepted, albeit with reservations, by the end of his rigorous training at Schulpforta.

At this time for Nietzsche, the world beyond this one is merely an imaginative construct, which means that the truth of Christianity is unfounded. He expresses a thought that would grow in intensity until the end of his career in a letter to his friends Krug and Pinder during the time the high school essays were written:

Once we recognize that we are responsible to ourselves alone, that we have only ourselves to blame and not any sort of higher powers for our failings in life, then we finally will strip the foundational ideas of Christianity of their outer covering and get at its core. [. . .] That God became man only indicates that man should not search for blessedness in the infinite; rather, he should ground his heaven on earth. The delusion of a world beyond has cast human spirits and minds in a false relation to the earthly world: this was the product of a childhood of peoples.³⁵

At a later date, the thought captured here will resound in Zarathustra's saying: "Remain true to the earth!" Thus, at an early age, Nietzsche is faced with a problem that will occupy him throughout the remainder of his intellectual career: how does the individual fit into a cosmos that lacks any transcendence while maintaining his superiority in the hierarchy of being?

For Nietzsche, the answer is already present in the essay "Fate and History: Thoughts." History provides the human being with a solid foundation so that he or she does not slip away into the ceaseless becoming of the universe. "History and natural science, the wonderful legacies of our entire past, the heralds of our future, they alone are the secure foundations on which we can build the tower of our speculations."³⁶ History is important in

³⁵ All citations of letters are from *Nietzsche Briefwechsel: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli andazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1975). Citations of letters, to or from Nietzsche, follows the same pattern as citations from his published or unpublished work: The date, *KGB*, followed by the division, volume, page, and letter number. For example, the citation for this letter would be: April 27, 1862, *KGB* I/1: 202 (no. 301). Unless otherwise noted, all translations of letters are my own.

³⁶ *KGW* I/2: 432.

that it firmly roots man in the past and (should) open him up to limitless possibilities in the future. Once one realizes that the “true world,” or the divine, no longer holds sway in the present, the possibilities in the future are truly limitless—one is no longer held back by divine sanctions. This presents an incredible danger and a fantastic opportunity simultaneously, as the young Nietzsche was well aware: either one loses all orientation and slips into nothingness or one affirms the limitless possibilities for creativity.

Freedom of creativity (and self-creation) becomes central in Nietzsche’s perspective from an early age until the end of his sanity. History simply provides the individual with the proper orientation so that he does not view his existence as absolutely arbitrary and, hence, meaningless. It is with this in mind that he offers a thought for reflection. To summarize: it is impossible to know if humanity is nothing more than a stage in becoming; it might be possible that the human being is a rock developed through the animal stage; if this is so, the human being’s perfection lay in this history of development (and not in a world beyond). “Does this eternal becoming never end? What are the motivating forces of these great clock mechanisms? They are hidden, but they are the same in the great hour that we call history. The events are the dial. From time to time the hand moves again to begin at 12 its course anew; a new period of the world dawns.”³⁷ What seems contradictory in all of this is that freedom can still be spoken of even if transcendence has been abolished. Since history is the sole ground from which the human being grows, we are thoroughly determined by the forces of the past. Free will, conceived as absolute, arbitrary freedom, is simply an illusion because

³⁷ *KGW* 1/2: 433-434.

one's freedom is limited by fate (or the ebb and flow of past, present, and future events that are irrevocably tied together at a single point).³⁸

The young Nietzsche was, therefore, well aware of the problem that confronts man in the absence of the transcendent God (even if he was unaware of the far reaching consequences of this event at this time). Adrift in the modern world with no stable ground, one latches onto history in order to provide a sense of security and a feeling of belongingness. However, as Jacob Burckhardt well understood, this would mean that one would be completely determined by history and possess no freedom—this is the tyranny of the historical.³⁹ His soon-to-be younger colleague at the University of Basel was also aware of this aporia. One of Nietzsche's main tasks is already found in these early essays: How can one maintain the delicate balance between necessity and freedom without allowing the former to displace the latter completely (as was the general tendency in 19th century German philosophy since Hegel)? The answer to this question ultimately can be found in the doctrine of the eternal recurrence. Nietzsche's later philosophy of history reconfigures the nature and relation of freedom and necessity by overcoming the distinction between theory and practice—as I will maintain in Chapters 4 and 5. This grounds the human being while simultaneously allowing one the freedom of creation (and self-creation).

Some indications that Nietzsche already had such a solution in mind in 1862 are found in the complementary essay, "Freedom of the Will and Fate." His goal in this short writing is to alter his thinking about the nature of freedom and necessity so that they can be

³⁸ "Fate is the infinite power of resistance against the free will; free will without fate is just as little thinkable as spirit without the real, good without evil." *KGW* 1/2: 436.

³⁹ This is something that Nietzsche would later argue in the second of the *Untimely Meditations*, especially §§8-9. Discussion of his thoughts on this problem follows in the next chapter.

combined without resulting in contradictions. Fate is not simply the inevitability of world history. We must remind ourselves that fate is “only an abstract concept, a force without substance, that there is only an individual fate for the individual, that fate is nothing but a chain of events, that man—as soon as he acts and, thus, creates his own events—determines his own fate, that in general the events, as they affect man, make him conscious or unconscious and must be suitable to him.”⁴⁰ Similarly, freedom of the will is an abstraction and designates only conscious behavior (as opposed to the unconscious behavior that derives from fate). These two seemingly incommensurable concepts “become blurred in the idea of individuality.”⁴¹ His prime example of an “individual” in this sense is Goethe—a man who remained creative despite the ever-changing conditions of his life. Thus, *fatum* is not reducible to a simple determinism but, rather, designates the necessary complement to free will.⁴² It is ingredient to the wholeness of the human being. One’s fate needs to be made actual through creativity—something that Nietzsche thought he achieved through his rigorous experimentation, which is why Nietzsche will later say that *amor fati*⁴³ is his “innermost nature.” Freedom becomes necessity and necessity becomes freedom in self-creation.

Nietzsche is here already treading on a path that Friedrich Schiller traveled down in his *On the Aesthetic Education of Man: In a Series of Letters* (1795). The unity of freedom and necessity can be found in the “play-drive” [*Spieltrieb*] found in aesthetic education—this

⁴⁰ *KGW* I/2: 438.

⁴¹ *KGW* I/2: 439.

⁴² “Perhaps . . . free will [is] nothing other than the highest potency of fate.” *KGW* I/2: 437.

⁴³ “My formula for human greatness is *amor fati*: that you do not want anything to be different, not forwards, not backwards, not for all eternity. No just to tolerate necessity, still less to conceal it—all idealism is hypocrisy towards necessity,—but to love it . . .” *KGW* VI/3: 297. From *Ecce Homo* in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 99.

is an important theme that Nietzsche developed throughout his intellectual career. It will be in this vein of thought that he will argue against the current conditions of education, echoing Schiller's thoughts on the transition from the Greek polis to the modern nation-state. The play-drive, as Schiller notes in the Fourteenth Letter, unites what is apparently incommensurable—in this case, time and timelessness:

The sense-drive demands that there shall be change and that time shall have a content; the form-drive demands that time shall be annulled and that there shall be no change. That drive, therefore, in which both the others work in concert (permit me for the time being, until I have justified the term, to call it the *play-drive*), the play-drive, therefore, would be directed towards annulling time *within time*, reconciling becoming with absolute being and change with identity.⁴⁴

The forgetfulness of time, the “it was,” which necessarily goes along with play (especially that of the child) is something that Nietzsche believes is necessary for happiness in §1 of the “History” essay. Here, despite the obvious differences between Schiller and Nietzsche on the issue of the relation between becoming and being, one is also reminded of what he says in one of his later notebooks: “To *imprint* upon becoming the character of being—that is the highest *will to power* . . . That *everything recurs* is the most extreme *approximation of a world of becoming to one of being: pinnacle of contemplation.*”⁴⁵ His thoughts on the possible fusion of freedom and necessity (and being and becoming) in an aesthetic vision of the world paves the way for the mature articulation of his doctrine of the eternal recurrence—the highest degree of unification of these two apparently incommensurate concepts.

⁴⁴ Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 97.

⁴⁵ *KGW VIII/1*: 320. From *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, trans. Kate Sturge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 138. Nietzsche's emphasis.

Greek Tragedy

Aesthetic education, the logical conclusion of Nietzsche's earliest views in these two essays, is highlighted in his first publication, *The Birth of Tragedy*.⁴⁶ Fourteen years after its first publication, in 1872, Nietzsche wrote a new preface for his "first born" that explains his relation to it. Commenting on the unwieldy nature of the book, Nietzsche says: "A *strange* voice was speaking here, the disciple of an as yet 'unknown god' who concealed himself beneath the cowl of a scholar, beneath the ponderousness and dialectical disinclination of the Germans, even beneath the bad manners of a Wagnerite . . . here one heard—as people remarked distrustfully—something like the voice of a mystical and almost maenadic soul which stammers in a strange tongue, with great difficulty and capriciously, almost as if undecided whether to communicate or conceal itself."⁴⁷ The book attempts to answer a novel question, albeit in a groping and fragmentary kind of way, the question "What is Dionysian?"⁴⁸ This is the question that will occupy Nietzsche for the rest of his career and whose answer will be summed up in the eternal recurrence of the same—this doctrine is the highest level of affirmation of existence because it affirms everything as "necessary" for the

⁴⁶ In spite of the prevalent view that Nietzsche disliked the moralizing Schiller, the *Birth of Tragedy* owes a great deal to Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. The later work has certain parallels and shares similar concerns with the earlier work, as a recent scholar has noted. "*Die Geburt der Tragödie* engages in a constructive and at times even deferential manner with Schiller's aesthetic theory, and the work as a whole relies heavily on idealist aesthetics." From Nicholas Martin's *Nietzsche and Schiller: Untimely Aesthetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 2. Both works are concerned with the education of the individual and each wants to make a change in the way that the individual sees the world. They are, therefore, both infused with the Kantian spirit insofar as they see aesthetic education as a prerequisite to the cultural change that each wants to effect. See Martin's excellent study for more detail on the affinity between these two works.

⁴⁷ *KGW* III/1: 8-9. From *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 6. Nietzsche's emphasis.

⁴⁸ Max L. Baeumer notes that Nietzsche was not the first to direct attention toward the concept of the Dionysian, but since he was the most vocal, he is largely identified as the originator of this concept. For a concise history of this concept in the 19th century see Baeumer's article "Nietzsche and the Tradition of the Dionysian," in *Studies in Nietzsche and the Classical Tradition* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1976).

meaningfulness of one's existence. As for now, Nietzsche remains content with pointing out the difference between the Socratic/scientific view of the world (i.e., the moral interpretation) and the Dionysian/tragic view (i.e., the aesthetic interpretation).

In short, the concept of the Dionysian signifies for Nietzsche an immediate ecstatic vision of the whole that cannot be attained through the dialectical art of Socrates (and the rest of the philosophical tradition). One must be “inspired” or “intoxicated.” In 1888, in *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche speaks of the kind of intoxication experienced by the artist under the influence of Dionysus: all modes of expression are discharged simultaneously, the artist himself is transformed by this intoxication and his understanding is attuned in a such a way that he cannot fail to understand those in a similar state. “It is impossible for a Dionysian to fail to understand any suggestion, he will not miss any affective signal, he has the most highly developed instinct for understanding and guessing, just as he possesses the art of communication to the highest degree. *He enters into any skin, into any affect: he constantly transforms himself.*”⁴⁹ Dionysus, in a sense, enters into the prophet and transforms him in such a way that his communication takes on all of these various subtle tones. Nietzsche considers both Heraclitus and Zarathustra (and Nietzsche himself) to possess this symphonic form of communication, which means that they have been overcome by a Dionysian kind of intoxication.⁵⁰ What would this mean for a proper interpretation of Nietzsche's earliest publication, which he offered as a sacrifice to the god Dionysus?

⁴⁹ *KGW VI/3*: 111-112. From *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 197. Emphasis added.

⁵⁰ Reflecting on his work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in his autobiography, Nietzsche speaks of his inspiration in the following way: “The idea of revelation in the sense of something suddenly becoming *visible* and audible with unspeakable assurance and subtlety, something that throws you down and leaves you deeply shaken—this simply describes the facts of the case. You listen, you do not look for anything, you take, you do not ask who is

The first, but most certainly not the last, time Dionysus “crossed my path,” Nietzsche says, was in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Once this work is closely examined, it is easy to see that there are traces of the doctrine of the eternal recurrence (which is the core of Dionysian philosophy) in the work as a whole. Heraclitus, as a possible teacher of this doctrine, figures in the background of this “premature” work⁵¹—the connection between the philosophical type Heraclitus and the god Dionysus, though, is not made explicit at this point in Nietzsche’s thought. Ultimately, the several strands of thought present in his early lectures and publications (and this is especially true in the case of the eternal recurrence) are only later tied together in his “mature” works through his insight into the nature of science as a passion.⁵² The names Heraclitus and Zarathustra become intertwined in his last publications to such an extent that they signify the same thing, for they have both been transformed by Dionysus.

To answer the question raised in the preceding paragraph: Nietzsche’s thoughts on inspiration indicate that it was not Nietzsche who was speaking in *The Birth of Tragedy*, but rather the great tempter god himself. Nietzsche’s “inspiration”—one might even say “possession”—here is what allows him to understand both Heraclitus and Zarathustra;

there; a thought lights up in a flash, with necessity, without hesitation as to its form,—I never had any choice. A delight whose incredible tension sometimes triggers a burst of tears, sometimes automatically hurries your pace and sometimes slows it down; a perfect state of being outside yourself, with the most distinct consciousness of a host of subtle shudders and shiverings down to the tips of your toes; a profound joy where the bleakest and most painful things do not have the character of opposites, but instead act as its conditions, as welcome components, as *necessary* shades within this sort of excess of light . . . All of this is involuntary to the highest degree, but takes place as if in a storm of feelings of freedom, of unrestricted activity, of power, of *divinity* . . .” *KGW* VI/3: 337-338. From *Ecce Homo*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 126-27. Emphasis added.

⁵¹ By the time of the publication of his first work, Nietzsche was already composing his lectures on the “Pre-Platonic Philosophers” and was in correspondence with Erwin Rohde concerning Heraclitus’s philosophy as a “cosmodicy.”

⁵² See Chapter 3, especially.

Dionysus, the *daimon*, literally enters into each of these figures just as he did in the case of the actors on stage in ancient Attic tragedy. As Nietzsche says in an early version of his first work: “The dithyrambic servant of Dionysus can be understood only by those who are like him.”⁵³ This explains the immediate affinity Nietzsche feels with Heraclitus (and Zarathustra) from such an early stage in his professional career. Moreover, this may also indicate that the eternal recurrence could already be present in his first published work (albeit in an inchoate fashion). It will require a careful examination of the main thought in *The Birth of Tragedy* in order to make this point clear—but it is worth the effort since Nietzsche himself considers the thought contained in this work to be the zenith in the orbit of his intellectual career.

So, “what is Dionysian” according to Nietzsche at the time of 1872? If one can answer this question, it will be possible to see in what way the eternal recurrence lingers like a shadow in the background of Nietzsche’s first work. It is the answer to the question that he asks but is unable to articulate. “Everything is announced in advance in this essay: the imminent return of the Greek spirit, the need for *counter-Alexanders* to *retie* the Gordian knot of Greek culture after it had been undone . . .”⁵⁴ The harmonious unity of humanity with nature in the age of Greek tragedy—as a paradigm of culture—is the true topic of this essay. It only appears to be philological, but in reality it is a philosophical exposition on the nature of man’s being at home in the world.⁵⁵ Nietzsche’s prolonged attack on Socratism and

⁵³ *KGW* III/2: 69.

⁵⁴ *KGW* VI/3: 312.. *Ecce Homo*, 111. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

⁵⁵ “The rejection of Nietzsche’s treatise by traditional philologists is in some degree justified. No less than Wilamowitz-Möllendorf led a sharp attack against the treatise, which he accused of ‘a dreamy ingenuity and impertinence, ignorance and insufficient love of truth.’ However, it rests on the misunderstanding provoked by Nietzsche himself, namely that he was concerned with a philological question. The presentation of this treatise

scientific optimism (§§12-19) is intertwined with this exposition because he thinks that science is responsible for the human being's sense of homelessness in the world. The human being only feels at home in a world that is unified (even if that means that it is a tragic world). He begins to describe such a view in the 6th and 5th centuries B.C. by reflecting on the two main deities of artistic creation in Greece: Apollo and Dionysus.

The juxtaposition of the Apollonian and Dionysian in the sphere of art is something that goes largely unexplained because they are only symbols for two different states of being. Apollonian art is represented by the epic poetry of Homer whereas Dionysus is represented by lyrical poetry and music. For Nietzsche, the two artist gods must be joined in order to render whole what has hitherto been fragmented: their unification results in the highest art form, Greek music drama. Apollo without Dionysus is simply appearance, an outer shimmering without any depth; Dionysus without Apollo is self-destructive knowledge. Dionysian wisdom needs to be tempered by the *principium individuationis*, as the tale of Oedipus suggests: "Wisdom, the myth seems to whisper to us, and Dionysiac wisdom in particular, is an unnatural abomination: whoever plunges nature into the abyss of destruction by what he knows must in turn experience the dissolution of nature in his own person."⁵⁶ Thus, the powerful, destructive inner tide of Dionysian pathos needs to be formed and controlled by the Apollonian love of outward appearance.⁵⁷

differs in all respects from the level of its actual conception. It appears to deal with aesthetic, psychological and philological problems, but it is in reality Nietzsche's first tentative attempt to articulate his philosophical understanding of the world." *Nietzsche's Philosophy*, 14.

⁵⁶ *KGW* III/1: 63. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 48.

⁵⁷ Thus, Apollo and Dionysus are not annihilating opposites (as sometimes thought) but competing drives. See Helmut Rehder's "The Reluctant Disciple," in *Studies in Nietzsche and the Classical Tradition*, eds. James C. O'Flaherty, Timothy F. Sellner, and Robert M. Helm (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1976).

The Dionysian, according to Nietzsche, is a surging, dark power that is in contact with the primordial essence of the One through music (the original language of the world of eternal becoming). One's existence is seen to be itself an injustice against the One—as Nietzsche believes Anaximander already realized in the “tragic age” of the Greek philosophers before Socrates.⁵⁸ Knowledge of this leads to despair, especially in the case of those who do not believe in divine redemption. Their “tragic” worldview notwithstanding, the Greeks are still able to affirm existence despite the impossibility of salvation from their finitude (necessary contingency). Once the Dionysian is tempered by the Apollonian, and the two grow into an organic whole onstage, the Greeks are able to affirm their own moribund existence because they know that they will rejoin the One.⁵⁹

Artistic interpretation, or aesthetic vision, is what makes this kind of affirmation possible in Nietzsche's view. Not only does art approach “as a saving sorceress with the power to heal,” but it is what makes action possible after one has gazed into the terrible heart of the cosmos: “*Knowledge [Erkenntniss] kills action; action requires one to be shrouded in a veil of illusion*—this is the lesson of Hamlet, not that cheap wisdom about Jack the Dreamer who does not get around to acting because he reflects too much, out of an excess of possibilities, as it were. No, it is not reflection, it is true knowledge, insight into the terrible truth, which outweighs every motive for action, both in the case of Hamlet and in that of

⁵⁸ See Nietzsche's discussion of the philosophy of Anaximander in §4 of *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*.

⁵⁹ “Tragic affirmation (including even the affirmation of one's own destruction) is based on the realization that all finite manifestations are just temporal waves in a great flood of life, that the destruction of finite being is not simply an annihilation, but a return to the ground of life from which all individual beings ascend.” *Nietzsche's Philosophy*, 10.

Dionysiac man.”⁶⁰ Intuitive insight into the nature of existence renders all action ineffective in the eyes of the one who has experienced Dionysian wisdom. Expressed in the terms of the philosophical tradition: there exists an insurmountable void between theory (Dionysian wisdom) and practice (action). The god of light needs to be joined to the god of darkness if existence is going to be justified—i.e., if man is going to be at home in the world. This is why Nietzsche maintains that “only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* is existence and the world eternally *justified*.”⁶¹

Art, therefore, is not simply something that the spectator is meant to enjoy “objectively.” Aesthetic experience, especially in tragedy, is itself a kind of education in that it unifies theory and practice—the spectator is drawn into the action onstage in such a way that he forgets himself and takes a personal interest in the happenings of the main character.⁶² It does not “help one live well,” in the sense that art is a secluded haven from the burdens of the rest of life; rather, it provides a coherent whole within which one can live and act with a certain degree of confidence. It makes man feel at home in the world. Greek tragedy, as the highest level of art in Nietzsche’s opinion, affirms the necessity of destruction while retaining freedom as the “highest potency of fate.” Without the individual on stage, which is introduced only through the form-giving power of Apollo, existence can never be affirmed—evil is just as much a part of the world as good. Tragedy itself is an example of how men like

⁶⁰ *KGW* III/1: 53. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 40.

⁶¹ *KGW* III/1: 43. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 33.

⁶² “The fact that tragedy begins with the satyr, and that Dionysiac wisdom of tragedy speak out of him, is something which now surprises us just as much as the fact that tragedy originated in the chorus. Perhaps it will serve as a starting-point for thinking about this if I now assert that the satyr, the fictitious creature of nature, bears the same relation to the cultured human beings as Dionysiac music bears to civilization . . . I believe that, when faced with the chorus of satyrs, cultured Greeks felt themselves absorbed, elevated, and extinguished in exactly the same way. This is the first effect of Dionysiac tragedy: state and society, indeed all divisions between one human being and another, give way to an overwhelming feeling of unity which leads men back to the heart of nature.” *KGW* III/1: 51-52. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 39.

Aeschylus and Sophocles are able to create despite the apparent conflict between fate and freewill in a world without transcendence (i.e., the possibility of redemption).

Individual characters onstage, e.g., Oedipus or Prometheus, are nothing but masks for the suffering god, Dionysus, according to Nietzsche. The audience is able to see the individual character only because Apollo is present. But it is individuation that is the primal evil, and tragedy offers a glimpse of the original unity within the One: “In the views described here we already have all the constituent elements of a profound and pessimistic way of looking at the world and thus, at the same time, of *the doctrine of the Mysteries taught by tragedy*: the fundamental recognition that everything which exists is a unity; the view that individuation is the primal source of all evil; and art as the joyous hope that the spell of individuation can be broken, a premonition of unity restored.”⁶³ Tragedy, therefore, provides a vision of primordial unity in which man and world, good and evil, becoming and being, are ultimately reconciled. This is what Nietzsche, following the insights of his friend Erwin Rohde, calls a “cosmodicy”: there is no final victory (as in a theodicy) of good over evil in the tragic vision of the world, which would justify evil’s existence, but only an acknowledgement of the necessity of both. Eugen Fink aptly articulates this as the “world as play” between two competing forces (Apollo and Dionysus), neither of which can do without the other. Tragic wisdom, or Dionysian philosophy, is what grasps the fact that the world is play, which has no end and no specific player.⁶⁴

⁶³ *KGW* III/1: 68-69. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 52-53.

⁶⁴ For an excellent presentation of Fink’s interpretation of Nietzsche see Babette Babich’s article “Nietzsche’s ‘Artists’ Metaphysics’ and Fink’s Ontological ‘World-Play’” *International Studies in Philosophy* 37 (2005): 163-180.

Despite his insistence that metaphysics is itself a prejudice, Nietzsche consciously puts forward an aesthetic/tragic view of the world, which he thought fostered “a new form of Wagnerian *Wahn* [illusion]: an acknowledgement and indulgence of the need to find a higher meaning in existence, however illusory that meaning may be.”⁶⁵ Thus, Nietzsche is on par with David Hume as an anti-metaphysical metaphysician. After the Kantian critique of metaphysics, he realized that “it is *unlikely* that this [resurrection of religious and metaphysical belief] will ever happen again.”⁶⁶ An aesthetic view of the world remained the only alternative and he sought to rekindle this in the modern era through an appeal to the philhellenism of the Germans—albeit in a fashion to which they were unaccustomed. But such a view required illusions such as the Greeks enjoyed. Like Schiller, who heralded the Olympians as “beautiful beings out of the land of fables” [schöne Wesen aus dem Fabelland], Nietzsche thought that the Greeks did not actually believe in their gods but pretended that they did all the same. Their tragic culture, which was really another metaphysical prejudice, was supported by profound illusions—this is what Nietzsche thought was necessarily true of every healthy culture.⁶⁷ They delighted in the appearances of things as a cover over the disturbing truth that there is nothing at the bottom of existence⁶⁸—only endless becoming in the play of an indifferent cosmos.

⁶⁵ Katherine Harloe, “Metaphysical and Historical Claims in *The Birth of Tragedy*,” in *Nietzsche on Time and History*, ed. Manuel Dries (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 285-286. For a similar view, see James I. Porter’s *The Invention of Dionysus: An Essay on “The Birth of Tragedy”* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

⁶⁶ *KGW* III/3: 19.

⁶⁷ “Without myth . . . all cultures lose their healthy, creative, natural energy; only a horizon surrounded by myths encloses and unifies a cultural movement.” *KGW* III/1: 141. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 108. This is a view that he maintained also in the second *Untimely Meditation*; see Chapter 2 below.

⁶⁸ “Oh, those Greeks! They knew how to *live*: what is needed for that is to stop bravely at the surface, the fold, the skin; to worship appearance, to believe in shapes, tones, words—in the whole Olympus of appearance! Those Greeks were superficial—*out of profundity!*” *KGW* V/2: 20. *The Gay Science*, trans. Josephine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 8-9.

Nietzsche thought that Heraclitus was one of the few who recognized the unity of opposites within the cosmos—i.e., that the Ephesian had a tragic conception of the world. The importance of Heraclitus for the conception of the eternal recurrence will be discussed below. However, the tragic conception of the world embodied in Heraclitus’s philosophical fragments was destroyed by the world historical figure of Socrates. Nietzsche thinks that by the time Euripides was composing his plays, tragedy was declining due to the moralizing influence of Socrates. Once Euripides had realized that he had fallen under the spell of Socrates it was already too late to undo what had been done: “Dionysus had already been chased from the tragic stage, and, what is more, by a daemonic power speaking out of the mouth of Euripides. In a certain sense Euripides, too, was merely a mask; the deity who spoke out of him was not Dionysus, nor Apollo, but an altogether newborn daemon called *Socrates*.”⁶⁹ The Dionysiac, or the tragic aesthetic view of the world, was replaced by the moral interpretation of Socrates, which eventually breathed life into early Christianity. For Nietzsche, the Dionysian and the Socratic are polar opposites: one affirms existence just as it is whereas the other believes that one is “obliged to correct existence”⁷⁰ because it does not conform to the standards of rational thought. It is theoretical man that Socrates introduced through his willingness to sacrifice himself for the “examined life,” and it is this kind of man that Nietzsche thought dominated the landscape of Europe for the past two millennia.

Socratic (or Alexandrian) culture, which cut the Gordian knot of tragic culture, is what today gives rise to the modern scientific man. According to Nietzsche, the wisdom of

⁶⁹ *KGW* III/1: 79. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 60.

⁷⁰ *KGW* III/1: 85. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 66. However, it is important to note that Nietzsche refers to morality as a “non-Dionysiac art.” Morality/science has the capacity to be infused with passion—this is what Nietzsche tries to accomplish in his “gay science.”

Silenus—i.e., that one’s existence is necessarily contingent—can be converted into affirmation only through the mythical (illusion). Tragic culture is capable of this only because it stays on the surface and does not try to penetrate to the heart of the world: it acknowledges illusion as illusion through the redemptive power of artistic vision. No less than the tragic culture of the ancient Greeks, the culture of the modern world confronts the revolting truth that the world is at bottom chaos (eternal becoming) through the powerful illusion that our concepts match up to reality as it is. Modern science attempts to control nature through concepts in order to put it to work for man—in this way, it is no less life-denying than Socratic morality. Hence, modern science remains as un-Dionysian as Socrates was:

It fights against Dionysiac wisdom and art; it strives to dissolve myth; it puts in the place of metaphysical solace a form of earthly harmony, indeed its very own *deus ex machina*, namely the god of machines and smelting furnaces, i.e. the energies of the spirits of nature, understood and applied in the service of a higher egotism; it believes in correcting the world through knowledge, in life led by science; and it is truly capable of confining the individual within the smallest circle of solvable tasks, in the midst of which he cheerfully says to life: ‘I will you: you are worth understanding.’⁷¹

The illusion of modern science, and Alexandrian culture *tout court*, is that its foundations are completely transparent.⁷² The difference between a tragic conception of the world and that of the scientific (Socratic) is that the former recognizes that myth is a necessary part of life, which bestows wholeness and coherence to life, whereas the latter is ignorant of its own foundation in myth. Science believes that it is a self-certifying project: its foundations are

⁷¹ *KGW* III/1: 111. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 85.

⁷² One such illusion that the Alexandrian culture denies but is nonetheless still a part of it is the necessity of a class of slaves to do menial tasks. “It should be noted that Alexandrian culture needs a slave-class in order to exist in the long term; as it views existence optimistically, however, it denies the necessity of such a class and is therefore heading towards horrifying extinction when the effects of its fine words of seduction and pacification, such as ‘human dignity’ and ‘the dignity of labor,’ are exhausted.” *KGW* III/1: 113. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 86.

clear and distinct, as Descartes demanded in the early 17th century. However, it is precluded from pursuing the truth because it does not know the truth about its foundations (namely, that its foundation is not pure).

By the time Nietzsche published *The Birth of Tragedy*, the prevailing culture of science [Wissenschaft], especially in the German academic institutions, had begun to teeter on its own foundations—it was losing confidence in its supposedly unshakeable axioms. Under the drive of science, the demand for truth at all costs, the foundation of the modern world is presently being revealed (namely, that there is nothing supporting this drive). In spite of the promise of logical thinking, men are incapable of rendering their own existence transparent. Man finally comes to accept the limits of scientific knowledge and when “he sees how logic curls up around itself at these limits and finally bites its own tail, then a new form of knowledge breaks through, *tragic knowledge*, which, simply to be endured, needs art for protection and as medicine.”⁷³ Ultimately, science coils back on itself once theoretical man realizes that it is not all comprehensive. Far from being anti-scientific (or pro-scientific), as many commentators think,⁷⁴ Nietzsche is interested in bringing science to its completion. He wants to do this by taking science itself as “something problematic and questionable”; in doing so, he hopes that there will be a transformation of science into an infinite project that is self-conscious of its own limits (i.e., that it become aware of the inevitable tenability of its axioms and the need for constant revision in the light of new

⁷³ KGW III/1. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 75.

⁷⁴ One notable exception to this general trend is Babette Babich. For a refreshing, and accurate interpretation of Nietzsche’s relation to science, see Babich’s *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Science: Reflecting Science on the Ground of Art and Life* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994). Also see Babich’s more recent study of this topic in “Nietzsche’s *Gay Science*,” in *Words in Blood, Like Flowers: Philosophy and Poetry, Music and Eros in Hölderlin, Nietzsche, and Heidegger* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), pp. 55-74.

evidence). Once science is made self-conscious it will see the need for art as a protective barrier against the horrors of existence (in particular, suffering). This is what Nietzsche hopes to accomplish in *The Gay Science* [*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*]: to make science into art, to make it “passionate.”⁷⁵ The possibility of a rebirth of tragedy, or a tragic culture, can only come out of the fertile ground of modern scientific (Socratic/Alexandrian) culture. In Nietzsche’s words, we are waiting for the “*music-making Socrates*,” the one who will turn science into art. Thus far, however, this perfection of science has not yet been realized—Nietzsche thinks it will be realized in “gay science,” as I will show in Chapter 3.

Nietzsche’s presentation of Socrates in his first work is, therefore, only a caricature: he is using Socrates as a magnifying glass to bring his reader’s attention to a certain kind of attitude—the optimism of the theoretical man concerning the possibility of the correction of existence through the “mastery of nature”—one that is so pervasive that no one is able to recognize it.⁷⁶ Throughout his career, Nietzsche’s attitude toward Socrates remained ambiguous. This is certainly true at the time that he published his first work, for in a lecture series delivered in the summer of 1872, he counts Socrates among the “pure and unmixed types” of philosophers. Plato, on the other hand, “is the first grand *mixed character*,” because he mixes the teachings of Socrates, Pythagoras, and Heraclitus. All philosophers after Plato fall into this mold. But the pre-Platonics were all unique, “pure and unmixed

⁷⁵ As Babich notes, the method of modern science has the potential to make science into art: “For Nietzsche, as for the rest of us, the method at work—stipulation, mechanism, and above all delimitation, that is, the working practice of method *as such*—is the key to the modern scientific age. The same methodification is also the means whereby science becomes art, but to say this is also to say that science departs from theory alone, from its metaphysical heaven or perfection, to become practicable and livable, viable, as such.” *Words in Blood, Like Flowers*, 61.

⁷⁶ The *ad hominem* argument is one of Nietzsche’s favorites as he notes at the end of his sanity: “I never attack people,—I treat people as if they were high-intensity magnifying glasses that can illuminate a general, though insidious and barely noticeable, predicament.” *KGW VI/3: 272. Ecce Homo*, 82.

types.” Socrates is the last in this series of pure types within philosophy: “Whoever wishes to do so may call them all ‘one-sided.’ In any case, they are genuine ‘discoverers.’ For all those afterward, it became infinitely easier to philosophize. They [the pre-Platonics] had to find the path from myth to laws of nature, from image to concept, from religion to science.”⁷⁷ Socrates is a daring questioner and “philosopher of *life*” [Lebensphilosoph] insofar as he puts knowledge at the service of life. In his equation of knowledge with virtue and happiness, Nietzsche believes that Socrates brings about a new way to look at the world hitherto unknown in the age of the Greeks. He remains a great man in Nietzsche’s eyes even though the latter fundamentally disagrees with Socrates’s conception of the world (and its transmission in European history).

The diametric opposition of the Socratic (moral) and Dionysian interpretations of existence is what drives Nietzsche’s philosophy for the rest of his intellectual career. But even this opposition is illusory because these two positions are two sides of the same coin. The Dionysian can only be revealed through the prism of the Socratic (and vice-versa): the rebirth of tragic culture can only come about through the perfection of modern science. For Nietzsche, then, the Dionysian is the affirmation of existence as it is without subtraction; the Socratic, on the other hand, is the attitude that seeks to correct existence and then affirm this contracted version of the world. There are two existential possibilities: one is an unrestrained “Yes-saying” to existence; the other is a “No-saying” to existence because it is affirmed conditionally (i.e., existence without suffering).⁷⁸ In this vein, Babette Babich notes that “the

⁷⁷ *KGW* II/4: 214. From *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, trans. Greg Whitlock (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 5.

⁷⁸ This is the real opposition for Nietzsche; art and science are not opposed because it is possible for either of these to serve or hinder affirmation of existence. See, again, Babich “Nietzsche’s *Gay Science*,” 72.

‘dramatic’ or heroic view of life requires an extraordinary, originally powerful individual: the type capable of surviving a life lived as a spectacle. The capacity to survive the agony of existence in its full tragic expression—that is also to say, with grace and style—is the cultured ideal of Dionysian ecstasy and the art of tragedy itself.”⁷⁹ The ability to incorporate all aspects of existence (including suffering) so as to give one’s own being form or “style” depends on one’s attitude—this attitude is what education should aim to inculcate. According to Nietzsche, only once has there been an unconditional affirmation of existence of this kind—found in his own philosophy. Heraclitus among the pre-Platonics was one of the few who came closest before Nietzsche introduced the eternal recurrence as the ultimate affirmation of existence.

The Pre-Platonics: Tragic vs. Socratic Wisdom

According to Nietzsche, the heyday of the tragic vision of the world was not in the 5th century BC (in the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles) but rather the 6th century when tragedy was first born. Through Euripides the slavish “serenity” [Heiterkeit] of the Greeks came to color the rest of antiquity “as if there had never been a sixth century, with its birth of tragedy, its Mysteries, its Pythagoras and Heraclitus, as if indeed the works of art of the period simply did not exist.”⁸⁰ Although Nietzsche only names Heraclitus in passing in his first published work, the Ephesian was on his mind during the composition of *The Birth of Tragedy*. Due to his heavy workload at the Gymnasium and University in Basel, he was regularly busy preparing for the courses he was teaching. One of the university courses he

⁷⁹ Babette Babich, *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Science: Reflecting Science on the Ground of Art and Life* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 247.

⁸⁰ *KGW* III/1: 74. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 57.

taught in the summer of 1872 was “The Pre-Platonic Philosophers” [Die vorplatonischen Philosophen], which includes a long section on Heraclitus.

Commenting on his first writing sixteen years after its publication, Nietzsche says in *Ecce Homo* that he himself must be understood as the first “*tragic philosopher*.” He was the one responsible for turning the Dionysian into a philosophical passion. Still, he admits that he doubted the case of Heraclitus insofar as the Ephesian philosopher may also have had a tragic/aesthetic view of the world. “The affirmation of passing away *and destruction* that is crucial for a Dionysian philosophy, saying yes to opposition and war, *becoming* along with a radical rejection of the very concept of ‘being’—all these are more closely related to me than anything else people have thought so far. The doctrine of the ‘eternal return,’ which is to say the unconditional and infinitely repeated cycle of all things—this is Zarathustra’s doctrine, but *ultimately it is nothing Heraclitus couldn’t have said too*.”⁸¹ Although Nietzsche claims that he is the first “*tragic philosopher*,” Heraclitus (and, for that matter, Zarathustra) are extremely close to his own understanding. As he noted in passing in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Heraclitus comes from the “tragic” century in ancient Greek history. Tragic wisdom, or the aesthetic vision of the world, which is articulated best in the doctrine of the eternal recurrence, belongs just as much to Heraclitus as it does to Nietzsche. Heraclitus might have already taught it, but this information is lost to history. For Nietzsche, the possibility is enough to suggest an affinity between them even though they are separated by millennia: they both affirm existence in the face of ceaseless becoming. Therefore, to understand the

⁸¹ *KGW* VI/3: 310-311. *Ecce Homo*, 110. Emphasis added.

doctrine of the eternal recurrence, one must examine Nietzsche's writings on this pre-Platonic philosopher.

Out of all of Nietzsche's writings the two longest considerations of the philosophy of Heraclitus are found early in his professional career at the University of Basel: the first in the lectures on the pre-Platonics and the second in an unpublished work entitled, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (1873). The detail that can be found in both of these expositions are evidence of his preference for Heraclitus among all of the pre-Platonic philosophers.⁸² However, both of these unpublished works have peculiarities that flow from Nietzsche's idiosyncratic reading of the ancient sources—especially Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*. Before examining Nietzsche's thoughts on Heraclitus, it is necessary to understand his philological method in these lectures.

The ancient sources from which we glean the fragments of the early Greek philosophers are, at best, tenuous: it is difficult to determine whether or not a source like Plato, Aristotle, Theophrastus, etc., can be trusted to give an accurate presentation of the philosophical thought of one of their predecessors. The primary ancient source on which Nietzsche most depended was Diogenes Laertius (a 3rd century A.D. compiler of anecdotal, biographical, and doctrinal information of the Greek philosophers).⁸³ This is significant because he rejects Theophrastus's "succession" theory—the idea that the early Greek philosophers formed a chain of student-teacher relationships until the emergence of Socrates,

⁸² See Ludwig von Scheffler's personal account of Nietzsche's admiration for Heraclitus in the lecture series. From *Conversations with Nietzsche: A Life in the Words of His Contemporaries*, ed. Sander L. Gilman (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 73.

⁸³ He acknowledges this in a letter to Erwin Rohde signing his name "Diogenes Laertides" (the son of Laertius). August 26, 1872, *KGB* I/3: 48 (no. 252).

Plato, and Aristotle.⁸⁴ His title of his lecture course is, therefore, apt: “The Pre-Platonic Philosophers.” Nietzsche emphasizes the independence of thought of each of these philosophers; they were all able to educate themselves without the assistance of teachers. Of course, this does not mean that the pre-Platonics had no relationship to one another whatsoever.⁸⁵

As noted in the last section, Socrates is the last of the “pure and unmixed” philosophical types, which is why he is included among what has been called “Presocratic philosophy” since the publication of Hermann Diels’s *Fragments of the Presocratics* [*Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*] in 1901. Socrates is separated from Plato because the latter founded the first place in which philosophy was taught. After Socrates “it became infinitely easier to philosophize.”⁸⁶ Nietzsche preserves Socrates from his scathing critique of the tradition since the latter did not belong to any school—though he is sometimes attacked separately. Plato, on the other hand, remains a constant object of scorn for Nietzsche since he founded the first school of philosophy and, thus, gave rise to the Western philosophical tradition that Nietzsche despised. To found a school for the sake of preserving and protecting one’s own intellectual activity is “a sign that they [founders of schools] are not in accord with their world.”⁸⁷ The gulf between theory and practice ironically grows wider with the

⁸⁴ This is what he relates in a letter to his friend Erwin Rohde: “In the chronologies of Apollodorus I have a principle trust: he has already discovered the entirely *arbitrary* nature of the old διαδοχαι [student-teacher succession theory of Theophrastus] and thereby destroyed its numbers.” June 11, 1872, *KGB* II/3: 10 (no. 229).

⁸⁵ “All of them together form what Schopenhauer in contrast to the republic of scholars has called the republic of creative minds: each giant calling to his brother through the desolate intervals of time.” *KGW* III/2: 302. From *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. Marianne Cowan (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 1962), 32.

⁸⁶ *KGW* II/4: 214. *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, 5.

⁸⁷ Richard Velkley, “Primal Truth, Errant Tradition, and Crisis: The Pre-Socratics in Late Modernity,” in *Early Greek Philosophy: Reason at the Beginning of Philosophy*, ed. Joseph McCoy (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, forthcoming), 11.

establishment of the first school—science is pursued for its own sake instead of proper cultivation. All of this is evidence of the fact that Nietzsche thinks that traditional education cannot give form [Bildung], that is, unity, “purity,” and “style,” to one’s nature.

All of the pre-Platonics were self-educated men, and this is especially true in the case of Heraclitus, who scorned learning from others as polymathy.⁸⁸ This is important because it forms another aspect of the Dionysian as Nietzsche understood it: self-transcendence through genuine education. “In paradoxical fashion Dionysian wisdom combines affirmation of the world as it is—the rejection of any *telos* beyond the Now—with the hope of the radical transformation of man. This apparent contradiction between affirming and transcending is present in the willing of the eternal recurrence, not as theoretical doctrine but as means for the will’s self-transformation.”⁸⁹ Heraclitus (and Zarathustra) is able to rise above himself through the ultimate affirmation of existence, i.e., the tragic/aesthetic view of the world, which is akin to the eternal recurrence. At this point in his career, he refers to Heraclitus’s teaching as “cosmodicy,” a term coined by his friend Erwin Rohde. The goodness and beauty of existence is, thus, affirmed despite the presence of evil and ugliness in the cosmos. Becoming and passing away, which the precursor Anaximander thought were an injustice, are affirmed in the aesthetic vision of Heraclitus.

Anaximander’s vision of Time as the judge that doles out punishment for becoming (i.e., generation) is the archetype of the “spirit of revenge,” as Nietzsche calls it in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which permeates the moral, Christian conception of time and history. Existence is viewed as blameworthy and in need of redemption; becoming, or history, is the

⁸⁸ See Diels-Kranz fragment 40.

⁸⁹ “Primal Truth, Errant Tradition, and Crisis,” 9.

dialectical process that comes to justify and, ultimately, redeem existence. One can find this in the Christian conception of history (Fall → Incarnation and Resurrection → Redemption) as well as the Hegelian, teleological view of history that Nietzsche thought derived from Christianity. In such an interpretation, Becoming is a sign of guilt: time is seen as a judge. This is the origin of the concept of “theodicy,” the justification of injustice in existence through the dialectic process of history. As opposed to Anaximander, Gilles Deleuze notes, Heraclitus “is the one for whom life is radically innocent and just. He understands existence on the basis of an *instinct of play*. He makes existence an *aesthetic phenomenon* rather than a moral or religious one.”⁹⁰ Play is the essence of existence/the cosmos; there is no need for external justification, for existence is a never-ending game and this play itself is justice.

Once again the concept of play is active within Nietzsche’s exposition of Heraclitean philosophy in order to show that there is no need to interpret becoming and passing away morally. The cosmos is the playground of the world-child Zeus,⁹¹ who is always engaged in creation and destruction. “Only in the play of the child (or that of the artist) does there exist a Becoming and Passing Away without any moralistic calculations. He conceives of *the play of children* as that of spontaneous human beings: here is innocence and yet coming into being and destruction: not one droplet of injustice should remain in the world.” There is a similar passage to this one in §24 of *The Birth of Tragedy*, which suggests that the Heraclitean view of the world as play was in the back of Nietzsche’s mind during the composition of his first work.⁹² In that section, Nietzsche notes that the “Dionysiac phenomenon” is *similar to the*

⁹⁰ *Nietzsche et la philosophie*, 27.

⁹¹ See Diels-Kranz fragment 52.

⁹² “That striving towards infinity, that wing-beat of longing even as we feel supreme delight in a clearly perceived reality, these things indicate that in both these states of mind we are to recognize a Dionysiac

view of Heraclitus. This may be the reason why Nietzsche says in *Ecce Homo* that the eternal recurrence is something that Heraclitus might have taught. Nietzsche maintains that he is the first to have transformed the Dionysian into a philosophical pathos.⁹³ Nevertheless, he thought the necessary elements of the eternal recurrence were already present within the teaching of Heraclitus.

In an unpublished essay presented to Cosima Wagner for Christmas in 1872, Nietzsche had first considered “the pride of the wise *Heraclitus*” as something that could not be conceived idly. He presents a brief portrait of the “obscure” philosopher: “Among human beings Heraclitus, as a human being, was unbelievable; and if he was perhaps seen, as he gave respect to the play of noisy children, thus had he thereby in any case considered what a mortal had never considered on such an occasion—the play of the great world-child Zeus and the eternal sport of a world demolition and a world emergence.”⁹⁴ The philosophical “type” outlined here is given greater detail in Nietzsche’s writing *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. More importantly, however, Nietzsche discusses the teaching of Heraclitus that most closely approximates his own doctrine of the eternal recurrence in this short work.

Incidentally, Nietzsche points out that the neo-Pythagoreans developed a theory of time that will later resemble his own doctrine of the eternal recurrence. The following passage resonates with his discussion of “monumental history” in the “History” essay of the

phenomenon, one which reveals to us the playful construction and demolition of the world of individuality as the overflow of a primal pleasure and delight, a process *similar to* Heraclitus the Obscure’s comparison of the force that shapes the world to a playing child who sets down stones here, there, and the next place, and who builds up piles of sand only to knock them down again.” *KGW III/1*: 149. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 114.

⁹³ “Heraclitus transposes the Dionysian-poetic vision into philosophic concepts, but does so incompletely. One can surmise that Heraclitus lacks a concept of will to ground the cosmic activity of ‘world-building.’ But no ancient thinker could have had that concept, nor the historical consciousness resulting from insight into the will’s power of self-transformation.” “Primal Truth, Errant Tradition, and Crisis,” 8.

⁹⁴ *KGW III/2*: 252. From *Prefaces to Unwritten Works*, trans. Michael W. Grenke (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2005), 24-25.

next year: “Whenever the stars once more attain the same position, not only the same people but also the same behavior will again occur.”⁹⁵ Nietzsche believes that the neo-Pythagoreans derived this idea from the teaching of Heraclitus, who might very well have taught the eternal recurrence. Although this sounds like the eternal recurrence, it is the dwarf’s theory of time from “On the Vision and the Riddle” in Part III of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. But this is “too easy,” for both Zarathustra and Nietzsche. It is only a caricature of Dionysian philosophy—it is a watered-down version of what Heraclitus might have taught. (One could also say that this is the “cosmological” aspect of the doctrine, using the terms of Karl Löwith.)

Continuous with his lectures on the pre-Platonic philosophers of the previous year, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* presents the “pure” philosophical types of the pre-Platonics. (Nietzsche had planned to continue an exposition on each of these self-educated men up to Socrates but never completed it.) In these sketches of the character of Heraclitus, Nietzsche goes into greater detail connecting the thought of eternal becoming with the Dionysian, tragic wisdom discussed in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Heraclitus’s insight into the actual nature of the world as nothing but a whirlwind of ceaseless becoming—so much so that he distrusts the report of the senses⁹⁶—is commensurate with tragic wisdom: “The everlasting and exclusive coming-to-be, the impermanence of everything actual, which constantly acts and comes-to-be but never is, as Heraclitus teaches it, is a terrible, paralyzing thought. Its impact on men can most nearly be likened to the sensation during an earthquake

⁹⁵ *KGW* II/4: 349. *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, 139. Emphasis added.

⁹⁶ “When all the other philosophical folk threw out the testimony of the senses because it showed multiplicity and change, Heraclitus threw it out because it made things look permanent and unified.” *KGW* VI/3: 69. *Twilight of the Idols*, 167.

when one loses one's familiar confidence in a firmly grounded earth. It takes astonishing strength to transform this reaction into its opposite, into sublimity and the feeling of blessed astonishment."⁹⁷ What aligns Heraclitus with Nietzsche, though, is the ability to overcome the sense of revulsion at the prospect of an indifferent cosmos always engaged in a game with itself. This transformation of revulsion into cheerfulness and overflowing desire is what makes Heraclitus an initiate and disciple of Dionysus (even if he does not teach the eternal recurrence).

According to Nietzsche, Heraclitus views the world not merely as the playground of the world-child Zeus, but also as an arena of opposites locked in an eternal contest. The world is the *agon* in which one thing (e.g., sweetness) triumphs over its opposite (bitterness), only to be cast down at a moment's notice, and to rise up once more in victory. "Everything that happens, happens in accordance with this strife, and it is just in the strife that eternal justice is revealed."⁹⁸ He affirms the ceaseless act of destruction and creation in the cosmos because it is just: the goodness of the cosmos is vindicated despite the existence of evil within it—evil is a necessary part within the whole. Heraclitus's aesthetic view of the world as the play of the Aeon is what prevents him from succumbing to the conclusion of Silenus, that it is better not to exist.⁹⁹ Only in the aesthetic vision of the whole is existence justified as what it is, the eternal contest of opposites, the ever-renewed fire: "In this world only play, play as artists and children engage in it, exhibits coming-to-be and passing away, structuring and destroying, without any moral additive, in forever equal innocence. And as children and

⁹⁷ *KGW* III/2: 318-319. *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, 54.

⁹⁸ *KGW* III/2: 319. *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, 55.

⁹⁹ See §3 in *The Birth of Tragedy*.

artists play, so plays the ever-living fire. It constructs and destroys, all in innocence. Such is the game that the aeon plays with itself.”¹⁰⁰ This view of Heraclitus—a view impossible without the prior understanding of Schiller’s program of aesthetic education—makes Nietzsche feel “warmer” in the Ephesian’s presence.

Nevertheless, in 1888, Nietzsche believes that he is the only one in the history of Western philosophy to give a proper articulation of the eternal recurrence. Heraclitus comes close but still does not achieve the perfect vision of the absolute unity of world and man afforded by the eternal recurrence. This might be due to the fact that the Greek philosopher had no conception of the will. If this is the case, Heraclitus’s alleged teacher, the historical figure Zoroaster (better known by his Persian name Zarathustra), was even further removed from the eternal recurrence since he was the first to introduce dualism to the world. Perhaps Heraclitus transformed this dualism into the struggle of opposites with each other in a game that has no end; thereby he came closer to Nietzsche’s own conception. Whatever the case may be, Heraclitus (like the other pre-Platonics) was able “to pick up the spear and throw it onward from the point where others had left it.”¹⁰¹

Heraclitus and Zarathustra remain constant companions of Nietzsche since they share his intoxication: their philosophy is the expression of the affirmation of existence as it is without subtraction or adjustment. This does not change the fact that his predecessors did not achieve the ultimate affirmation of existence in the doctrine of the eternal recurrence. They still share an affinity. In fact, Zarathustra is the vehicle by which the teaching is disseminated in the 1880s. Is this perhaps because Zarathustra as the first teacher of dualism

¹⁰⁰ *KGW III/2: 324-325. Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks, 62.*

¹⁰¹ *KGW III/2: 300. Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks, 30.*

(and, hence, life-denying values) needs to overcome his previous teaching through its exact opposite? Transformation from negation to affirmation is made possible only through the conversion of Zarathustra. This is a topic that will be discussed in the third chapter. In the meantime, it is important to note the unconscious connection Nietzsche makes between Heraclitus and Zarathustra, the latter of whom Nietzsche calls “that Dionysiac monster,”¹⁰² by mentioning them in the same breath in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*.

Thoughts on Education

There is some difficulty in attempting to tie together Nietzsche’s earliest compositions so as to render a coherent picture of his thought. This is due to the diversity of his writings during the decade of 1862-1872: he wrote high school essays that are philosophical; he wrote a work that challenged the presuppositions of classical philology and called for a rejuvenation of culture through aesthetic education; he delivered lectures that were primarily concerned with the pre-Platonic philosophers; and he continued his work on these same philosophers in a private writing. What unites all of them? It seems likely that Nietzsche’s concern with “education” [Bildung] is the unifying factor at this “stage” in his intellectual career. It is possible to see this in a series of lectures that he delivered in the spring of 1872 entitled *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions* [*Über die Zukunft unserer Bildungsanstalten*]. These lectures prepared the groundwork for Nietzsche’s most “untimely” meditation on history in the following year, so it will be helpful to examine these in order to make a connection between his “earlier” and “later” concerns.

¹⁰² *KGW* III/1: 16. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 12.

As Nietzsche makes clear in his earliest writings, education is primarily concerned with the formation of the individual.¹⁰³ Aesthetic education is especially valuable in this regard because it provides the highest degree of unity by allowing the individual to act (and live). It combines freedom and necessity through a powerful illusion or myth. Tragic wisdom, the knowledge that the world is the game of the world-child Zeus without goal or end, is tempered by the mythical. Opposed to this, modern scientific culture (the descendent of Alexandrian or Socratic culture) believes that its foundations are transparent—i.e., that it has no presuppositions. Not only is Alexandrian culture founded on a slave class, which it insistently denies as a necessary presupposition of its own existence, but it also requires a horde of state functionaries prepared by an educational system at the service of the state. Nietzsche and his colleague at Basel Jacob Burckhardt feared that higher education would be subsumed by the modern nation-state so that the university would no longer be a free space devoted to the cultivation of the individual. In the place of the traditional European university there would be an institution designed to produce as many functionaries of the state as quickly as possible.

Nietzsche's fear that the higher educational institutions would eventually become another apparatus for the aggrandizement of the nation-state had come true in Germany by 1888. As he notes in *Twilight of the Idols*, "German 'higher schooling' is in fact a brutal

¹⁰³ Lionel Gossman summarizes Nietzsche's position well: "To the neohumanists [like Friedrich August Wolf, Friedrich Schiller, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe], as to Nietzsche, education meant above all the development of the individual, to the highest degree possible, of a free and creative spirit, and it was best achieved through study of the Greek language and literature. The idea was not to copy the Greeks in a servile way but, through study of their language and literature, to appropriate their free, original, and creative spirit (thus circumventing the secondary and dependent classicism of the French). In this way, the young German student might in turn create a free, original, and authentic culture. The critical utopian character of early neohumanism remained essential to Nietzsche's view of education and underlies his repeated attacks on the state's subordination of education to its own ends." From Gossman's *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt: A Study in Unseasonable Ideas* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 427.

form of training that tries to process a horde of young men as quickly as possible for use—*and abuse*—in the civil service. ‘Higher education’ and *horde*—these are in contradiction from the outset. Any higher education is only for the exceptions: you have to be privileged to have the right to such a high privilege. Nothing great or beautiful could ever be common property: *pulchrum est paucorum hominum.*”¹⁰⁴ While this fear remained a real (but unrealized) threat for Nietzsche in 1872, he thought that it could be diverted through the reform of educational institutions. This is the ultimate goal of his lecture series in the spring of that year: he wanted to make his audience see that true education is about the cultivation of the individual and not about the creation of a class of state functionaries. Eventually, however, he saw that there was no stopping the march of democracy and that education would be regulated by the masses—most likely the real reason that he abandoned his post at the University of Basel in 1879.¹⁰⁵

But in 1872 Nietzsche viewed the situation more optimistically than in his wandering years. Education can be reformed so that its genuine goal—the cultivation of a select number of individuals—could be realized. Wholeness, or unity, is the goal both of Nietzsche and Schiller in their respective attempts at the reformation of education through the aesthetics of play. Culture is opposed to the modern scientific drive for Nietzsche. The latter inclines toward specialization and compartmentalization—something that Nietzsche thought was characteristic of Alexandrian culture. His analysis in §§18-23 of *The Birth of Tragedy* is meant to show how culture has been surpassed by the rise of technical science at the beginning of the end of Greek culture. This trend continues to his own time and has been

¹⁰⁴ KGW VI/3: 101. *Twilight of the Idols*, 189.

¹⁰⁵ “Officially” the reason he listed was his quickly deteriorating health.

exacerbated by the interference of the state. Specialization makes itself readily amenable to manipulation by the state. One can combat the advance of the state into the arena of education only by first despising one's education thus far. The saving power of the educational institutions will come from this realization that one's education has not been directed toward wholeness but only toward the development of a specialized skill set to be used for the aggrandizement of the state.

For Nietzsche, culture is what strives after the wholeness of the individual in *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*. Wholeness and perfection, or unity and "purity," are the goals of a select set of educational institutions, the gymnasium and the university. Specialized skills, which have immediate practical application, are not to be despised in themselves; their proper place is in the technical schools. It is a problem when the gymnasiums and universities forget their express purpose and become the lackeys of the state. "It is the classical *Gymnasium*, claiming to promote culture or *Bildung*, rather than provide a practical education, and to form men and leaders rather than efficient workers or cogs in a bureaucratic machine, that is the problem: this is so because the *Gymnasium*, which ought to be a constant challenge to the prevailing culture of the market and of modernity, has opted to become their servant."¹⁰⁶ Young men no longer expect to be formed freely by the study of classics, but expect an education that will prepare them for material and social success. The gymnasium and the university have become disingenuous in the execution of their professed duties: they no longer strive after the perfection of the individual in which all aspects of one's self are integrated into a coherent whole. He traces this to two separate, but

¹⁰⁶ *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt*, 428.

not incommensurable, drives: the “highest *possible extension of education*,” on the one hand, and “*the diminution and weakening of the same*,” on the other: “According to the first drive education should be carried into an ever wider circle; in the mind of the other tendency it will be expected of education that it give up its highest claim to self-mastery and subordinate itself serving another form of life, namely that of the state.”¹⁰⁷

In Nietzsche’s view, the first of these drives is problematic not only because it exchanges wholeness and perfection (the true goal of education) for specialization and fragmentation, but also because it tends toward the democratization of knowledge. True education is a reserved privilege for the few, as Nietzsche constantly reminds his audience in these five lectures and in the “History” essay in the following year. In fact, democratization and specialization feed off one another, as the fictional character of the philosopher reminds his old friend in tones that resonate in Nietzsche’s later works:

For the study of science is now so expanded in breadth that whoever, with good, although not extreme talents, still wants to achieve something in them, will pursue a completely specialized field, and then remain untroubled, however, by everything left over. If he should even now in his field stand above the *vulgus*, in everything left over he indeed belongs to them, i.e., in all main things. Thus one learned in an exclusive field is then similar to a factory worker, who, his life long, makes nothing other than a specific screw or handle to a specific tool or to a machine, in which he then, to be sure, attains an unbelievable virtuosity.¹⁰⁸

The over-expansion of the methods of modern science is what makes possible the myopic specialist, who sees nothing beyond his own limited task. Ultimately, Nietzsche’s problem with this emphasis on scientific specialization in the gymnasiums and universities in Germany is that theory and practice become further and further separated from one another.

¹⁰⁷ *KGW III/2*: 139. From *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*, trans. Michael W. Grenke (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2004), 17.

¹⁰⁸ *KGW III/2*: 161-162. *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*, 39.

In true education theory and practice are supposed to dissolve into one another.¹⁰⁹ Modern scientific culture, as Nietzsche argued in *The Birth of Tragedy*, is incapable of this kind of integration of all parts into a coherent whole because it refuses to accept the fact that it is based on myth.

According to Nietzsche, proper education is the precondition for the revitalization of German culture. Great individuals are the standards of any culture, for they are the true goal of all education. The masses do not actually matter: “Education of the mass cannot be our goal: rather education of the individual, selected human beings, equipped for great and lasting works: we know now for once that a just posterity will deliver its judgment on the collective level of education of a people only and completely exclusively according to those great heroes of a time, who walk in solitude, and according to the manner these same were recognized, promoted, honored or made secret, mistreated, destroyed.”¹¹⁰ The “education of the people” is a lie spread about by the state, which attempts to bend the gymnasiums and universities to its will. The state needs a vast number of specialists, bureaucrats, in order to function at a certain level in the modern world. “The state presents itself as a mystagogue of culture and while it advances its purposes, it compels each of its servants to appear before it only with the torch of universal state education in their hands: in whose restless light they are supposed to recognize again it itself as the highest goal, as the reward of all their educational exertions.”¹¹¹ Thus, the second drive is the natural complement to the first.

¹⁰⁹ Instead science begins to turn on the condition for its possibility, i.e., life, and thus “bites its own tail”: “For now the exploitation of the human being for the sake of the sciences is without objection the overall accepted presupposition: who still asks himself what a science may be worth which so vampire-like consumes its creatures?” *KGW III/2*: 162. *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*, 39.

¹¹⁰ *KGW III/2*: 190-191. *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*, 66.

¹¹¹ *KGW III/2*: 199-200. *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*, 75.

Nietzsche's purpose in these lectures is to indicate to his audience that in contemporary society there is something fundamentally at odds with the supposed goal of all education, i.e., wholeness. Reformation of the educational institutions is possible, but he does not give them a specific program to achieve this goal. Out of the seven proposed lectures, only five were written and delivered in the spring of 1872. His solution is formulated in the "History" essay in the following year. Nevertheless, his thoughts on education in these lectures best articulate his overall position during the decade 1862-1872 and give us a clue about the significance of the teaching of the eternal recurrence. True culture is named as the goal of education in these lectures—proper cultivation requires the nourishing soil of myth, a solid ground from which one can speculate. Tragic wisdom requires a powerful illusion that protects us from the self-destructive tendencies inherent to the knowledge that the world is in a constant state of becoming (the cosmos is the playground of the world-child Zeus). Human beings need an illusion so powerful that it allows them to affirm the world as it is without subtraction or alteration—this is what Nietzsche thought Wagner's "total artwork" [Gesamtkunstwerk] was capable of doing (a re-birth of tragic culture). Myth is the means necessary to the achievement of this affirmation; and "only a horizon surrounded by myths encloses and unifies a cultural movement."¹¹² Thus, true education involves recognition of the limits of human knowledge; myth (illusion) is what closes off the horizon and grants wholeness to an individual.

¹¹² *KGW* III/1: 141. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 108.

However, what has occurred in the educational institutions of 19th century Germany is the elimination of myth “by science, by the demand that history should be a science.”¹¹³ But as Nietzsche noted in *The Birth of Tragedy*, modern science (the descendent of Socrates and his theoretical man) denies that it is based on myth. History, by becoming a science, has lost its ability to provide a unified, stable ground, which Nietzsche in “Fate and History” thought was the only alternative for stability in a world that had lost its contact with the transcendent. History’s becoming a science is a result of the second drive Nietzsche listed in his lectures: historical science is being used to illustrate how the German victory over France in the Franco-Prussian War (1871) was cultural. Historical revisionism, based on a diluted form of Hegel’s philosophy of history, distorts the past in order to serve the ends of the state. Thus, the state has an interest in interfering as much as possible in the academic institutions; the irony of this, as Nietzsche insistently points out, is that this is the *exact opposite* of the purpose of education, which is meant to ground the individual in the world, i.e., make him feel at home in the world, by dissolving the distinction between theory and practice.

Philosophy of the Future

Of all Nietzsche’s writings between 1873 and 1878, the “History” essay forms the direct link between the issues raised within *The Birth of Tragedy* and their reappearance in more mature form in his later works (especially *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*). The main “problem of science” that he deals with in §§12-20 in his first work is preserved in this short essay of 1873. It transforms these original insights (Socratic vs.

¹¹³ *KGW* III/1: 267. From *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 77.

Dionysian wisdom; the moral/scientific interpretation of existence vs. the tragic/aesthetic interpretation) into more mature and precise formulations. The “History” essay is the true heir to the questions that Nietzsche raises in his early writings because it is a powerful critique of modern science—it criticizes the methods and aims of modern historical science. However, without the formulation of the “problem of science” that is first raised in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and the notion of the Dionysian, Nietzsche’s critique of historical science would make no sense. The value of science for life is ultimately questioned in this next work. Nietzsche asks of his readers: “Can the life dominated by wisdom (science) be affirmed? Or, is this kind of life detrimental to the human being and must be shunned?” The kind of affirmation of life, in its brutality and beauty, achieved in the Dionysian form of intoxication is the crucial test of the thought of the eternal recurrence. But before Nietzsche can articulate this thought, he must confront several issues that arise in the wake of the overcoming of life by scientific rationality—including the “death of God” (covered in the Chapter 3)—already in progress at the end of the 19th century. It is to his critique of scientific rationality, as expressed in the dominant science of his day, historical science, that I shall now turn.

Chapter 2: The “Transitional Stage” of Nietzsche’s Philosophy

The purpose of this chapter is to determine Nietzsche’s relation to the prevailing philosophy of his time, Hegelian philosophy in its cultural form. His reaction to the “cultural philistines” in Germany is simultaneously an attack on a superficial understanding of Hegel’s philosophy. While he is able to purge himself of the crude interpretation of the historical dialectic, Nietzsche retains some aspects of Hegel (largely the dynamism found in the works of the young Hegel). Nevertheless, it remains true that Nietzsche rends asunder his predecessor’s static system of reality found in the older Hegel’s *Science of Logic*. To understand Nietzsche’s ambivalent relation to Hegel is essential for comprehending the ambiguous nature of the doctrine of the “eternal recurrence.” Nowhere is this relation stressed more heavily than in “On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life.” History is no longer a science for Nietzsche, but rather a lived experience—this is evident in the three kinds of history discussed in this essay.

Introduction

The year 1873 marks an important change in Nietzsche’s thinking. From this point onward, the trajectory of Nietzsche’s thought is established—what he writes after 1873 until his loss of sanity in January 1889 has already been cursorily sketched out in his “transitional” writings. Of the four meditations, the first two essays from *Untimely Meditations* [*Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*], “David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer” and “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” are continuous with the concerns present within *The Birth of Tragedy* of the previous year. Within these essays, Nietzsche confronts the

culture of his day in the figure of David Strauss—the author of *The Old Faith and the New* [*Der Alte und der Neue Glaube*—and the prevalent historicism that grounds the presumption of a German cultural victory in Europe. When one reads these essays for the first time, one can see that Nietzsche’s discussion of Greek tragic culture stands in the background. The topic of culture, and its criticism, remains of constant concern to Nietzsche in 1872-1873. Thus, there is a sense of continuity in the writings of the “early” period due to the overriding concerns of their author.

Nietzsche is not only concerned with the status of culture in both the ancient and modern worlds, and the possibility of a rejuvenation of tragic culture in the 19th century at this time; he is also concerned with reforms in the educational institutions. The series of lectures that he delivered at the University of Basel in the spring of 1872, *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*, provided material for the argument that he puts forward in the “History” essay of the following year. In the later essay, Nietzsche spends a great deal of time considering the relation between knowledge (theory) and life (practice)—it is, in fact, what preoccupies him from his *ceterum censeo* in the “Preface” until the conclusion of his argument in §10. He is also occupied with the relation between the state (politics) and education (philosophy) in “Schopenhauer as Educator”—another point of importance in the earlier lecture series.

The reason for the real change between *The Birth of Tragedy* and the *Untimely Meditations* can be isolated in a single name: Hegel. While Hegel, and his philosophy, are not named anywhere in the earlier writing, he pops up everywhere in the later writing. Hegel stands in the background of “David Strauss” and all of the sections of the “History” essay.

The question naturally arises: Why does Hegel suddenly become so important for Nietzsche as a philosopher who needs to be criticized? Prior to 1873, there is only one indication that he read Hegel first hand: he read an unidentified essay of Hegel's while at the University of Bonn.¹¹⁴ Nietzsche does not dwell anywhere at length on Hegel's philosophy in the intervening years of 1865-1873. Then, without prior warning, Hegel becomes the object of Nietzsche's unremitting scorn in the *Untimely Meditations*. The purpose of this chapter will be to determine the influence Hegel had on Nietzsche and the reason for the latter's rejection of the philosophical system of his predecessor.

Nietzsche and Hegel

Hegel died in 1831; Nietzsche was born thirteen years later in 1844. Despite the similarity between the world in which Hegel died and the world in which Nietzsche was born, one cannot deny that the thought of these two philosophers could not be more different. It is not without reason that Gilles Deleuze notes that "Anti-Hegelianism runs through Nietzsche's work as its cutting edge" [L'anti-hégélianisme traverse l'œuvre de Nietzsche, comme le fil de l'agressivité].¹¹⁵ This is certainly true of the works after *Untimely Meditations* wherein Hegel, and the academic style of philosophy his work engendered, became a perpetual target of Nietzsche's criticism. But the question that needs to be answered is: Why does Hegel suddenly become the target of Nietzsche's ire in the *Untimely*

¹¹⁴ According to Thomas H. Brobjer's chronology of Nietzsche's philosophical reading, Nietzsche read an unidentified work by Hegel in 1865. Suddenly in 1873 (around the time of the composition of the "History" essay), Nietzsche started to quote from Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* in his notes. See Brobjer's *Nietzsche's Philosophical Context: An Intellectual Biography* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

¹¹⁵ *Nietzsche et la philosophie*, 9.

Meditations? It is not only necessary to determine who is the target of his philosophy, but also equally important to determine why this is the case.¹¹⁶ One should, therefore, begin with the question of Nietzsche's familiarity with Hegel—if he did have any extensive knowledge at firsthand.

Nietzsche's education began at home, in a Lutheran vicarage in Röcken (in the Prussian province of Saxony). After the death of his father and his younger brother, Nietzsche's mother moved the family to Naumberg in 1850. Eight years later, the young Nietzsche was accepted on full scholarship to Schulpforta—the prestigious boarding school that had been attended by Leopold von Ranke, the brothers Schlegel, and Hegel's friend J.G. Fichte. A great deal had changed since these men attended the school. In particular, the influence of Hegelian philosophy had a profound hold over the members of the faculty. It was at Pforta that Nietzsche first encountered Hegel, transmitted through the influence of his teachers. The school was firmly encamped in the humanist tradition, as Curt Paul Janz notes:

The spirit of Pforta, however, was not purely Prussian-conservative and militaristic, like the cadet corps, but rather had been fully informed by the spirit of humanism, as the German classicists had cultivated it and the philology of the 19th century further developed it. One attached importance to the German language and literature and nurtured the dream of German unity in teachers and students; of course, one occupied oneself more heavily with the spirit of antiquity.¹¹⁷

During the time that he attended the school, the approach to the study of the ancients was largely influenced by Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, and his many other works that touch on the subject of classical antiquity (like *Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Philosophy of Right*). The Plato scholar Karl

¹¹⁶ "If we do not discover its target the whole of Nietzsche's philosophy remains abstract and barely comprehensible." *Nietzsche et la philosophie*, 9.

¹¹⁷ Curt Paul Janz, *Friedrich Nietzsche Biographie: Band 1* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1981), 66.

Steinhart, who first introduced the *Symposium* to Nietzsche, was certainly influenced by Hegel. This is only one case—there are several others.¹¹⁸

Whether Nietzsche realized it or not before 1873, his education had been set in the fashion prescribed by Hegel. Of course, this was not only the case at Pforta; Hegel's presence at the universities (especially at the University of Berlin) and the gymnasiums throughout the German-speaking world could not be ignored.¹¹⁹ Even a popular brand of Hegelianism had begun to penetrate into non-academic spheres: works like Max Stirner's *The Ego and His Own* (1845) had introduced the German bourgeoisie to the rudimentary notions of Hegelian philosophy. In his day, Stirner was identified with the Left Hegelians of his day—and this was how he was taken up in the bourgeoisie, as another Hegelian. Stirner speaks the language of Hegel, transforming the concepts of “private individual” and “private property” into absolutes. He concretizes Hegel's categories so that the bourgeoisie, who saw Stirner's philosophy as a confirmation of their own economic and political success, more easily grasps them.¹²⁰ However, they neglected the conclusion of his book: “All things are

¹¹⁸ Dennis Schmidt also notes how Hegel had come to dominate the interpretation of Greek tragedy long before Nietzsche began writing *The Birth of Tragedy*: “By the time Nietzsche broaches the question of tragedy and its relation to the modern world, the history of the second life of this question [as presented in the scholarly journals of 19th century Germany] is, by and large, for better or worse, owned by Hegel. When the young Nietzsche begins to take an interest in Greek art, especially Greek tragedy, Hegel's argument (or, better, the Hegelian argument as it was canonized by his epigones) that the structure of tragedy was ultimately a dialectical structure had become something of a commonplace.” From Schmidt's *On Germans and Other Greeks: Tragedy and Ethical Life* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 191-192. While I agree with Schmidt's hypothesis, I do not think that Nietzsche fully realized the necessary implications of his thoughts on tragedy in his first work—in particular, the conscious break with Hegelian dialectics. Nietzsche only later realizes the radical nature of his “first born.”

¹¹⁹ He already noted this in his lectures *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*.

¹²⁰ Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations* can be read as a prolonged attack on “cultural Hegelianism.” I only take up the first two *Meditations* in this chapter as proof of this—it would be possible to include the latter two *Meditations* as Gary Shapiro does in his recent article, “Nietzsche's Unmodern Thinking: Globalization, the End of History, and ‘Great Events,’” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84/2 (2010): 205-230.

nothing to me.”¹²¹ Stirner brings Hegelian philosophy to its logical conclusion, a conclusion that could be interpreted in a way so that it turns against Hegel.

If Ida Overbeck (the wife of the theologian and friend of Nietzsche at the University of Basel) can be trusted, sometime in the early 1880s Nietzsche is said to have mentioned Stirner’s philosophy in passing. Nietzsche said that he had some kind of intellectual affinity with Stirner in his conversation with Frau Overbeck, but was then embarrassed to have admitted this.¹²² It may be the case that Nietzsche was embarrassed to have identified himself with a supposed Hegelian, or that he did not want someone to confuse him with a supposed Hegelian. Although no one knows where or when Nietzsche read Stirner, it must have been sometime around the time of the publication of the *Untimely Meditations*.¹²³

Whatever the case may be, the fact remains true that “Nietzsche paid innermost attention to Stirner.”¹²⁴ Stirner’s philosophy interested him, and he must have read Stirner intently, for he seems to have interpreted Stirner as anti-Hegelian. The affinity that exists between Stirner and Nietzsche, as he understood it, is their rejection of Hegelian philosophy, which claimed to have been the “standpoint of the present day” in which the Spirit knows itself as absolute in “scientific knowledge.”¹²⁵ In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, delivered intermittently over the course of the 1820s, Hegel claimed that the Spirit reached

¹²¹ Max Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, trans. Steven T. Byington (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2005), 366.

¹²² *Conversations with Nietzsche*, 113-114.

¹²³ Nietzsche’s embarrassment can be explained as follows: Stirner was not considered to be an academic philosopher in his own time (one reason that Nietzsche may have liked him—he was radical). The fact that no one knows where or when Nietzsche read Stirner can most likely be explained by the fact that he did not want anyone to know that he checked out the latter’s books from the library.

¹²⁴ *Conversations with Nietzsche*, 114.

¹²⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Medieval and Modern Philosophy*, trans. E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 552.

full consciousness of itself as the Absolute Idea in his own work. There will not be any new developments in the consciousness of the Idea—as the endpoint of the history of Western philosophy, Hegel’s philosophy brings on an unlimited stasis. “Hegel completes the history of the spirit in the sense of its ultimate fulfillment, in which everything which has taken place hitherto or has been conceived is comprehended in unity; but he completes it also in the sense of an eschatological end, in which the history of the spirit is finally realized.”¹²⁶ Thus, as Nietzsche would say (repeating Hegel), the culmination of all history (and philosophy) coincided with Hegel’s “Berlin existence.”¹²⁷ In other words, Hegel had stated that absolute idealism is the philosophy of its time and place—his philosophy is *timely*. This was true in more ways than one.

First in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) and again in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, first delivered in 1822 and then revised for 1830, Hegel makes the claim that world history represents the progress in the “consciousness of freedom.” The end state of this progress is found in the “Germanic world,” where “the divine spirit has come into the world and taken up its abode in the individual, who is now completely free and endowed with substantial freedom.”¹²⁸ The freedom bestowed on the individual, however, is not the idea of being free *from* restraints, i.e., negative freedom; rather, freedom is made manifest through the emergence of the state in its laws. Hegel notes in *The Philosophy of Right* (1825):

¹²⁶ Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, trans. David E. Green (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 32.

¹²⁷ *KGW* III/1: 304.

¹²⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 131.

The state is absolutely rational inasmuch as it is the actuality of the substantial will which it possesses in the particular self-consciousness once that consciousness has been raised to consciousness of its universality. This substantial unity is an absolute unmoved end in itself, in which freedom comes into its supreme right. On the other hand this final end has supreme right against the individual, whose supreme duty is to be a member of the state.¹²⁹

One is free to follow the (rational) laws decreed by the state, or suffer the consequences. For Hegel, the state in which the ultimate consciousness of freedom has emerged is Prussia, whose laws he believed adhered to the Kantian notion of positive freedom. It just so happened that Hegel was present in Berlin when the manifestation of the ultimate consciousness of freedom occurred and his philosophy comprehended this truth.

The deification of the present situation occurs in Hegel's philosophy because he crowns his philosophy (and the Prussian state) as the endpoint of history. The Spirit reaches its Sabbath in Prussia, the state that forms the culmination of the development over the course of several millennia. Even the Germanic culture is considered to be superior to all that came before—a point that Nietzsche hotly contested in “David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer.” According to Nietzsche, Strauss has gradually become Hegel's lackey over the years, and unwittingly remained “in a state of ‘absolute dependence’ on Hegel and Schleiermacher” because he groveled before the realities of the day.¹³⁰ Like many of his day, Strauss glorified the present German military victory as a victory of German culture. In this way, he was following the path already established by Hegel, who viewed the present as the culminating point of history, and it was difficult not to have a kind of philistine optimism during a time of German economic prosperity and military power. “*He who has once contracted Hegelism and Schleiermacherism is never quite cured of them*” [Wer einmal an

¹²⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 155-156.

¹³⁰ *KGW* III/1: 187. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 27.

der Hegelei und Schleiermacherei erkrankte, wird nie wieder ganz curirt].¹³¹ Anyone who encounters Hegelian philosophy has the difficult task of disentangling themselves from the labyrinth of his logic of dialectics. Might this not also be the case for Nietzsche himself, who encountered Hegel (albeit mostly in a mediated way) during his high school days at Pforta?

Nietzsche found himself in a situation that was similar to that of his target Strauss in the first of the *Untimely Meditations*. By 1873, he realized that his thought had been structured by Hegelian philosophy even though he rarely encountered Hegel firsthand during his time at Pforta and then the Universities of Bonn and Leipzig. Nietzsche points out that the young Strauss had been pulled in by Hegel and had fallen back into the use of Hegelian jargon much later in his life:

At least Strauss does not write like the most infamous of all corrupters of German, the Hegelians and their deformed offspring. At least he wants to get back out of this swamp and he has partly succeeded, though he is as yet very far from being on firm land; it is still noticeable that in his youth he stuttered Hegelian: something in him become dislocated at that time, some muscle got stretched; his ear became dulled, like the ear of a boy brought up amid the beating of drums, so that thereafter he became deaf to the subtle and mighty laws of sound under whose rule every writer lives who has been strictly trained to follow good models.¹³²

Nietzsche's reaction against Strauss is actually an attack on Hegelian philosophy—he admits that Strauss was not the real target of his polemic in *Ecce Homo*.¹³³ The polemic was so vicious that Nietzsche's critics could not see whom he was actually attacking. In fact, he praises Strauss for attempting to disentangle himself from the dangerous influence of Hegel

¹³¹ *KGW* III/1: 187. *Untimely Meditations*, 27. Emphasis added.

¹³² *KGW* III/1: 224. *Untimely Meditations*, 54.

¹³³ He mentions this in the third proposition of his practice of war: "I never attack people,—I treat people as if they were high-intensity magnifying glasses that can illuminate a general, though insidious and barely noticeable, predicament. This is how I attacked David Strauss or, more precisely, the *success* of an old and decrepit book in German 'culture',—I caught this culture in the act . . ." *KGW* VI/3: 272. *Ecce Homo*, 82. Nietzsche's emphasis.

in the middle of his life and reserves his ire for the self-satisfied cultural philistinism born out of Hegelian philosophy. Nietzsche is like Strauss who wants to escape from Hegel's labyrinth. Both want to avoid slipping back into "the Hegelian sludge" [Hegelschen Schlamm], that is, the dialectical logic of absolute idealism (and, for Nietzsche, its incomprehensible language and impossible style).

We are left with two questions. The first question is: "If Nietzsche wants to avoid slipping back into the crude dialectics of Hegel, when and where did he extricate himself from Hegel in the first place?" My attempt in this chapter will be to answer this question. The focus will be first, on when Nietzsche purges himself of the Hegelian dialectical logic, and second, how he believes he accomplishes this. The second question is: "How does Nietzsche's self-extrication from the limits of Hegelian philosophy in the second *Untimely Meditation* change the way we should understand the teaching of the eternal recurrence?" This question will be answered in the three chapters that follow this one.

Nietzsche's Quasi-Hegelianism

The distance that Nietzsche puts between himself and Hegel must come sometime after *The Birth of Tragedy* but before he started writing the *Untimely Meditations*. His first work contains no mention of Hegel or his philosophy; however, the way it views past, present, and future is dialectical. During the 5th century B.C., tragedy and the tragic worldview thrived in ancient Athens. Once Socrates and Euripides arrived, the tragic worldview was replaced by that of the optimism of science and the theoretical man—Nietzsche's time was the culmination of this optimism. According to Nietzsche, his age is

moving toward a “*rebirth of tragedy*,” especially in the form of Wagnerian opera. This position is peculiar to the Germans: “We feel that the birth of a tragic age means the return of the German spirit to itself, a blissful reunion with its own being after the German spirit, which had been living in hopeless formal barbarism, had been tyrannized for too long by forms introduced from outside by a vast invading force.”¹³⁴ The language is that of dialectics. If read outside of its context, such a sentence could easily be mistaken for something from Hegel’s corpus!

Nietzsche reflected on his first publication that it appears to be “very untimely.” In fact, *The Birth of Tragedy* was not untimely at all—a great portion of its formulations are influenced by the prevailing Hegelian philosophy of the time. For example, he says that Greek tragedy is the synthesis of two opposed views of art, Apollo and Dionysus. It is not without reason that Nietzsche says in *Ecce Homo* that “you would sooner believe that the essay was fifty years older” [Man könnte eher schon glauben, dass die Schrift fünfzig Jahre älter sei]. If the work was published in 1872, that would mean that it sounded as though it was from 1822. What is going on in the early 1820s when it comes to philosophy and tragedy? Idealism certainly took center stage in Germany and the rest of Europe. Which idealists were around at the time? Hegel was the main proponent of idealism at this time—Fichte was already dead by the 1820s and Schelling had lapsed into his long silence. Nietzsche seems to be saying that his first work was a product of German idealism, that, in his words, “it smells offensively Hegelian.”¹³⁵ As Nietzsche himself saw it, the problem with

¹³⁴ *KGW* III/1: 124. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 95.

¹³⁵ *KGW* VI/1: 308. *Ecce Homo*, 108.

The Birth of Tragedy was that it was not only Romantic (it was addressed to one man, Richard Wagner), but also that it was idealistic, Hegelian.

The Romanticism and idealism of his first work was not only responsible for its rejection as being “unscientific” by the philological community. These features also prevented Nietzsche from answering the main question of the work: “What is Dionysian?” Romanticism and idealism are twins born from the same mother—the modern world. Nietzsche identifies Romanticism and idealism in *The Case of Wagner*, calling Wagner “Hegel’s heir.” For him, Wagner’s music is another formulation of the “Idea,” it is the Idea in the disguise of music. He notes further: “The same type of people who enthused over Hegel get enthusiastic about Wagner these days; in Wagner’s school, people even *write* in Hegel—*German young men understood him better than anyone else did.*”¹³⁶ The young Nietzsche understood what Wagner wanted to express only because they spoke the same language, Hegelian. Of course, he did not realize this at the time. Under the influence of Wagner, who was hammering Hegel into Nietzsche during the composition of *The Birth of Tragedy*, the articulation of the question was tainted.¹³⁷ Therefore, the “untimeliness” of his first work is only apparent: Nietzsche’s question is an ancient one, in this way it is “untimely”; however, no answer is forthcoming because of the way in which the question is posed (i.e., in the terms of Hegel’s idealism). The answer was supposed to resound from Wagnerian tragic opera; but the answer Nietzsche received was the Bayreuth Festival, an

¹³⁶ KGW VI/3: 30. *The Case of Wagner*, 252. Emphasis added.

¹³⁷ Julian Young also takes note of this in greater length in his book *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography* (see Ch. 7 “Richard Wagner and the Birth of *The Birth of Tragedy*”).

answer that shattered Nietzsche's (and other people's) hopes for a proper rejuvenation of culture.¹³⁸

Since his first work was tainted by Hegelian thought, Nietzsche's break must come sometime after 1872. One already sees signs of it in 1872 in his lecture series, *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*. Nietzsche's purging of Hegelian philosophy is completed in the "History" essay of 1873—this precipitates Nietzsche's later break with Wagner. One cannot hold onto Wagner once one has broken with what Nietzsche soon came to see as Wagner's intellectual foundation in Hegel.¹³⁹ The appearance of the *Untimely Meditations* indicates a radical transformation in Nietzsche's philosophy. It sets the course for all of what comes after; it changes the way in which the question "What is Dionysian?" is posed. An answer can come forth in *The Gay Science* when he changes the trajectory (and nature) of science as traditionally conceived, one which Nietzsche will call the "eternal recurrence." In this way, the *Untimely Meditations*, and especially the "History" essay, should be considered a "transitional" work. Most scholars, on the contrary, agree that *Human, All Too Human* is the point of transition in Nietzsche's philosophy. But this is due to a misinterpretation of his comments on the work in *Ecce Homo*, namely that it "is a monument [Denkmal] to a

¹³⁸ In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche writes of *The Birth of Tragedy*: "The book owed its *effectiveness* and even its fascination to what was wrong with it—its practical application to *Wagnerianism*, as if that were a symptom of *ascent*. This is why the book was an event in Wagner's life: it was at this point that Wagner's name began to give rise to great hopes. People still remind me of this, sometimes in the context of *Parsifal* . . ." *KGW VI/3*: 307. *Ecce Homo*, 107. Nietzsche's emphasis.

¹³⁹ In a letter to George Brandes in which he discusses how he is responsible for the now present unity of Schopenhauer and Wagner in the German mind, Nietzsche notes: "I was the first person to distill a sort of unity out of both of them; this erroneous belief is now very much in the forefront of German culture—all Wagnerites are adherents of Schopenhauer. This was not true when I was young. In those days it was the last Hegelians who adhered to Wagner, and even in the fifties the slogan was 'Wagner and Hegel.'" February 19, 1888 *KGW III/5*: 260 (no. 997). From *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. Christopher Middleton (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1996), 286.

crisis.”¹⁴⁰ Monuments are only erected after the fact—the crisis in his thinking had already occurred long before. *Human, All Too Human* is a book in which some of the details of the break with Hegelian idealism are worked out.¹⁴¹

The “middle” stage of Nietzsche’s philosophy, as some scholars call it, begins with *Human, All Too Human* and lasts until *The Gay Science*. During this period, Nietzsche’s thinking drives toward a definite point, an articulation of the “eternal recurrence” in §§341-342, the last sections of the first edition of *The Gay Science* (1882). However, the preparatory work, which makes this articulation of a philosophy of history possible, begins in the “History” essay. This often-overlooked essay is the point where Nietzsche’s philosophy of history coincides with his philosophy of science (“the problem of science”)—his criticism of Hegelian dialectical logic, Science, sets the stage for the advent of the “eternal recurrence.” It is necessary at this point to see how Nietzsche purges himself of the dialectical logic of Hegel—and the historicism to which it gives rise—in this “transitional” essay. In turn, this will give one a sense to what extent Nietzsche was able to eliminate elements of Hegel’s system of philosophy from his own thinking about history and what he was unable to uproot fully.

The Shattering of Hegel’s Dialectic of History

The “History” essay was composed over the course of 1873 and finally published early in 1874. On the surface, it is straightforward: Nietzsche will be talking about the

¹⁴⁰ *KGW* VI/3: 320. *Ecce Homo*, 115.

¹⁴¹ Nietzsche says of the book: “It calls itself a book for *free* spirits: almost every sentence is the manifestation of a victory—I used it to liberate myself from things that *did not belong* to my nature. Idealism is one of them: the title says ‘where *you* see ideal things, *I* see—human, oh, only all to human!’” *KGW* VI/3: 320. *Ecce Homo*, 115-116. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

“advantages” and “disadvantages” of history [Historie] *for life*. Although the structure of the work is not spelled out in a table of contents, one can easily determine the different parts of the essay. There is a “Preface,” which gives Nietzsche’s *ceterum censeo* for the essay, three sections that discuss the “advantages” of history for life (§§1-3), an interlude on German “culture” (§4), five sections on the “disadvantages” of history for life (§§5-9), and a concluding section that indicates his hopes for the future (§10). Its structure is simple and the topics addressed are in a natural order: one cannot see what the “disadvantages” of history are for life without first knowing its “advantages.” Even the simple way in which it has been structured indicates that the work is “unacademic”—in Nietzsche’s mind, non-Hegelian. One follows the thread of the argument from the beginning until the end, and the reader ends up in a different place than he or she began. The essay is instructive, but it opens up a new horizon of life and action for its reader. To get a sense of its “unacademic” quality one would need to compare it with one of Hegel’s works (like *Science of Logic*), wherein the reader moves in a large circle, never moving to a new vista. According to Nietzsche, Hegel merely instructs his readers, he never moves them to anywhere new.¹⁴²

“Preface”

The closed, perfect system of the mature Hegel does not allow for a new horizon. Everything is brought to stasis in absolute idealism. Goethe’s main point of criticism of Hegel’s system of philosophy is that it merely instructs but does not encourage action: “In

¹⁴² Such a view is debatable. One certainly cannot say this of the younger Hegel in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* since it is a work that outlines the actual movement of Spirit from one form of consciousness/knowledge to the next. In fact, the dynamism of Hegel’s earlier works matches those of Nietzsche’s (throughout his career).

any case, I hate everything that merely instructs me without augmenting or directly invigorating my activity” [Übrigens ist mir alles verhaßt, was mich bloß belehrt, ohne meine Tätigkeit zu vermehren oder unmittelbar zu beleben]. These words were written in a letter to Schiller on December 18, 1798. Although Goethe had not come into contact with Hegel at this point, they nicely summarize his later criticism of Hegel’s philosophy. Prior to these words, Goethe was telling Schiller how he had been reading Kant’s “Anthropology” and enjoyed it in small doses. However, on the whole “it is not refreshing” [ist es nicht erquicklich].¹⁴³ One does not find refreshment in anything that is merely speculative because it stands beyond the concerns of the everyday, human world. Speculation that does not have any effect on human behavior is not the purpose of education. In other words, Goethe is reminding Schiller of the old teaching that education consists in overcoming the distinction between theory and practice.

Nietzsche rightly picks up on this in the “Preface.” History needs to be studied for the purpose of refreshing and invigorating us—i.e., we need it “for the sake of life and action, not so as to turn comfortably away from life and action.”¹⁴⁴ The study of history serves life, it gives us perspective on our place in time and directs us toward the future. However, history studied for its own sake—i.e., historicism, history made into a *science*—results in the degeneration and decay of life and action. But, as Nietzsche sadly notes, such is the case for historical studies in modern Europe (especially Germany). History has become a refuge from one’s responsibilities and pressing concerns: however one does history in the modern world, it no longer *moves* its investigator. Historical science is the ultimate sign of the degeneration

¹⁴³ Siegfried Seidel, ed., *Der Briefwechsel Zwischen Schiller und Goethe, Zweiter Band: Briefe der Jahre 1798-1805* (München: C.H. Beck, 1984), 181.

¹⁴⁴ *KGW* III/1: 241. *Untimely Meditations*, 59.

of a culture, as Nietzsche notes in §23 of *The Birth of Tragedy*, because the historical sense uproots the unhistorical foundation of myth.¹⁴⁵

He has had the feeling that the historical sense has slowly come to reign among the Germans “particularly for the past two generations.” In other words, history studied for its own sake is a phenomenon that first appears at the beginning of the 19th century, when Hegel’s system of philosophy dominated the intellectual landscape. His philosophy is the height of the optimism of “theoretical man” because it claims to make everything intelligible. It was within the Hegelian dialectic—a Socratic device originally intended for educational purposes promoted to the level of the highest speculation—that history portrayed the pattern of infinite progress. However, his logic of history forms a self-enclosed circle—nothing lies outside of the domain of history, it is all-inclusive. Hegelian idealism is the conclusion of the two thousand year drive “to encompass the entire world of appearances” in the net of theoretical man because it casts its reach the furthest: it attempts to grasp everything and pull it all together via history. The promotion of history to the level of science is, therefore, the last page in the book of Alexandrian culture; Nietzsche and his contemporaries live in a time at which “logic [Logik] curls up around itself” and “finally bites its own tail,”¹⁴⁶ i.e., the time of the closed, all-comprehensive system. Nothing new can happen, no change can take place—everything has already been subsumed in the Absolute Idea of Hegel’s system.

¹⁴⁵ The 19th century, according to Nietzsche, is the conclusion of the rediscovery of Alexandrian-Roman antiquity in the 15th century. What he says here foreshadows his indictment of historical science in the “History” essay: “On the heights we find the same excessive lust for knowledge, the same unsatisfied delight in discovery, the same enormous growth in worldliness, and alongside these things a homeless roaming-about, a greedy scramble to grab a place at the tables of others, frivolous deification of the present, or a dull, numbed turning away from it, all of this *sub specie saeculi*—of the ‘here and now’; these same symptoms all suggest that at the heart of this culture there is the same lack: the destruction of myth.” *KGW* III/1: 144-145. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 111.

¹⁴⁶ *KGW* III/1: 97. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 75.

Optimism in Germany concerning historical education as the best form of education available was at an all-time high. When Nietzsche wrote, history as the ultimate (because all-inclusive) science not only deified the present as the necessary conclusion and summit of the past, but it also encouraged education in history for its own sake. In Nietzsche's view, despite what Marx may say to the contrary about his own philosophy, this was due to the Hegelian influence: as a self-enclosed, all-encompassing system of reality, absolute idealism does not promote *action*. One moves in circles in the dialectic, according to Nietzsche, one does not move from point A to point B. The ideal of historical education cannot be that found in Hegel's philosophy. Nietzsche notes at the end of his "Preface" that the meaning of classical studies (philology) is to be "untimely"—"that is to say, *acting counter to our time and thereby acting on our time and, let us hope, for the benefit of a time to come.*"¹⁴⁷ One should not come to rest in studying history, but be moved toward the future. In other words, study of any kind should promote right action and right living.

"Advantages" (§§1-3)

Nietzsche begins his reflection on history with a discussion of the difference between human beings and animals.¹⁴⁸ Animals "do not know what is meant by yesterday or today," for they live permanently in a series of disconnected moments in which the past and the

¹⁴⁷ *KGW* III/1: 243. *Untimely Meditations*, 60.

¹⁴⁸ For an excellent interpretation of the difference between animals and human beings, and how this difference determines the course of Nietzsche's argument in the "History" essay, see Vanessa Lemm's "Animality, Creativity and Historicity: A Reading of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben*," *Nietzsche-Studien* 36 (2007): 169-200. (I came across this essay after I had written my interpretation of Nietzsche's essay and it has confirmed much of what I had originally written; but it also has led me to include other points that strengthen my position.) For an extension of the principles in this essay to other parts of Nietzsche's philosophy see Vanessa Lemm's *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy: Culture, Politics, and the Animality of the Human Being* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009).

future never arise. In other words, animals have no concept of time, and it is in this that their complete happiness subsists. The flow of time can never disturb the animal, who immediately forgets each moment after it passes. In this way, the animal lives “*unhistorically*”: “It is contained in the present, like a number without any awkward fraction left over.”¹⁴⁹ The animal lives wholly in the moment and leaves nothing behind in the jump from moment to moment. Man is another story. He “remembers,” the past haunts his steps all the days of his life, his existence is “an imperfect tense that can never become a perfect one.”¹⁵⁰ Something of man is always left behind in the past, which can return to him at any given moment without warning. Man is a historical being, his past is an invisible burden that he always carries with him even during his time unawares.

The remembrance of the past makes man aware of his time—that someday he will die. His envy of the animal is natural: the animal does not remember and, therefore, can live completely unawares of the fact that it is finite. Animals remain active because they do not suffer from knowledge of the past. However, it is also true that man can temporarily live in the moment because he does act—his eye cannot penetrate every part of the past. To have the power of seeing all the past before oneself is unnatural. The conditions of both animal, which is completely unhistorical, and man, who is historical and unhistorical, are good:

It is possible to live almost without memory, and to live happily moreover, as the animal demonstrates; but it is altogether impossible to *live* at all without forgetting. Or, to express my theme even more simply: *there is a degree of sleeplessness, of rumination, of the historical sense, which is harmful and ultimately fatal to the living thing, whether this living thing be a man or a people or a culture.*¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ *KGW III/1: 245. Untimely Meditations, 61.*

¹⁵⁰ *KGW III/1: 245. Untimely Meditations, 61.*

¹⁵¹ *KGW III/1: 246. Untimely Meditations, 62.*

The human being needs to be able to forget things from the past, or else the past will literally bury the present. No actions will be possible if man does not forget—as Nietzsche noted in *The Birth of Tragedy*, this is like the case of Hamlet, whose knowledge makes action loathsome to him.¹⁵² Having turned around toward the past with his back to the future, man cannot act and create. A horizon needs to surround man so that he will be able to know and act; thus, there needs to be the correct balance between the unhistorical and historical, forgetting and remembering. All of the “advantages” of history consist in their capacity to strike the proper balance between knowledge and action.

Among the two ways of feeling, the priority goes to the unhistorical because it is what allows life (and action) to flourish. One need only look to the animal for confirmation of this—it is also true that it constitutes the only foundation on which “anything truly human, can grow.” History, then, is founded on life and action. It is also true that man only becomes man when he draws a boundary around himself (his horizon) of that which he knows and that which he has forgotten. If the historical element tries to extend itself beyond the limits set by man’s need for forgetfulness, one becomes incapable of acting. Action requires being unjust to the past for the sake of the future; even though one’s memory “revolves unwearingly in a circle and yet is too weak and weary to take even a single leap out of this circle,” the darkness that lies outside this circle is what allows one to perform any deed whatsoever.¹⁵³ But what would happen if man’s memory extended to every corner of the past? He would undoubtedly revolve in an enormous circle, but would never be able to

¹⁵² The need of forgetfulness for action is even true of that creator of all creators, God: “Luther himself once opined that the world existed only through a piece of forgetful negligence on God’s part.” *KGW III/1*: 265. *Untimely Meditations*, 76.

¹⁵³ *KGW III/1*: 249. *Untimely Meditations*, 64.

act. Such is the case of Hegel and his students who adhere to the logic of dialectics, as Nietzsche makes clear in §§8-9 of the essay, who have become self-satisfied *cynics*. Everything that can happen has already happened; therefore, there is no need to act because the future will work itself out regardless of what one might do. The Spirit's "cunning of reason" cannot be countered by a similar cunning on the part of the individual. All of this derives from the all-comprehensive system of Hegel in which one can see everything.

The suprahistorical viewpoint, which is embodied best in Hegel's philosophy of history, is that of the unclosing eye. Suprahistorical men are incapable of acting, for the simple reason that they see "no salvation in the process" and regard the world as an achievement of finality "at each and every moment."¹⁵⁴ Their wisdom makes them nauseated and complacent because the overabundance of history paralyzes them and makes them incapable of acting. Nietzsche proposes to leave them behind and concentrate only on those who suffer from an excess of historical knowledge. Opposed to this, Nietzsche will propose the unwisdom [Unweisheit] of the unhistorical, which allows us to act and makes a future possible for us. There is in this an *antithesis* [Gegensatzes] of life and wisdom, one which cannot be resolved based on Nietzsche's three stated theses. At the end of §1, he leaves us with a choice: either life will be subordinated to wisdom or wisdom will be subordinated to life. There is no possibility of reconciliation of the two in a higher synthesis. Nietzsche forces his audience to make a decision, i.e., to act; wisdom at any cost, which would mean the consumption of the entire past, or life and its open horizon of the not yet determined future.

¹⁵⁴ *KGW* III/1: 251. *Untimely Meditations*, 66.

The “advantages” of history for life, those in which wisdom is subordinate, are outlined in the next two sections. Here, Nietzsche discusses the three different kinds of history—monumental, antiquarian, and critical—and how each serves life. “History pertains to the living man in three respects: it pertains to him as a being who acts and strives, as a being who preserves and reveres, as a being who suffers and seeks deliverance.”¹⁵⁵

However, even in his list of the three kinds of history, Nietzsche is following Hegel, for the latter listed three ways of dealing with history in his lecture course “Lectures on the Philosophy of History”: original, reflective, and philosophical. It is possible to see elements of monumental, antiquarian, and critical history in Hegel’s descriptions. For example, original history and reflective “pragmatic” history have some things in common with monumental history; Hegel even calls one of the kinds of reflective history “critical.” What makes Nietzsche different from Hegel is that the three kinds of history listed by Hegel are all ways of writing history, as opposed to living in relation to the past. It is important to keep this in mind while reading §§2-3.

According to Nietzsche, the most important of the three kinds of history is monumental, the kind of history for the man of action. Nietzsche begins with it in §2. Monumental history belongs to the powerful man, the creator. For this kind of man, history serves as a reminder of the possibility of greatness. Alexander the Great served as an example for Caesar; Caesar, in turn, was an example for Napoleon. The monumental form of history encourages future greatness and reassures those who are capable of greatness that their deed is still possible. However, “that which was once possible could present itself as a

¹⁵⁵ *KGW* III/1: 254. *Untimely Meditations*, 67.

possibility for a second time only if the Pythagoreans were right in believing that when the constellation of the heavenly bodies is repeated the same things, down to the smallest event, must also be repeated on earth.”¹⁵⁶ One cannot expect that monumental history will be exact—the *same* event would require that everything else be the same. It would be absurd to expect this.¹⁵⁷ Caesar’s conquest of the world (i.e., Rome) is a unique act that cannot be repeated; Napoleon’s conquest of Europe, although similar, differs greatly. Therefore, monumental history deals in analogies and dilutes the differences between situations as much as it can so that they appear to be similar to one another.

Even still, monumental history serves life because it encourages action and striving. Only those who are great are capable of expanding the concept “man” and making it more beautiful—this kind of history is for great *individuals*. These men carry the weight of the centuries on their shoulders, and it is these men who are willing to destroy large segments of the past in order to fulfill their destiny. Even in the hands of good men, monumental history may still cause unbelievable damage to the past: “Whole segments of it are forgotten, despised, and flow away in an uninterrupted flood, and only individual embellished facts rise out of it like islands.”¹⁵⁸ Without the proper reverence for the past (found in antiquarian history), the monumental historian will end up sacrificing all that surrounds a great deed of

¹⁵⁶ *KGW* III/1: 257. *Untimely Meditations*, 70.

¹⁵⁷ Nietzsche’s opinion of this does not change later in his career. For the Pythagoreans, whom Nietzsche thought were the first teachers of a ridiculous form of the eternal recurrence, everything is cyclical; thus, everything repeats itself exactly. However, this view of the recurrence is that of the dwarf who says, “All that is straight lies. All truth is crooked, time itself is a circle.” Zarathustra immediately rebukes him for making it too easy. *KGW* VI/1: 196. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 125. See Chapter 3 for a discussion of this passage of *Zarathustra*.

¹⁵⁸ *KGW* III/1: 258. *Untimely Meditations*, 71.

the past in the hopes that it can be transplanted to the present. Even the great man needs antiquarian and critical history so that his relation to the past is not one-sided and skewed.

But the greater damage is caused when the masses take hold of monumental history, for it is unnatural for those who recognize greatness, but who are impotent, to recreate the greatness of the past in the future. They are “faded copies of great men produced on poor paper with worn-out plates.”¹⁵⁹ Everything that was great gets leveled-down to a figure that the masses can recognize—the great of the past are reduced to images of dwarfs. Their simmering hatred for the great men of the present age is veiled in their respect for great men of the past and, thus, they “invert the real meaning of that mode of regarding history into its opposite.”¹⁶⁰ Once the canon of literature, or any other art form, is set no newly inspired innovation can arise—so the masses say. If the great already exists, why is there need to attempt greatness again? Any future striving for greatness is unnecessary—so the cynics say. Nietzsche will return to the issue of the abuse of monumental history in §§8-9 and trace it to the powerful influence of Christianity and, to be more precise, Hegelian philosophy. Coupled with an antiquarian history run rampant, the abuse of monumental history by the impotent leads to a permanent stasis in Nietzsche’s view.

Antiquarian history serves life by preserving and revering the past. He who practices antiquarian history wants to “preserve for those who shall come into existence after him the conditions under which he himself came into existence.”¹⁶¹ The things of the past that make up a community, city, or nation need to be preserved—all of the details that make the present

¹⁵⁹ *KGW III/1*: 316. *Untimely Meditations*, 113.

¹⁶⁰ *KGW III/1*: 260. *Untimely Meditations*, 72.

¹⁶¹ *KGW III/1*: 261. *Untimely Meditations*, 73.

what it is are worthy of reverence. However, antiquarian history “possesses an extremely restricted field of vision,” it is incapable of placing things in a hierarchy due to its myopia. Anything and everything from the past needs to be preserved for the future; the corollary of this is that anything new is immediately rejected. This walks hand in hand with the displacement of monumental history from those who are great to those who are impotent. Armed with the stubborn instinct of preservation, the antiquarian historian might forget his task of preserving the past for the future and demand that the minutiae of the past be forever preserved. Antiquarian history’s “piety withers away, the habit of scholarliness continues without it and rotates in egoistic self-satisfaction around its own axis [Mittelpunkt].”¹⁶² Thus, the antiquarian historian, who lacks a sense of piety, is merely a collector of facts for the sake of collecting them. His obsession with preservation leads to the paralysis of life—nothing new can come forward because it will invariably damage something from the past.

To prevent either monumental history or antiquarian history from exceeding their limits requires a third kind of history to act as a natural buffer between the two. Critical history serves life by dissolving a part of the past that encumbers the present. The critical historian dissolves part of the past by bringing it to the bar of judgment: “It is not justice which here sits in judgment; it is even less mercy which pronounces the verdict: it is life alone, that dark, driving power that insatiably thirsts for itself.”¹⁶³ For life to continue sometimes requires the destruction of an injustice—“a privilege, a caste, a dynasty”—that is an anchor on the present dragging it down into the past. Critical history attempts to sever the present from the past so that a future will be possible. However, when this kind of history is

¹⁶² *KGW III/1: 264. Untimely Meditations, 75.*

¹⁶³ *KGW III/1: 265. Untimely Meditations, 76.*

practiced without a present need, it causes enormous mischief. There is always the risk of condemning the past *in toto* so that one is set adrift on the infinite tide of becoming with no coordinates. Without some kind of link to the past, the human being runs the risk of utter annihilation. Since we are the products of ages of injustice, it is impossible to free ourselves completely from the stigma of these crimes. The best that we can do is give ourselves a new past, one out of which we would have liked to originate, in the hopes that this will replace the actual past of injustice.

Nietzsche believes that these three kinds of history are all necessary for every man and nation in their proper balance. In each of the three knowledge is subordinated to the needs of life: in monumental history knowledge of the past is used as an impetus to strive for greatness in the future; in antiquarian history knowledge of the past is used to ground one in the present through its preservation for future generations; and, in critical history knowledge of the past is used to cut away what hinders the development of man. What would happen, though, if these kinds of history were transplanted from their natural soil to that of a foreign place (e.g., monumental history from the great to the impotent)? They would “grow into a devastating weed [Umkraut]” that chokes and, ultimately, kills the life on which it is dependent. The abuse of monumental history, in particular, has the greatest potential for devastation because this kind of history has the greatest potential for invigorating life. In the hands of the impotent, knowledge of the great of past ages would strangle life and destroy itself because it has eliminated the ground for its own existence. The elimination of the element of the monumental is a constant threat: “Where the vital plan, the projection of life into the future declines the assembly of historical knowledge becomes a burden or even a

danger for life itself. In this case man only learns to surrender in the face of history. The futility of all plans and the life which is no longer sustained by intentions to create its own future escapes into the past and seeks to forget its own emptiness in the remote richness of a past life.”¹⁶⁴ But this is exactly what Nietzsche thinks Hegelian philosophy is capable of—this is why he considers it to be “dangerous” in §8.

Interlude on German “Culture” (§4)

This short section of the essay forms a natural division between the “advantages” and “disadvantages” of history by identifying each with a particular culture. How has history been used to promote life? How has history been used to the detriment of life? Since times of old people have utilized history in the correct way—it was used for the promotion of life, history was always pursued for the “ends of life.” This was true also for the ancient Greeks, who, according to Nietzsche, would be considered uncultured by the standards of nineteenth century man. Why is this the case? Because the natural constellation of knowledge (history) and life has been altered by the imposition of the “hostile star” [Gestirn] of *science* [Wissenschaft]. Nietzsche’s readers can see this once they reflect on their “own time.” What is now current, what is “timely,” is the rearrangement of the natural relationship of knowledge and life through Hegel’s demand that history be made into an all-comprehensive science.

Nietzsche’s choice of words—“hostile star” and science—at the beginning of this section is not merely metaphorical; they indicate at whom he is aiming his criticism. For

¹⁶⁴ Nietzsche’s *Philosophy*, 29.

Hegel, in the “Preface” to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, the scientific system of truth is the only genuine form in which truth exists. He claims that his “phenomenology” will bring to light in successive stages Spirit’s consciousness of itself—as though it were a child emerging from the womb into the world of light. The final stage will be absolute consciousness in the form of the system of “Science”—thus, Hegel’s idea that scientific cognition is the highest knowing completes the alignment of truth and science begun by Descartes. The appearance of the new world for the child is like the shining beacon of Enlightenment in which the world as a whole becomes absolutely intelligible. Knowing and being are unified. Hegel stands in the long tradition of Neoplatonism with its metaphors of light and the sun for understanding that ultimately derive from Plato. It is not unreasonable to suppose that Nietzsche had Hegel in mind when he refers to the “hostile star,” which he then immediately identifies as “*the demand that history should be a science.*”¹⁶⁵ The metaphors of light and understanding (i.e., Science) abound in Hegel’s works, especially his earlier writings where he claims that his absolute idealism is the antithesis of the darkness (“the Night”) of Schelling’s identity philosophy.

The “star” of Science, which unifies knowing and being in Hegel’s philosophy, exists for its own sake—it shines for itself because everything is brought together through history. This comes from the idealist demand that philosophy become speculative again. The reason why the star is “hostile” is that the Absolute Idea uses individuals for its own fulfillment only to discard them once they have suited its temporary needs—this is the “cunning of Reason”

¹⁶⁵ *KGW* III/1: 267. *Untimely Meditations*, 77.

of which Hegel speaks in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*.¹⁶⁶ History in the Hegelian understanding is inevitably hostile to the individual, for what matters most is the self-realization of the universal. In contrast with this view of history, Nietzsche's own view can be abstracted from the first words that Zarathustra speaks at the beginning of his long journey: "You great star [Gestirn]! What would your happiness be if you had not those for whom you shine?"¹⁶⁷ History, as a kind of knowledge, is meaningless if it does not do anything for the individuals who study it—i.e., if it does not help them act, preserve, or free themselves from the chains of the past. For this reason, knowledge must be subordinated to the ends and purposes of life—as the Greeks were well aware.

The unnatural synthesis of life and knowledge in Hegel's science actually results in the subordination of life to knowledge, which gives rise to the irreconcilable antithesis of "inner content" and "outer form" in modern man. What has occurred within the last two generations after Hegel is the turning around toward the past—the natural horizon provided by the unhistorical has been smashed, the human being now looks into the infinite. "Such an immense spectacle as the science of universal becoming, history, now displays has never before been seen by any generation; though it displays it, to be sure, with the perilous daring

¹⁶⁶ "The particular interests of passion cannot therefore be separated from the realization of the universal; for the universal arises out of the particular and determinate and its negation. The particular has its own interests in world history; it is of a finite nature, and as such, it must perish. Particular interests contend with one another, and some are destroyed in the process. But it is from this very conflict and destruction of particular things that the universal emerges, and it remains unscathed itself. For it is not the universal Idea which enters into opposition, conflict, and danger; it keeps itself in the background, untouched and unharmed, and sends forth the particular interests of passion to fight and wear themselves out in its stead. It is what we may call the *cunning of reason* that it sets the passions to work in its service, so that the agents by which it gives itself existence must pay the penalty and suffer the loss." From Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 89. His reference to the Anaximander fragment should not be overlooked in this context, where individuals pay the penalty for their injustice to one another while Time sits in judgment.

¹⁶⁷ *KGW VI/1: 5. Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 3.

of its motto: *fiat veritas, pereat vita*.”¹⁶⁸ In Germany, this new arrangement of life and knowledge (history) has reached its fulfillment. With the floodgates opened to the past, man clammers about with an excess of knowledge that can never be given proper expression in his actions. Thus, his interior grows and the exterior turns into a thin, translucent membrane that holds everything inside.

However, the contradictions within modern man are no foundation for a true culture—which, for Nietzsche, consists of “unity of artistic style in all the expressions of the life of a people.”¹⁶⁹ Modern man wanders about now filling, and overfilling, himself with the minutiae from the past as though he were an insatiable monster. He is “like a snake that has swallowed rabbits whole and now lies in the *sun* and avoids all *unnecessary movement*.”¹⁷⁰ Man is only satisfied once he has consumed all other past cultures; but, like a glutton, once he has devoured them, he no longer has a desire to move or do anything. The superabundance of his knowledge of the past paralyzes him. He does not know what to do with his knowledge of the past; therefore, “interiority” and its slow digestive process take the leading role in the modern conception of culture. Without the antithesis of inner and outer, modern culture is incomprehensible. And yet, modern culture “is not a real culture at all but only a kind of knowledge of culture; it has an idea of and feeling for culture but no true

¹⁶⁸ KGW III/1: 268. *Untimely Meditations*, 77-78.

¹⁶⁹ KGW III/1: 159. *Untimely Meditations*, 5. The problem that Nietzsche is dealing with in all of the *Untimely Meditations* when it comes to the question of German culture is an ontological one, as Herman Siemens points out: “The problem is one of absence: absence of a German style, absence of a ‘Fundament’ for German culture, and so the absence or *non-being* of the German . . . The non-existence of the German qua culture . . . means that Nietzsche’s fundamental problem is a problem of origin, of giving being or birth, of an *unprecedented* birth.” From his article, “Agonal Configurations in the *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*. Identity, Mimesis and the *Übertragung* of Cultures in Nietzsche’s Early Thought,” *Nietzsche-Studien* 30 (2001): 85.

¹⁷⁰ KGW III/1: 269. *Untimely Meditations*, 78. Emphasis added.

cultural achievement emerges from them.”¹⁷¹ There is no unifying idea, but several shades of ideals from past ages passing through like various fads. It is no wonder, then, that the eponymous hero of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* refers to the city below his solitary dwelling in the “Prologue” as the “Motley Cow”—modernity is a mixture of competing ideals that have no structure or hierarchy and these ideals are those of the “herd.”¹⁷²

Thanks to Hegel, in Germany, “historically educated” and “educated” have become synonymous (to Nietzsche’s great dismay). For the Greeks, on the other hand, this would be considered barbaric, because they embraced the unhistorical aspect and kept the historical within its proper bounds. The Greeks would take modern men to be nothing more than “walking encyclopedias” [wandelnden Encyclopädien], crammed full of knowledge of “ages, customs, arts, philosophies, discoveries of others.”¹⁷³ Hegel’s *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* is, as its author admits, a cursory overview of his philosophy as a whole—the *Science of Logic* forms its other half. For Hegel, the system of science contains everything within it: one need only read the contents and one will be acquainted with everything (even if it is only an outline). Since history is the medium of intelligibility, education must be historical in nature. This is all part of Hegel’s project of renovating the Enlightenment from the perspective of philosophical science: more people than any before

¹⁷¹ *KGW* III/1: 269. *Untimely Meditations*, 78.

¹⁷² Modernity is “motley” or “many-colored” because of its democratic inclination to accept everything from the past without a sense of discretion. Nietzsche’s use of the word “motley” is intended to recall Plato’s pejorative use of it to describe the democratic regime in *The Republic* (558c). Now is not the place for a discussion of Nietzsche’s political theory—too much ink has been spilled on arguing over his political preferences. But it might be helpful to remember that the discussion within *The Republic* is always focused on the individual soul even while the interlocutors are discussing the different kinds of political regimes. Nietzsche most likely detested the democratic kind of soul, which does not have a discriminating taste, while he remained politically indifferent toward democracy by the end of his life—philosophy is, after all, possible in the “best possible city” and the democratic city, according to Plato. He was extremely worried by the fact that modern democracy might eventually lead to tyranny—his prescience in this regard cannot be denied.

¹⁷³ *KGW* III/1: 270. *Untimely Meditations*, 79.

will be able to study history and be able to consider themselves educated in doing so. However, according to Nietzsche, all that this results in is the further division of man into inner and outer—and the epicenter of this pseudo-culture is the German university and gymnasium (see the penultimate section of Chapter 1), over which Hegel casts a long shadow.

The division of an inner and outer ultimately leads to the first “disadvantage” of history for life—that modern man has a “weak personality.” For the only way to deal with the influx of knowledge of everything from the past is to take it all lightly, “the real and existent only makes a slight impression.”¹⁷⁴ The flood of information is taken in only to be discharged immediately for the next wave. This encourages the development of an ever-deepening interior, an abyss that can never adequately be filled, with a membranous covering, a flimsy exoskeleton. But the division of man into inner and outer, which comes about through the influence of Hegelian style history, does not result in a genuine culture because there is no “higher unity.” History is abused for the sake of promoting the idea of the “profound inwardness” of the Germans as a sign of their cultural superiority.

Nietzsche notes how the Germans have embraced their reputation as being a people of inwardness and have given up trying to imitate the convention introduced by French culture. They want to be more natural; but, in doing so, they have become slovenly—the inwardness has come to dominate the outward form. This is not to say that the Germans do not have value as people of inwardness, but they are incapable of bringing their knowledge onto the level of practice. In this way, the Germans are weak because their seriousness,

¹⁷⁴ *KGW* III/1: 271. *Untimely Meditations*, 79.

power, and profundity “are not wound together into a powerful knot.”¹⁷⁵ Their actions are not the expression of internal unity because they are crammed full of other cultures and ages from the past, which more often than not come into conflict with one another. Therefore, the German can only be judged based on what he writes—his actions remain a mystery even to himself.

Ultimately, the source of all of the disadvantages of history for life can be drawn to the common source of Hegel, who demanded that history be practiced as a science. The only hope for Nietzsche remains the unification of the interior of the German so that there will be a possibility of the rebirth of culture in the modern age. Those like Nietzsche, the few who do not pride themselves on the “historical sense,” recognize that the distinction of inner and outer needs to vanish before a genuine German culture can arise. “Out of a vigorous need there will one day arise a vigorous deed.”¹⁷⁶ It is not in the political sense that Nietzsche strives for unity, but rather in the spiritual, cultural sense. In order for this to occur, the future generation will have to be given the proper tools for its implementation. This is what Nietzsche leaves up to the “youth” in §10, who need to be given a blank slate after the expulsion of the Hegelian influence on education. The disastrous influence of Hegel on education, and the Germans in particular, is outlined in the following sections, beginning with what Nietzsche identifies as the “weak personality” of modern man.

¹⁷⁵ *KGW III/1: 272. Untimely Meditations, 81.*

¹⁷⁶ *KGW III/1: 274. Untimely Meditations, 82.*

“Disadvantages” (§§5-9)

All of the “disadvantages” of history for life stem from the subordination of life to knowledge (history). Modern man’s division between an ever-expanding interior and ever-shrinking exterior—both of which are necessary to accommodate the rapid influx of anything and everything from the past—belongs to this unnatural arrangement, the demand that history be a science on par with physics and chemistry. This is the first disadvantage of history for life, and Nietzsche’s criticism of the German pride of “inwardness” in the last section continues in §5. There are four others after this first one, each is worse than the one before. The last of the two, modern man’s belief that he is an epigone capable of judging history because he is the endpoint of the process and his self-satisfied cynicism, are the most dangerous. These stand as the final product of the reversal of the natural relationship between life and knowledge. And it is in these two sections where Hegel figures most prominently.

Modern man has a weak personality, according to Nietzsche, because he is expected to consume, digest, and expel too much knowledge of the past. He stuffs himself with obscure knowledge from the past, but like any glutton, he has no taste. His interior expands while his exterior grows thin—there is no correspondence, no unity between the two. Once the necessary boundary of the unhistorical has been shattered, everything from the past flies at the historian. But even that does not satisfy him—modern man dines on the newspapers, flipping through them for a new item of information. Over sated with knowledge, his “deeds are shortlived explosions, not rolling thunder.”¹⁷⁷ There is no unity of action for this kind of

¹⁷⁷ *KGW III/1: 276. Untimely Meditations, 83.*

man; he has lost his simplicity by gazing momentarily at what deserves longer attention, his instincts are gone. Having lost his childlike simplicity, which demands the unity of life and knowledge (unhistorical and historical), modern man sinks into the abyss of his interiority and puts on a mask.

Nietzsche claims that with the inundation of history, man is no longer capable of acting freely on his own. His instincts have been dulled by history and turned man into a shadow. “No one dares to appear as he is, but masks himself as a cultivated man, as a scholar, as a poet, as a politician.” Modern man has become an imitator of actions; he is an *actor*. But this actor is not born an actor, i.e., he is not the Dionysian actor. He is rather a counterfeit actor—and this is not rare in a society wherein the individual is leveled down by the quantitative power of the masses, which are contented with their place in history (see especially §9). Thus, as Friedrich Georg Jünger describes it, “it is a mark of man, who no longer acts spontaneously and actively, but only reacts to actions, that he needs stand-ins everywhere, and a mark of the stand-in that he needs reactions in order to act.”¹⁷⁸ The actor stands in for the real person and performs the action; everyone has become an actor because the overfilling of the interior with historical knowledge prevents a deed to emerge from one’s knowing. The thin membrane that suffices for an outer form in modern man is really only a mask that hides the true person underneath. Like the actor, modern man can only ever react—i.e., do something based on his cues from the outside.

People are becoming more alike on the outside, their differences are only contained within. Modern men have become less honest because they are all actors on the outside. The

¹⁷⁸ Nietzsche, 146. See the entire discussion for a thorough examination of Nietzsche’s thoughts on the actor.

task of everyone is the preservation of the past at all costs in its “objective” form—thus, man has been turned into a eunuch since history is no longer able to have an effect on him. “It almost seems that the task is to stand guard over history to see that nothing comes out of it except more history, and certainly no real events!—to take care that history does not make any personality ‘free,’ that is to say truthful towards itself, truthful towards others, in both word and deed.”¹⁷⁹ This is why it does not matter exactly what any of these men study “so long as history itself is kept nice and ‘objective.’”¹⁸⁰ One’s own interests must not come into the picture, for if they do, there is the risk that the past will never be understood “in itself.” The ultimate goal is to transform history into a pure science, on par with modern physics¹⁸¹—this is why Nietzsche refers to those who are historically educated as a race of neuters, moved neither by the feminine nor the masculine.

Even philosophy no longer moves one to lead a certain way of life outside of the halls of academia, according to Nietzsche. Philosophy is done “on the clock,” for in a historical culture it “possesses no rights if it wants to be more than a self-restrained knowing which leads to no action.” One is no longer permitted to live the philosophical way. It is impossible to tell whether or not those who study philosophy are men, for they are now subjectless beings, who are impotent to act (they only react). History has corrupted these “weak personalities” to the extent that they are only ever able to offer criticism of what other

¹⁷⁹ *KGW III/1: 277. Untimely Meditations*, 84. One can discern in this section of the essay an important theme in Nietzsche’s philosophy—the virtue of “intellectual honesty/integrity.” For a discussion of his evolving relation toward this virtue, see Chapter 5 below.

¹⁸⁰ *KGW III/1: 280. Untimely Meditations*, 86.

¹⁸¹ It is interesting to compare his critique of objectivity here in the “History” essay with his praise of the intellectual honesty that compels true knowers to physics in §335 of *The Gay Science*. Nietzsche’s change in attitude toward objectivity can only be explained by his transformation of science into “gay science.” An account of this will be offered in Chapters 3 and 4.

great men can do. One's objectivity is a sign of one's being a great critic; however, this "historical culture of our critics will no longer permit any effect at all in the proper sense, that is an effect on life and action."¹⁸² Criticism run rampant is a sign of *impotentia*, it is a sign that one is an actor because one is only able to react to external stimuli. Thus, one can see that Hegel's influence on the study of history (namely, his demand that it become a universal science) has already corrupted two kinds of history that serve life: antiquarian tries to preserve anything and everything, crystallizing the past in objectivity while criticism arises as the only means for action (i.e., re-action).

Turning from the weakness of modern man's personality, Nietzsche wonders in the next section (§6) whether or not the "objectivity" of the historical sense is not, as some call it, the grounds for his strength. For the historically educated, their "objectivity" is a sign of their justice: they are in the position to criticize and, ultimately, determine the fate of everything in the past. But does the modern age possess the virtue of justice more than that of previous ones simply due to its supposed "objectivity"? Nietzsche's answer is no, modern man is deluded in his equation of justice with objectivity.

For the ancients, especially Plato and Aristotle, justice was a virtue that was never easily attained. In the case of Plato, the most just man was also the wisest man; on the other hand, justice for Aristotle is the highest virtue for the life of the active man within the polis. Likewise for Nietzsche, as a virtue, justice is reserved for the great man. The man who is capable of judgment is "the most *venerable* exemplar of the species man; for he desires truth,

¹⁸² *KGW* III/1: 281. *Untimely Meditations*, 87.

not as cold, ineffectual knowledge, but as a regulating and punishing judge.”¹⁸³ Only the great are capable of such judgment because they desire the truth not for its own sake but for the sake of life. Few historians have this kind of virtue—Nietzsche in *Twilight of the Idols* says that Thucydides had the “strong, severe, harsh objectivity,” he was a great historian because he was not afraid to condemn what happened in the past.¹⁸⁴ It is improbable that many have the natural talent for critical history, for most men believe that the goal of history is objectivity. Objectivity to them means the application of the standard of justice in the present age to the beliefs and deeds of past ages; therefore, what is “timely,” the “everyday standards of the present moment,” serves as the measure of everything from the past.

Pure objectivity is a myth—it is the myth of mythlessness, the prevailing myth of the modern age.¹⁸⁵ For the modern historian, in order to comprehend an isolated event requires an artistic skill—one must be able to weave it into the whole pattern of history. He already has an *a priori* pattern in his mind, one in which each event must find its proper place. But this already undermines the historian’s sense of detachment from the phenomena he is dissecting, for he believes that “he to whom a moment of the past *means nothing at all* is the proper man to describe it.”¹⁸⁶ That man is the man of the present, the one who is last of all. This kind of man thinks that coming last in the line of history gives him a right to judge all the past—but he does not stand higher than those whom he is judging. Only those who have

¹⁸³ *KGW* III/1: 282. *Untimely Meditations*, 88. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

¹⁸⁴ *KGW* VI/3: 150. *Twilight of the Idols*, 226.

¹⁸⁵ It is a myth in the sense that it is the driving force behind historical science and also in the sense of an illusion: “For Nietzsche, it is questionable whether pure and objective knowledge of the past is possible at all, since this would depend on an objective and ‘disinterested’ perspective on the past. But, as Nietzsche convincingly shows, such a perspective is impossible for it would not be a perspective of life.” “Animality, Creativity and Historicity,” 183.

¹⁸⁶ *KGW* III/1: 289. *Untimely Meditations*, 93.

the rarest minds can become great historians—one needs to think of the Empedoclean formula: “Like to like!” According to Nietzsche, history is written only by the great man, one who is like those who were great in the past, for it is only the great who can divine the meaning of the past and be an accurate judge of it.

Objectivity, then, is the great leveler in Nietzsche’s judgment. It makes all who follow the method outlined in the science of history equally capable of dissecting the past. Nietzsche believes that this sense of objectivity does not provide equal access to all, for the past speaks as an oracle and “only if you are an architect of the future and know the present will you understand it.”¹⁸⁷ Those who are capable of justice, i.e., the great, are the only ones who can judge the past because they are equal to its greatness. One must draw examples from the past so that the future can be brought to life out of the present: in other words, one must do monumental history. The current method of doing history results in a population of dwarfs, who can only study the great of the past by cutting them down to their own size. The objectivity of the historians supposedly places them on an equal footing with the great, but what this actually does is turn the great things of the past into dead ones that no longer have an effect on how one leads one’s life in the present. Nietzsche picks up on this point in the next section (§7).

An artistic drive is necessarily part of the good historian—one needs to be creative in order to bring all of the different threads of the past together into a coherent whole.¹⁸⁸ If

¹⁸⁷ *KGW III/1: 290. Untimely Meditations, 94.*

¹⁸⁸ History is an artistic endeavor, not a scientific/epistemological one: “To think of all in relation to all others and weave the isolated event into the whole: always with the presupposition that if a unity of plan does not already reside in things it must be implanted in them. Thus man spins his web over the past and subdues it, thus he gives expression to his artistic drive—but not to his drive towards truth or justice.” *KGW III/1: 286. Untimely Meditations, 91.*

objectivity alone prevails, i.e., if the historical prevails over the unhistorical, “then the instinct for creation will be enfeebled and discouraged,” which means that the future has already been buried by the past.¹⁸⁹ History, as it is pursued at the present, does not foster the growth of the instincts, but rather hinders them and, thus, makes dull those who practice history. Some believe that they can occupy themselves with history as though it were merely an innocent occupation; this is especially true of the liberal Protestant theologians.¹⁹⁰ Christianity has become reduced to a purely historical phenomenon, one that does not have an effect on those who study it—in a certain sense, “God is dead” to those who study Christianity historically. Of course, this idea is propagated by Hegel’s philosophy, which teaches one to distinguish the “idea of Christianity” from its manifold imperfect “phenomenal forms.” For Nietzsche, and others, Hegelian philosophy has destroyed Christianity by resolving it into pure knowledge about Christianity.

That everything needs a shroud of myth, or the unhistorical, about it in order to flourish is something that can easily be apprehended. Once the mythical has been abolished, then the past floods the present with the greatest trivialities. It is also at this moment that a living religion is destroyed—and this is what both Christianity and Judaism claimed as the sign of the power of their God, as the “living God” of both Jesus and the Old Testament prophets. The past cannot have an effect on the present once one is ruled by the demand for “historical objectivity”—life comes to a grinding halt when history is practiced as a science

¹⁸⁹ *KGW* III/1: 292. *Untimely Meditations*, 95.

¹⁹⁰ Much of what Nietzsche has to say here about the current state of Christianity derives from Franz Overbeck’s *How Christian is Our Present Day Theology?* [*Über die Christlichkeit unserer heutigen Theologie*], which was published along with Nietzsche’s “David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer.” One should compare what Nietzsche says here about how Christianity is able to find itself in everything with what Overbeck has to say about the “adaptability” that certain liberal theologians ascribe to Christianity.

and one remains immature. In this case, the consuming desire for the preservation of the minutiae of history renders any “*actio in distans* imposible,” i.e., the past can never have an effect on the lives of those in the present. Life itself withers under such conditions because it has been cut off from future development and maturity.

Everything that grows only does so under the auspices of an enveloping cloud of illusion—this is a position Nietzsche advocated in *The Birth of Tragedy* (see Chapter 1). However, the present rage for history results in the subordination of life to science. But this does not change the fact that such a life devoted to science is “not of much value because it is far less *living* and guarantees far less life for the future than did a former life dominated not by knowledge but by instinct and powerful illusion.”¹⁹¹ The demand for the preservation and criticism of the past requires the greatest number of scholarly laborers, not perfected and matured personalities, which was the goal of education before the *furor historiae*. Education in history is necessary so that the youths of today can be put to use laboring in some remote corner of the past. Scientific rigor is too much for the young to handle, especially in history, because they lack the necessary experience to order all that they are being taught. Young men can only take refuge in stupidity, disgust, or a sense of relativism—“every age is different, it does not matter what you are like,” one need not try to do anything differently.¹⁹² Eventually the scientific optimism of the historians, their sense of objectivity, turns into this “practical pessimism.”

If young men are expected to be proficient scientists before they have matured completely, they will soon wither under the strains of the rigorous methods of objective

¹⁹¹ *KGW III/1*: 294-295. *Untimely Meditations*, 97. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

¹⁹² *KGW III/1*: 295-296. *Untimely Meditations*, 98.

historical science. In turn science itself will eventually deteriorate and die. Science has been transformed into a commodity for consumption on the open market—it has consciously allied itself to the prevailing egoism of the present. The demand for production in the sciences is due to the ever-expanding consumption of the masses: “The process of leveling down is a monstrous process of exploitation and consumption. It demands a maximum in consumption and produces unbelievably little.”¹⁹³ Historians, therefore, produce books that grow ever worse in quality and ever greater in quantity to suit the demands of the masses’ need for consumption. The rule of the day in education is not that young men become whole and perfect but that they may be transformed into capable functionaries that can serve in the sweatshop of science (or, alternatively, officials at service in the state). But even the “service” rendered to the people is an act, for the “man of science” cares not a whit about the future of the people. These men are “practical pessimists,” who do not care either way what the future might hold for themselves and the people from whom they emerged. In this way, the historians “live an *ironic* existence”—much like Socrates, the first “theoretical man,” who distanced himself from the corrupt Athenians.¹⁹⁴

In the last two sections dealing with the “disadvantages” (§§8-9), Nietzsche addresses the most serious threats to life from the demand that history be made into a science. It is also in these sections that his anti-Hegelianism is most evident: he names Hegel’s philosophy as most dangerous in the first; and, in the second, he continues to attack Hegel via his proxy Eduard von Hartmann. The key to interpreting these sections lies in Nietzsche’s identification of the “*ironic* existence” [*ironische Existenz*] of the historians with Hegel’s

¹⁹³ Nietzsche, 152.

¹⁹⁴ KGW III/1: 298. *Untimely Meditations*, 100.

“Berlin existence” [Berlin Existenz]. It is his belief that Hegelian idealism is the culmination of Alexandrian scientific culture, and Socrates, famous for his irony, was the creator of this culture. Socrates’s optimism lies in his belief that the ills of existence can be corrected through reason. Hegel still remains within this logic and pushes it to its furthest limits by thinking of progress in terms of the historical dialectic. Reality cannot escape the inevitability of reason: “*What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational.*”¹⁹⁵ This is why Nietzsche considers Socrates the “vortex and turning-point of so-called world history”¹⁹⁶ and considers Hegel’s philosophical system the “climax and terminus of the world-process,”¹⁹⁷ i.e., the conclusion of world history.

From Nietzsche’s perspective, Hegel’s philosophy is a danger to everything living because it pronounces itself to comprehend all of existence in an all-inclusive system of reality. Thus, it allows for nothing further to arise. It is especially dangerous because it inverts the belief of being an epigone of the past ages into the belief that one is the crown and blossom of the entire world historical process simply because one comes last. The historian believes that he has come last and is, therefore, in a position to pass judgment on the entire past. And yet, he has a presentiment that he must die (*memento mori*) regardless of all that he knows: this is the grounds for the conversion of Socratic optimism into its opposite, pessimism (and cynicism). “Austere and profoundly serious reflection on the worthlessness of all that has occurred, on the ripeness of the world for judgment, is dissipated into the sceptical attitude that it is at any rate as well to know about all that has occurred, since it is

¹⁹⁵ *Philosophy of Right*, 10.

¹⁹⁶ *KGW III/1*: 96. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 74.

¹⁹⁷ *KGW III/1*: 304. *Untimely Meditations*, 104.

too late to do anything better.”¹⁹⁸ Such an attitude ultimately derives from Christianity, which exalts the end of one’s life as most important. However, as Nietzsche notes, any religion like this one is “inimical to all new planting, bold experimentation, free aspiration,” and it inculcates the belief that no matter what one does anything new is a latecomer, an epigone.¹⁹⁹ One needs to propose the alternative motto *memento vivere* to combat the negative outlook of Christianity (and modern science).

For Nietzsche, and this is a point that he will make at length later in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, the scientific drive is the descendent of the asceticism of the priest. The study of history (and, especially, the philosophy of history) remains a disguised theology. German idealism’s connections to Christianity are well known, and Nietzsche was one of the more astute to recognize this later in the 19th century: “You need only say ‘Tübingen seminary’ to understand just *what* German philosophy really is—an underhanded theology . . .”²⁰⁰ Thus, Nietzsche’s attack on Hegel in this section (and §9) is simultaneously an attack on Christianity’s understanding of the meaning of history: both give rise to the complacency of coming last and the desire to judge all that came before. Christianity’s reverence for the past and its emphasis on the end or goal gives rise to the teleological view of history, wherein the end redeems all becoming. Hegelian philosophy of history is built on this dialectical view of time and puts its faith in the “success” of the factual.

Rather than remaining content with what has happened and with oneself as the final outcome of the past, one should use the knowledge that one is an epigone to prepare for an

¹⁹⁸ *KGW* III/1: 301. *Untimely Meditations*, 102. This is the foundation for Nietzsche’s accusation that Christianity (and its values) is nihilistic. See Chapters 4 and 5 for a discussion of this point.

¹⁹⁹ *KGW* III/1: 300. *Untimely Meditations*, 102.

²⁰⁰ *KGW* VI/3: 174. *The Antichrist*, 9.

even greater future.²⁰¹ But the inversion of the belief that one is an epigone accomplished in Hegelian philosophy results in a form of idolatry—the necessity of the actual. “If every success is a rational necessity, if every event is a victory of the logical or the ‘idea’—then down on your knees quickly and do reverence to the whole stepladder of ‘success’!”²⁰² Such a belief is dangerous to every future plan because it makes one feel as though the necessary progression of history, the Spirit’s “cunning of reason,” exempts one from acting. History will progress, the actual will be made rational out of necessity, no matter what one may do—so think the epigones swindled by the Hegelian philosophy. This is certainly what David Strauss unwittingly promoted in the book Nietzsche attacked in the first *Untimely Meditation*, and this belief is hard to purge for the same reason that one is never quite cured of “Hegelianism and Schleiermacherism” once they have been contracted.

As Nietzsche says, this sense of the inevitability of things and the glorification of the actual is proper to the feeling of cynicism. All action, all striving is futile, for the historical process will work everything out for the best:

What does the historically cultivated man, the modern fanatic of the process swimming and drowning in the stream of becoming, have left to do if he is one day to harvest that disgust we have spoken of, the most exquisite grape of the vineyard?—He has to do nothing but go on living as he has lived hitherto, go on loving what he has loved hitherto, go on hating what he has hated hitherto, and go on reading the newspapers he has read

²⁰¹ This is something that Nietzsche insists on in §335 (“Long live physics!”) of *The Gay Science*: “Let us . . . limit ourselves to the purification of our opinions and value judgments and to the *creation of tables of what is good that are new and all our own*: let us stop brooding over the ‘moral value of our actions’! Yes, my friends, it is time to feel nauseous about some people’s moral chatter about others. Sitting in moral judgment should offend our taste. Let us leave such chatter and such bad taste to those who have nothing to do but drag the past a few steps further through time and who never live in the present—that is, to the many, the great majority!” *KGW V/2*: 243. *The Gay Science*, 189. Physics, the paradigmatic science of the 19th century, compels us to leave behind the morality of millennia and follow the virtue of intellectual honesty to its conclusion, which may result in new tables of values after the “death of God.”

²⁰² *KGW III/1*: 305. *Untimely Meditations*, 105.

hitherto; for him there is only one sin—to live differently from the way in which he has hitherto lived.²⁰³

It is not yet time, according to Eduard von Hartmann, to make history consciously—we have not yet evolved that far. Our assurance lies in the unconscious process of history, which guarantees the progress of the species as a whole. However, Nietzsche contends, the masses are not those who propel culture and history forward—it is, rather, great individuals who do so. Mathematical necessity—strength in numbers—does not govern the course of history; history is forged only by the great individuals, those who can do monumental history.²⁰⁴ History joins these great individuals “across the desert intervals of time,” and history ought to be written with this consideration always in mind.

The masses are simply fodder for the great and should not be accorded the honor of being considered great—this would be to confuse quality with quantity. The prolonged existence of something like Christianity, a religion taken up by the masses through the course of Western history, does not prove its greatness. The success of what is actual, to what currently prevails, to what is “timely” does not make that thing great; rather, what is great is what is “untimely,” it belongs to those who fight against being consumed by the masses. Thus, one is wrong to believe that “great men” are no more than the “clearest expression” of

²⁰³ *KGW* III/1: 311-312. *Untimely Meditations*, 110.

²⁰⁴ Friedrich Georg Jünger contends that the masses are mechanized through the event of technological organization and their progress is simply the progress of the means of ever-greater consumption. “The masses are in a variable movement of mechanical lawfulness. Historical and mechanical movement coincide in it and run with one another so that an ever more rigorous automatism develops. Formation of the masses and mechanical progress are identical events. The technical progress continues no longer than the formation of the masses itself; it ends wherever it [the masses] has an end. The limits of the formation of the masses and technical progress coincide exactly. To drive further this technology wherever there are no masses anymore makes no sense. Such a possibility can only occupy the one who still does not recognize that technology is nothing other than the organizing of the event of consumption, through which the masses are aimed at the minimal condition, that, thus, with the end of the event of consumption the technical apparatus and organization, which serves it, become superfluous. This realization is as exact as a mathematical equation.” *Nietzsche*, 162-163. Thus, it is an illusion that the masses are the moving force behind history.

the “great mass-drives.” The actual existence of the masses does not prove its success, for the “goal of humanity cannot lie in its end [the triumph of the actual, the masses] but only in its highest exemplars.”²⁰⁵ This is what is “untimely” about these great men: they are not the end goal of history—as the masses believe about themselves—but stand above the “process.” For them, the real is not the rational and the rational is not the real; in fact, the real is what is not rational and what is not rational is the real.

To describe history in terms of the movements of the masses does not make any sense to Nietzsche. The masses themselves lack all history; they have no destiny for the simple reason that their goal is to bring all suffering to an end. In the end, the masses want to descend to the level of the animal, which lives completely unhistorically. They want “to drop the burden of all forms, all historical purposes, in which the pain of life exists. It [the masses] grasps suffering as senseless and would like to live pain free. It expresses in it its yearning for death, which is a pure nothing for it, in that respect its yearning for all euphoric, anaesthetized, narcotic happy conditions.”²⁰⁶ Like the animal, which they envy (albeit in the wrong way), the masses want to live in stasis, knowing no pain and, therefore, undergoing no suffering or striving—they are, as Zarathustra will call the dwellers of the “Motley Cow,” quite literally the “last men.” Their goal is to end history by becoming animal again. As thoroughgoing nihilists, they want death, the ultimate end of pain. Thus, those who practice history in the way of the masses are like old men on the verge of death, like those in “second childishness, and mere oblivion, sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans every thing.”²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ *KGW III/1: 313. Untimely Meditations, 111.*

²⁰⁶ *Nietzsche, 167.*

²⁰⁷ *KGW III/1: 318. Untimely Meditations, 115.*

Conclusion (§10)

Opposed to the old age of man and its cynicism, Nietzsche places his hopes in the youth, the future. He believes that the excess of the historical sense destroys youth because it forces young men to go through the gauntlet of history in order to prepare them for a job in the factory of science. It would be better to be rid of this kind of man, who simply return from the infinite horizon of history and wither and dry up into a shriveled husk of a man. “The world would certainly be more redeemed if it were redeemed from these men and greybeards. For then there would come the empire of youth.”²⁰⁸ If redemption will come from this historical education and the pseudo-culture that it supports, it will only come from those whose instincts have not yet been corrupted. These are, of course, the youth. Nietzsche looks toward them for guidance, for he recognizes that his own treatise reveals its “modern character” since Nietzsche himself is a product of his philological-historical education. He can only trust in their guidance, when it compels him “*to protest at the historical education of modern man*” and when he demands “that man should above all learn to live and should employ history only in *the service of the life he has learned to live.*”²⁰⁹ The arrival of the future forces Nietzsche to make a decision: either wisdom will be in the service of life or life will be subordinated to wisdom. There is no possibility of overcoming the antithesis in a higher synthesis.

Nietzsche admits that he can only prepare the grounds for the future, for he is still able to recognize that historical education (and culture) is anti-natural. It is unnatural for young men to be “crammed with a tremendous number of ideas derived from a highly

²⁰⁸ KGW III/1: 320. *Untimely Meditations*, 116.

²⁰⁹ KGW III/1: 321. *Untimely Meditations*, 116.

indirect knowledge of past ages and peoples,” to condense two thousand years of history into the course of two years. Life suffers because it is put in service of science, of this mass cataloguing of data. At the same time, culture contracts into a kind of knowledge about culture. Nietzsche plans on uprooting the German “culture” through the destruction of its foundational lie: the idea that German culture can arise only through historical education. Most Germans, those whom Nietzsche points out in his “Preface,” believe in the *aeterna veritas* of the educational system as the ground for their superior culture. There needs to be a *necessary truth* to combat this lie before any change can ever be made—the truth that the Germans have no culture in the true sense of the term, but only a superabundant knowledge of culture.²¹⁰

The liberating quality of youth is its immediate connection with life through its instincts; education has not yet corrupted these young men of the next generation. They know that life deteriorates at the rate at which the unhistorical and suprahistorical are consumed by the historical drive. Man needs to be able to forget so that he can live, act, and create. But he also needs art and religion, suprahistorical forces, so that he will not become overwhelmed by the eternal wheel of becoming exposed by history.²¹¹ Science is currently hostile toward art and religion, for “it . . . lives in a profound antagonism towards the eternalizing powers of art and religion, for it hates forgetting, which is the death of knowledge, and seeks to abolish all limitations of horizon and launch mankind upon an

²¹⁰ The ideal would be the artistic drive of a culture with taste, like the Greeks, who knew what and what not to incorporate, i.e., what to remember and what to forget (and, therefore, had a healthy relation with history): “There are some things we now know too well, we knowing ones: oh, how we nowadays learn as artists to forget well, to be good at *not* knowing!” *KGW V/2*: 19. *The Gay Science*, 8.

²¹¹ Nietzsche recognizes the necessity of art and religion for the health of a culture. By the end of his productive career, in 1888, he begins to recognize in the eternal recurrence a new religious perspective. For a discussion of this, see Chapter 5.

infinite and unbounded sea of light whose light is knowledge of all becoming.”²¹² However, no one is able to bear the kind of burden that is demanded by historical science—i.e., one must have an unblinking eye. History as a science attempts to undermine its own foundation in life, but once that is gone, so too is science! Opposed to this, Nietzsche insists that history must become an art (an art of interpretation) in order to have any future whatsoever, because it is only as an art that history will “perhaps be able to preserve instincts or even evoke them.”²¹³ Works of art provide a grounding in the present through a mythical (or illusory) past—such a grounding in the unknown, the unhistorical, is necessary for the possibility of future life (otherwise nothing will be forgotten and, thus, there will be no action/striving). The transformation of history from a pure science into an art form is inevitable because the self-overcoming of history is already contained within its own principles.²¹⁴ History as a science will destroy itself and will make way for a future generation in Germany guided by instincts rather than historical facts.

Nietzsche’s “History” essay, then, forms one of the first, and most powerful, critiques of modern science. The ideal of objectivity goes back to Descartes’s attempt to find an Archimedean point beyond the world—he tries to find an absolute perspective. Of course, this ideal is not the main target of his criticism. The indubitable foundation for modern science, with the “subjective turn” in philosophy, rests in the identification of thought with existence. To think requires that the thinker must also exist—Descartes cannot doubt the

²¹² *KGW* III/1: 326. *Untimely Meditations*, 120.

²¹³ *KGW* III/1: 295. *Untimely Meditations*, 95-96.

²¹⁴ “The origin of historical culture—its quite radical conflict with the spirit of any ‘new age,’ any ‘modern awareness’—this origin *must* itself be known historically, history *must* itself resolve the problem of history, knowledge *must* turn its sting against itself—this threefold *must* is the imperative of the ‘new age,’ supposing this age really does contain anything new, powerful, original and promising more life.” *KGW* III/1: 302. *Untimely Meditations*, 102-103. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

immediacy of this truth in the Second Meditation. But Nietzsche points out that this assumption of modern science is dangerous:

Fragmented and in pieces, dissociated almost mechanically into an inner and an outer, sown with concepts as with dragon's teeth, bringing forth conceptual dragons, suffering from the malady of words and mistrusting any feeling of our own which has not yet been stamped with words: being such an unliving and yet uncannily active concept- and word-factory, perhaps I still have the right to say of myself *cogito, ergo sum*, but not *vivo, ergo cogito*. Empty "being" is granted me, but not full and green "life"; the feeling that tells me I exist warrants to me only that I am a thinking creature, not that I am a living one, not that I am an *animal* but at most a *cogital*.²¹⁵

It is not mistaken that Nietzsche references Descartes's most famous phrase at the end of this essay—Hegel is the culmination of modern, Cartesian science. Life must be the foundation for thought of any kind; the reversal of this natural relation results in a ghostlike condition of living death. Wherever thought dominates over life, life is on the decline because it has been made subservient. If this is the case, as it is in present day Germany, the value of science is very little because it undermines life (its own precondition).

The "problem of science," which Nietzsche says was his original problem in *The Birth of Tragedy*, is that science eventually coils up and bites its own tail, like a serpent. Science strives for a closed system that encompasses all of reality—it reaches out toward infinity when it tries to comprehend the whole. However, in this untiring search for knowledge of any and every kind, science ultimately reaches an end and turns against itself. This is what happened after Hegel brought two thousand years of science to a close when he grasped everything through history. Hegel's philosophy represents a "crisis" [Wendung], for when science finally satisfies its voracious hunger for knowledge, it finds that the life, which has supported it, has withered away. Nietzsche will later call such a condition nihilism.

²¹⁵ *KGW* III/1: 325. *Untimely Meditations*, 119. Nietzsche's emphasis.

Thus, in order to avoid this dangerous condition, he proposes that science should be at the service of life and a “*hygiene of life*” should accompany science. One of the rules of this hygiene would read: “the unhistorical and the suprahistorical are the natural antidotes to the stifling of life by the historical, by the malady of history.”²¹⁶ The work as a whole is also another one of the rules of the hygiene of life; it is supposed to work as an antidote to the consuming desire for knowledge for its own sake. The reader has undergone a change, has been given orientation in the chaos of the past, while reading through the “advantages” and “disadvantages.” There has been movement from the past to the future.

The task of the youth is “*to organize the chaos*” with which they are presented in the malady of history. Through their efforts in this organization, the youth will lose much knowledge but gain a unity of life, thought, appearance, and will. They will become human once more (with a unified inner and outer) and not merely an aggregate of human like qualities. Culture will then be viewed not merely as an outward decoration but rather as a creative, artistic force.

Conclusion

From beginning until end, Nietzsche’s second *Untimely Meditation* is a challenge to the Alexandrian, scientific culture of his day. Within his discussion of the “advantages” and “disadvantages” of history for life, Nietzsche forces his readers to come to a decision: either knowledge (history) will serve life or life will be subordinated (and destroyed) to knowledge. The resulting decision ought to lead one to the break with Hegelian dialectics—to view time,

²¹⁶ *KGW* III/1: 327. *Untimely Meditations*, 121.

and man's relation to time, outside of the realm of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Nietzsche himself breaks out of a crude form of Hegelian thinking with this work. It also signals Nietzsche's decisive break with Christianity: Hegelian philosophy is the scientific (and more rigorous) form of Christianity, from which Hegel took his understanding of time. His quotation of Goethe, which forms his *ceterum censeo*, at the very beginning of the work should indicate to his readers on which side his allegiance lies: life and becoming. Christianity and in Hegel's absolute idealism life is threatened by the drive for knowledge. This is the basis for Nietzsche's claim that morality killed God.

For Nietzsche, Hegel's philosophy remains an "underhanded theology" because he understands it as Christian metaphysics. He is the most radical Protestant, which means he goes further than anyone else to the roots of Christianity—dialectics. Overall, Nietzsche's attack on Hegel is an attack on the dialectical understanding of time that belongs to Christianity. The Christian view of time is linear and teleological: original sin (man falls into history) → Incarnation of the Savior → Redemption of sin. The immanent teleology in Hegel's philosophy of history redeems all becoming, which is viewed as a sign of guilt. According to Nietzsche, both Christianity and Hegel focus on the goal (redemption) and not on all the other aspects of life. The goal redeems all becoming and that is the only way to understand becoming. After he is cured of his cultural "Hegelism," Nietzsche attempts to speak of becoming outside of the realm of dialectics (i.e., metaphysics) and speak of the "innocence of becoming" in the thought of the eternal recurrence.

The second *Untimely Meditation* is the proper starting place to understand Nietzsche's philosophy as a whole. It is here that he strikes out on his own for the first time

against the entire Western tradition of metaphysics. Dialectics is shattered through Nietzsche's ultimatum: knowledge will be subordinated to the needs of life. He forces his readers to make a decision *against* Hegel (and Christianity). It is unnatural for life to be consumed by the past, for man to be a cataloguer and organizer of knowledge about the past. Cultural Hegelianism and even Hegel himself, who demanded that history be made into a systematic science, think that the only approach to history is through science. This is why the "historical malady," as Nietzsche describes it, ultimately derives from the push toward antiquarian and critical history among German scholars. Nietzsche wants his readers to see that there is an approach to history that lies outside of the demand for history to be a science—history can be a lived experience (an art that gives unity to one's life). For Nietzsche, metaphysics in the highest form of Hegelian dialectic undermines its own foundations and results in the condition of nihilism. Like a snake, logic (the science of science!) bites its own tail when pushed to the most extreme limits. At this point one must make a decision between science and life—the only natural choice is that of life. The question is then: What happens to science in Nietzsche's reorganization of Hegelian thought in regard to history? This is the question that will be answered in the following chapter.

The importance of the "History" essay in Nietzsche's thought cannot be underrated, and this is especially true when it comes to the thought of the eternal return. His turn against science and the scientific culture of his day, which began in *The Birth of Tragedy*, underlines his basic position that science has become routine and is governed by the rule of methodology.²¹⁷ As it is currently practiced, the life of science is divorced from the life of

²¹⁷ This is best captured in Heidegger's provocative phrase from *What is Called Thinking?*, "Science does not think." Science, as governed by methodology, does not require thought about its own foundations; science has

action: one man inhabits two spheres, the life in his laboratory (the life of theory) and that of his everyday, petty existence. Nietzsche's problem with the condition of science in his day is that theory does not come in contact with the way in which one leads one's life. Modern science no longer makes any demands on its practitioners in the way that the theoretical life of the ancient world made specific and difficult demands—one only needs to think of Socrates's insistence on leading the "examined life" even if it leads to one's death. (As I noted in the previous chapter, Nietzsche maintains a lifelong relation to Socrates that is ambiguous; one thing is certain—his complete ire is reserved for "Socratism," the unquestioned belief in the superiority of the method of science, as distinguished from Socrates's willingness to question radically.) As a scientific theory about the nature of history, the eternal recurrence places absolute demands on those who think it. It is not the dry, "grey" historical science of his day (that of Hegel), which offers clear and immediate answers; the eternal recurrence only poses questions marks—namely, and most importantly, the question about how one's life will be lived under its shadow.

become calculative and mathematical. It has ceased to be (or, more likely still, never was) radically questioning. It is for this reason that science cannot question its own foundations, whereas from the perspective of life (or art) science can be questioned: "Since science cannot subject itself to critique—that is, as the problem of science cannot be posed on the ground of science—Nietzsche proposes the perspective of the healing power of art." From Babette Babich's article "Nietzsche's Critique of Scientific Reason and Scientific Culture: On 'Science as a Problem' and Nature as Chaos," in *Nietzsche and Science*, eds. Gregory Moore and Thomas H. Brobjer (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 151. See also Babich's article, "'The Problem of Science' in Nietzsche and Heidegger," *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 63 (2007): 205-237.

Chapter 3: The “Scientific Stage” of Nietzsche’s Philosophy

In this chapter I will discuss Nietzsche’s conception of science after the second *Untimely Meditation*, “On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life.” The traditional understanding of science derives from Socrates and is necessarily tied to his distinction between the apparent and transcendent worlds: the Good (or God) is the final goal of scientific knowledge. Also, in the Socratic conception, the “theoretical life” is the best kind of life, the life devoted to science. This ultimately leads to the situation described in the “History” essay in which science destroys life and, thereby, undermines its own foundation. Nietzsche, on the other hand, sees the need for science to serve life; but this fundamentally alters the nature of science. Science and life indeed coincide for him—life becomes the ground for testing hypotheses, science is concerned with the affirmation of life. Without God (Truth), i.e., without the ultimate goal of theoretical knowledge, science is freed from its tether and is transformed into a matter of ever-new discovery of “truths.” It is within the context of his changing relation toward science where he is most explicit about the thought of the eternal recurrence. His excitement over his discovery of this thought is palpable in the letters he sent to friends and other correspondents. The question is: Why does Nietzsche place so much emphasis on the “eternal recurrence” in connection to his thoughts on the new nature of science?

Introduction

After his departure from the University of Basel in 1879, Nietzsche assumed more of the persona that the world is familiar with today—i.e., the Romantic vision of Nietzsche as

the poor and yet brilliant writer who lived alone in the Engadine. His abandonment of the university, which most believe to derive from health issues, signifies much more than that. He leaves because of his dissatisfaction with the tradition of Western education—he sees that it no longer forms the individual but rather focuses on “scientific” specialization. One is now transformed into a future worker in the insatiable “factory of science.” For this reason, Nietzsche leaves the university never to return. He lives out the rest of his days of sanity traveling from Alpine hostel to hostel with no citizenship, and occasionally would make visits to friends in Germany and Italy. It was also during the last decade of his intellectual life that Nietzsche was most prolific in his writing and correspondence.

With this drastic change in his life, there also seems to be a transformation in his philosophical interests. Most scholars view it in the following light: after spending a great deal of time on cultural criticism in the *Untimely Meditations*, the works that immediately follow show concern for the state of science. In fact, the opening section of *Human, All Too Human* (1878-1879) is entitled “Chemistry of concepts and sensations.” Thus, there seems to be a switch of focus from art to science after Nietzsche leaves the university permanently (which means he also abandons Hegel and, therewith, Wagner). Along with *Human, All Too Human*, a work concerned with overcoming idealism, and *Daybreak [Morgenröthe]* (1881), the work in which morality overcomes itself, Nietzsche wrote *The Gay Science [Die fröhliche Wissenschaft]* (1882), the work that is a turning point in his career. It is in this last work that science undergoes a transformation in its very nature. Nietzsche says of the work, “In almost every sentence, profundity lovingly joins hands with headstrong passion

[Mutwillen].”²¹⁸ Can passion really be an important component of science after two thousand years of the scientific ideal of objectivity and theoretical activity? What change has occurred that now permits one to think of science in this way, as a passion?

Nietzsche and Science

Science remains a constant concern of Nietzsche’s throughout his entire intellectual career.²¹⁹ He makes this point clear in the “Attempt at Self-Criticism,” which serves as his new Preface to the second edition of *The Birth of Tragedy*:

I shall not suppress entirely just how unpleasant it [his first work] now seems to me, how alien it seems, standing there before me sixteen years later—before eyes which are older and a hundred times more spoiled, but by no means colder, nor grown any more a stranger to the task which this reckless book first dared to approach: *to look at science through the prism [Optik] of the artist, but also to look at art through the prism of life.*²²⁰

In 1886, Nietzsche’s task has not changed—the criticism of science from the perspective of life. Therefore, it is wrong to think that he had a “scientific” stage because every “stage” was somehow concerned with the state of science. In the “History” essay, one can see Nietzsche’s concern for science in that he demands a “*hygiene of life*” that needs to be close to science at all times to ensure that science does not undermine its own foundation (i.e., life). He forces his readers to make a choice: either science will serve life or life will serve science. By the end of the essay, he has shown how history destroys life when it is turned into a science. However, this is not only true of the burgeoning historical sciences—it is true of all science because the understanding of science ultimately derives from Socrates. The

²¹⁸ KGW VI/3: 331.

²¹⁹ The fact that Nietzsche devotes a great deal of time to the critique of science in *Beyond Good and Evil* and, especially, the third essay of *On the Genealogy of Morality* supports this. For a discussion of his later critique of science see Chapter 4 below.

²²⁰ KGW III/1: 8. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 5.

choice is clear—one must choose life over science for the reason that science presupposes life.

If this is the case, then the nature of science will change fundamentally. As it was originally conceived by Socrates, the theoretical life (i.e., the life subordinated to science) was an end in itself; thus, science came to be seen as an end in itself. Scientific knowledge is the aim of philosophers from Socrates all the way to Hegel—it operates under the delusion that “thought, as it follows the thread of causality, reaches down into the deepest abysses of being, and that it is capable, not simply of understanding existence, but even of *correcting* it.”²²¹ One can comprehend the totality of existence through systematic knowledge, thus closing the gap between life and science (but subordinating life *to* science). As I mentioned in the previous chapter, for Nietzsche, Hegel’s *Science of Logic* is the culmination of 2500 years of the scientific tradition, for it tries to comprehend all of existence by casting the net of history to capture past, present, and future in its system. If Nietzsche demands a change in the conception of science, then its current configuration of science and life will change. The key to determining how it will change, I believe, lies in his conception of “gay science.” It therefore also involves the “eternal recurrence”—the central teaching of *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

The purpose of this chapter will be to determine why Nietzsche places so much importance on the eternal recurrence and how it is involved in his transformation of the nature of science. To answer these questions requires detailed interpretation of several passages from *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1884). Reference to

²²¹ *KGW* III/1: 95. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 73.

other works of this period is also necessary for proper understanding of the importance of the teaching of the eternal recurrence. Due to the difficulty of interpreting *Zarathustra*, I will treat *The Gay Science* as a gateway to the more difficult work. Even though Nietzsche elsewhere insists that the eternal recurrence is Zarathustra's teaching, it is first mentioned in §341 of Book IV of *The Gay Science*. The next section (§342) serves as the introduction to *Zarathustra*—thus, these two works belong together in Nietzsche's mind. It is for this reason that I consider *Zarathustra* a “scientific” work, with a “scientific” teaching—the eternal recurrence.

The “Gay Science”

Although Nietzsche was declared, in the words of an older colleague, “dead to science” after his first publication, his interest in science never abated. Even while discussing cultural issues in *The Birth of Tragedy* and the *Untimely Meditations* he was criticizing contemporary science from the perspective of art and life. The “problem of science,” as it was slowly becoming clear to Nietzsche, was that science gradually erodes its own foundation in life. As Nietzsche would later say, the scientific drive is nihilistic (it is self-destructive). The “History” essay proposes the solution of subordinating science to life—this is Nietzsche's escape from dialectical (i.e., scientific) thinking, a way of thinking that he believes Socrates introduced to the Western intellectual tradition and that has persisted until its perfection in Hegel's system. In the works immediately following this “transitional” essay, science as a problem becomes more intense because Nietzsche sees that it is impossible to get rid of science completely—it exists as an ineradicable drive of the

human being—but science in the Socratic conception remains self-destructive. The question is: How can science be redirected so that it does not undermine its own foundation and, hence, destroy itself?²²²

One of the first attempts to solve this problem can be found in *Human, All Too Human* in a section titled “Future of Science” (§251). Here, Nietzsche predicts a time when science will no longer afford any pleasure whatsoever because of the banality of its results. The desire for intellectual satisfaction is no longer being fulfilled by the results of science, which become ever more commonplace. If this is the case, then science will eventually become impoverished and will lead to a new barbarism prompted by the neglect of science. For Nietzsche, it is to science that “mankind owes almost all its humanity,”²²³ and without it we would be like a herd animal. Far from rejecting outright the contributions of Alexandrian, scientific culture, Nietzsche would be among the first to note how decisive Socrates (and the other philosophers) has been for the formation of the human being. For the sake of culture, he thinks that science must be preserved because it encourages a spirit of rigor, which gives depth to the human being.

He proposes a segregation of the “perceptions of science” from those of “non-science” in order to ensure the health of the human being. Just as humans have a heart with two ventricles, we need to think of having a brain with two ventricles. They lie parallel to

²²² To say this another way: How can science be transformed into art? The possibility for such a transformation goes back to Socrates, ironically, for Nietzsche notes that morality/science itself is a “non-Dionysian art.” Babette Babich takes note of the possibility of such a transformation: “For Nietzsche, as for the rest of us, the method at work—stipulation, mechanism, and above all delimitation, that is, the working practice of method *as such*—is the key to the modern scientific age. The same methodification is also the means whereby science becomes arts, but to say this is also to say that science departs from theory alone, from its metaphysical heaven or perfection, to become practicable and livable, viable, as such.” *Words in Blood, Like Flowers*, 61.

²²³ *KGW IV/2*: 213. *Human, All Too Human*, 119.

one another but do not intersect—science needs to be separated from life for the time being.

“In one domain lies the power-source, in the other the regulator: it must be heated with illusions, oneness, *passions*, the evil and perilous consequences of overheating must be obviated with the aid of the knowledge furnished by science.”²²⁴ Life and science need only interact when illusion starts to gain too much ground. As he says, science is a regulator of the drives and passions that give rise to science in the first place. Higher culture requires a rigorous science in order to focus energy on the development of individuals—we need to abandon science in the sense of results, for such a science is based on the pleasure that can be derived from knowledge.

According to Nietzsche, pleasure in science is, on the whole, steadily decreasing because of the banality of its results. The moment we stop taking an interest in science is the beginning of the end of higher culture and the future of science can easily be foretold: “Interest in truth will cease the less pleasure it gives: because they are associated with pleasure, illusion, error and fantasy will regain step by step the ground they formerly held: the ruination of science, a sinking back into barbarism, will be the immediate consequence.”²²⁵ The spirit of rigor in science is the key to maintaining higher culture, according to Nietzsche. In a section titled “Science furthers ability, not knowledge” (§256), he notes that the value of pursuing a rigorous science for a time is that “there will eventuate an increase in energy, in reasoning capacity, in toughness and endurance; one will have learned how *to achieve an objective by the appropriate means*.”²²⁶ Science is valuable only

²²⁴ *KGW IV/2*: 213. *Human, All Too Human*, 119. Emphasis added.

²²⁵ *KGW IV/2*: 213. *Human, All Too Human*, 119.

²²⁶ *KGW IV/2*: 216. *Human, All Too Human*, 121. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

insofar as it teaches self-discipline, which is a prerequisite for higher culture. And this is the value of schooling also, it teaches rigorous thinking (“Reason in school” §265). It is no mistake that Nietzsche’s longest discussion of science in *Human, All Too Human* occurs in the chapter “Tokens of Higher and Lower Culture.”

Nietzsche’s immediate solution to the “problem of science,” which he identified and discussed at length in the “History” essay, is to keep science isolated from life out of fear that the drives of life will overpower rigorous and careful thinking, leading to a new barbarism. However, as he notes in *Daybreak*, there is a constant danger that science will overstep its boundaries and overwhelm the practical life—the danger he identified in the earlier essay. Men of the *vita contemplativa* have always threatened the health and stability of men of the *vita activa* through their meddling. This is especially true of the most common member among those who lead the contemplative life—the religious. “The so-called *religious* natures, whose numbers preponderate among the contemplative and who consequently constitute their commonest species, have at all times had the effect of making life hard for practical men and, where possible, intolerable to them.”²²⁷ The other contemplative natures—the artists, the philosophers, and the “thinkers and workers in science”—have been no less annoying than the religious natures. But the scientists have often been subject to the mockery of the common man so that they have sometimes alleviated the plight of those whom they supposedly serve. Whatever the case, there is a disjoint between the results of science, which often cause discomfort at first, and everyday life. Separation of these two spheres, the contemplative (science) and the practical (life), is the solution that Nietzsche

²²⁷ *KGW* V/1: 44. *Daybreak*, 28.

arrives at after his demand that life be chosen over science in the “History” essay. Science remains as a “regulator” of life and is, therefore, subordinated to life—but yet, the danger of science consuming life remains ever-present in this configuration.

Nietzsche’s task during this “second” stage, as Löwith and others after him have called it, is to find a reconfiguration of science and life so that there is no longer the danger of one overwhelming the other. This reconfiguration takes place in *The Gay Science*, wherein Nietzsche proposes the coincidence of science and life.²²⁸ This is what he calls the “gay science”—the joining of profundity and great passion, or wisdom and laughter in §1 “The teachers of the purpose of existence.” His new conception of science and life is made possible by the death of the old science through the murder of its highest object, God (§108 “New battles” and §125 “The madman”). Without a goal, science falters and begins to undermine its own foundation. The purpose of science needs to be reconsidered as a means to ever-new discoveries (“truths”) and, thus, the affirmation of life. Life becomes a grand experiment and those who dare to set out on this adventure are like Columbus. According to Nietzsche, the highest scientific experiment is the “eternal recurrence,” for it is the test of whether or not one would affirm life unconditionally. Only in the affirmation of the recurrence is the distinction between life and science overcome—as an open hypothesis it transforms the very nature of existence. It is for this reason that the first edition of *The Gay*

²²⁸ Nietzsche foreshadows this new configuration in a section from *Human, All Too Human*, wherein he claims that science would have no appeal whatsoever unless it were capable of fulfilling some immediate need of life: “If science were not united with the *joy* [Lust] of knowledge and the *utility* of what is known, what interest would we have in science? If a little faith, hope and charity did not lead our soul towards knowledge, what else would draw us to science? [. . .] If we had not remained to some extent *unscientific* men what meaning could science possibly have for us? Taken as a whole and expressed without qualification: *to a purely cognitive being knowledge would be a matter of indifference.*” *KGW IV/3*: 53-54. *Human, All Too Human*, 235. Nietzsche’s emphasis. *The Gay Science* simply elaborates on this fundamental insight, drawing conclusions that are spelled out in greater detail.

Science concludes with the first formulation of the doctrine and the introduction of its teacher, Zarathustra (§341 “The heaviest weight” and §342 “*Incipit tragoedia*”).

At the beginning of the work, Nietzsche surmises that the single consistent drive within the human species is that of the preservation of humanity. It would be all too easy to divide human beings into “good” and “evil,” “useful” and “harmful” because it is impossible to know whether those who are labeled “evil” and “harmful” are not also necessary for the sake of the preservation of the species. Whatever the case might be, one cannot tell if the “harmful” might not be at the same time the “useful.” Everyone then is a eulogist and mocker of the “promoter and benefactor of humanity” because everyone is both useful and harmful. Nevertheless, people are too insipid to realize their wretchedness even if someone were to mock one of them to their faces. Truthfulness is what has been lacking so far—something that Nietzsche affirms about philosophy in the second Preface, but which is just as true for human beings as “knowers.”²²⁹ As Nietzsche will point out later in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, human beings do not know themselves because they do not know the truth. Their situation is far more uncertain than it has ever been before.

For Nietzsche, the truth is that man is wretched and nothing special, his existence does not mean all that much. To understand this truth would require that one “laugh at oneself as one would have to laugh in order to laugh *from the whole truth*.”²³⁰ The utter seriousness [Ernst] with which human existence is treated derives from the teachers of the meaning of existence, who, from time to time, appear to forge the instinct of the preservation of the species into a reason for existence, a purpose. As it stands now, however, tragedy

²²⁹ “What was at stake in all philosophizing hitherto was not at all ‘truth’ but rather something else—let us say health, future, growth, power, life . . .” *KGW* V/2: 17. *The Gay Science*, 6.

²³⁰ *KGW* V/2: 27. *The Gay Science*, 27. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

takes center stage—comedy, laughter, lies on the periphery because human existence is something that is taken seriously. Human beings have been taught not to laugh at themselves—people believe that the individual has a purpose outside of the preservation of the species and is, therefore, nothing to laugh about. Every so often these teachers of the meaning of existence appear to fulfill man’s artificial need to have “faith in the *reason in life*.” And every time they appear, they are soon afterwards “vanquished by laughter, reason and nature.”²³¹ Thus, tragedy and comedy are complementary necessities of the human being.

Only once humans can laugh at themselves does hope remain for science, which has been allied with morality and religion (i.e., seriousness about existence).²³² “At present, the comedy of existence has not yet ‘become conscious’ of itself; at present, we still live in the age of tragedy, in the age of moralities and religions.” Man’s liberation from morality and religion will come once he realizes that the species is everything and the individual is nothing—his tension will be relaxed and he will not take himself so seriously. Laughter will then have formed an alliance with science: “perhaps only ‘gay science’ will remain.”²³³ However, the steadily loosening grip of morality and religion foretells a time when the human being will soon no longer be “something one is absolutely forbidden to laugh at.” All of existence will be revealed as a farce—including the human being, who has been considered taboo for much of Western history. As a philosopher, Nietzsche too will have his time, he will have his “gay science”—the science in which passion is the driving force of

²³¹ *KGW V/2: 46. The Gay Science, 29.*

²³² This might be why Nietzsche begins the Preface of *Beyond Good and Evil* with a mockery of the “grotesque seriousness” with which philosophers have approached truth—and failed to court her. See Chapter 4 below.

²³³ *KGW V/2: 44. The Gay Science, 28.*

scientific inquiry. Science in the traditional sense will fade away once its foundation in religion and morality are destroyed.

This short reflection of §1 of the work points toward the structure of *The Gay Science* as a whole. Nietzsche opens the work with an exhortation to “corrective laughter” but the first edition of 1882 ends with §342 at the end of Book IV, a section titled “*Incipit tragoedia*” [“The tragedy begins”]. What does this mean? Comedy and tragedy are joined in “gay science.” From one perspective, an event like the “death of God” is tragic; from another, it is comic. Science is now a matter of varying perspectives within the whole since there is no absolute standard anymore. This new nature of science is brought into sharpest focus upon careful reflection on this most important event in history, an event that only one or two people have realized along with Nietzsche. The announcement of God’s death is the central passage of *The Gay Science* and the implications this event has for the nature of science is the most important theme of the work. The implications for science are discussed at length in Book IV “St. Januarius.” Nietzsche’s first response to this event is the teaching of the “eternal recurrence” in §341, which is the actual conclusion of the work and what I will discuss at length in the next section.

The passage in which God’s death is proclaimed is titled “The madman” (§125) and lies near the beginning of Book III. Nietzsche tells the story of the madman, who lit a lantern in the early morning and ran around the marketplace looking for God. His search is futile—everyone in the marketplace stands around watching the madman with amusement. After failing to find God, the madman gives a long speech about how God is dead, saying “*We*

have killed him—you and I!” The rest of the speech consists of a long lament and a series of challenges that the madman poses to the crowd.

It is necessary to discuss briefly the style in which the madman’s message of God’s death is presented. §125 is essentially a story within a story—there is a narrator (Nietzsche?) who is telling the story of a madman, who has his own story to tell. Ultimately, the message of the madman remains at an unbridgeable distance from both the audience in the marketplace and the readers of the passage. This is why the madman throws his lantern on the ground and says, “I come too early . . .” It is also why Nietzsche will say later, at the beginning of Book V (published with the second edition of *The Gay Science* in 1887): “For many people’s power of comprehension, the event [God’s death] is itself far too great, distant, and out of the way even for its tidings to be thought of as having arrived yet.”²³⁴ God’s death is held at a distance from most people—except, of course, those few exceptions (like Nietzsche himself). In order to try and approach the madman’s message, I will ask what seem to be the most obvious questions a reader might have after first reading the passage. Answers to these questions will provide an interpretation to this dense and rather cryptic passage.

The first question that arises after reading the passage is: Why is “the madman” [Der tolle Mensch] the one who announces the “death of God”? The equation of God and truth in the Christian conception makes God the absolute standard of all rationality. If God is dead, then that means that the distinction between “rational” (sane) and “irrational” (insane) is abolished. Could not the “madman” not also be the “great man” now, for it is only the mad

²³⁴ *KGW* V/2: 255. *The Gay Science*, 199.

who recognize what has actually occurred? Everyone else stands idly around. In fact, Nietzsche believes that it must be a madman who announces the “death of God.” New ideas and conceptions are always attended by a dreadful companion, madness. These shifts in the way of thinking, though rare, are out of step with the usual and the everyday. Madness is the necessary attendant of the new idea: “All superior men who were irresistibly drawn to throw off the yoke of any kind of morality and to frame new laws had, *if they were not actually mad*, no alternative but to make themselves or pretend to be mad—and this indeed applies to innovators in every domain and not only in the domain of priestly and political dogma.”²³⁵ It cannot be anyone other than the madman who announces the “death of God,” for this is an event the magnitude of which has not been fully comprehended. In fact, everyone born after this event belongs “to a higher history than all history up to now.”²³⁶ The idea of God’s death must be accompanied by madness because of its earth-shattering importance.

The second question that arises is: Who is the “madman”? From what one can tell from the passage, the madman is running around the marketplace looking for God and carrying a lantern in the early morning. It is the dawn of a new day—the dawn of a world without morality because God is dead. This entire opening scene recalls the story of Diogenes the Cynic (404-323 B.C.) in the *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*.²³⁷ Diogenes Laertius, the compiler of these lives, writes how Diogenes the Cynic went out in the middle of the day with a lantern looking for an honest (truthful) man in Athens. He did not find one,

²³⁵ *KGW* V/1: 23. *Daybreak*, 14. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

²³⁶ *KGW* V/2: 159. *The Gay Science*, 120.

²³⁷ I had written this interpretation of this section of *The Gay Science* before Charles Bambach’s essay on the cynicism in this passage was published. Much of what I say here is in agreement with Bambach’s position, but he goes into much greater detail than is permitted in the space of this chapter. I refer the reader to his excellent analysis in the essay “Nietzsche’s Madman Parable: A Cynical Reading” in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84/2 (2010): 441-456.

but the fact that he searched shows how he is himself a truthful man. Diogenes the Cynic was a man concerned with truth—in other words, a scientist. However, he is also considered “mad.” When asked about Diogenes, Plato is said to have responded: “He is a Socrates gone mad” (VI, 54). The madman is, therefore, the only one who thinks that searching for truth is worthwhile anymore even if it might happen that there is no truth (i.e., God). The “gay science” is more about the search than about the goal—it is science detached from a fixed goal, science infused with passion (i.e., science transformed into art). Without a set purpose or goal, the quest for knowledge is a temptation [Versuch] akin to that of Columbus, who dared to sail on open waters not knowing exactly where he would end up.

The madman is also the subject of ridicule of those idlers in the marketplace, who mock him openly for searching for what does not exist for them.²³⁸ After enduring their mockery, the madman reveals the truth: “‘Where is God?’ he cried; ‘I’ll tell you! *We have killed him*—you and I!” But how can something that is eternal be killed? Truth, the demand for truthfulness at all costs, kills God—in other words, science itself kills God. At one time, faith and reason were joined by St. Thomas Aquinas in the highest science, divine science; shortly afterward, though, faith and science were dislocated—science gained autonomy; science, as an independent pursuit, has reached a point where it calls into question the articles of Christian faith, especially the belief in God. Truth was identified with God; now, truth is identified with science, whose basis was in God. This has been forgotten by both the

²³⁸ It is interesting to compare the immediate reaction of the idlers in the marketplace to the message of the madman with that of a group of prisoners in another allegory in a section from *Human, All Too Human*: the prisoners do not laugh at the message of the supposed son of the prison warder, who told the prisoners that only if they believed in him would he save them; after the news of the death of the prison warder reaches the prisoners, the supposed son says, “I will set everyone who believes in me free, as surely as my father still lives”; again, the prisoners did not laugh at him, but only “shrugged their shoulders and left him standing.” *KGW IV/3: 228-229. Human, All Too Human, 331.*

scientific community and the faithful who say to themselves: “Science cannot be true, for it denies God. Consequently it does not come from God; consequently it is not true—for God is the truth.”²³⁹ Nietzsche writes this in a section of *Daybreak* titled “What is truth?”—a reference to John’s Gospel in which Pilate asks the same question of Jesus before he sentences him to death.²⁴⁰ The allusion is clear: science kills God and thus undermines its own foundation.

Now that human beings have liberated themselves from God, they have no metaphysical ground to support them: “No longer can the human being assume its role as the measure of all things since the very standard of measure has been undermined by the death of God.”²⁴¹ They may have retained the “moral teachings” of Christianity, which elevated the human being above everything else in the natural world, but it is impossible to hold onto these once you have eliminated belief in God.²⁴² Even after people stopped believing in God, they could not let go of His longest shadow: the belief that the human being was created in God’s image (a rational and scientific being) and is, therefore, above ridicule (see §1). This is the cause of the disconcerted silence of the bystanders—their incomprehension concerning the conclusions the madman draws from the “death of God.” There is then a sense of falling

²³⁹ *KGW* V/1: 82. *Daybreak*, 54.

²⁴⁰ Showing his disdain for Christianity, Nietzsche writes the following passage in *The Antichrist*: “Do I still need to say that in the whole of the New Testament there is only *one* honorable figure? Pilate, the Roman governor. To take Jewish affairs seriously—he could not convince himself to do this. One Jew more or less—what does it matter? . . . The noble scorn of a Roman when faced with an unashamed mangling of the word ‘truth’ gave the New Testament its only statement of *any value*,—its critique, even its *annihilation*: ‘What is truth!’” *KGW* VI/3: 223. *The Antichrist*, 45. Nietzsche’s emphasis. For his criticism of religion see Chapters 4 and 5.

²⁴¹ “Nietzsche’s Madman Parable,” 452.

²⁴² Nietzsche notes this in several places in his works: “One should notice that Christianity has . . . crossed over into a gentle *moralism*: it is not so much ‘God, freedom and immortality’ that have remained, as benevolence and decency of disposition, and the belief that in the whole universe too benevolence and decency of disposition will prevail: it is the *euthanasia* of Christianity.” *KGW* V/1: 81-82. *Daybreak*, 53-54. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

after all of the old boundaries have been smashed: “How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun?”²⁴³ There is no longer an up and a down with the ultimate reference point of God—human beings have fallen into a world of infinite becoming, and into history. It is also the case that we no longer have a coherent morality once the ultimate pillar has been removed.²⁴⁴ An insidious form of nihilism breaks out, which threatens to reduce everything to ashes. All that remains as a source of structure for the human being is the discipline of science, which, now that it has been freed from its tether, God, turns back upon itself in an unending circle. Science, therefore, needs to be embraced as “more than a means” to the salvation of the soul—the Christian estimation of science.²⁴⁵

There is something that is both comic and tragic in “The madman.” From the perspective of the crowd idling in the marketplace, the madman is a comic figure—in the same way that Diogenes the Cynic is depicted in the *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* as a rather ridiculous man. The scene as a whole is tragic, for the reason that the madman is the only person who realizes that God has ceased to be the “living God” of the Old Testament prophets. God no longer influences our practical decisions because *we* have severed our connection to him—the grounding of morality in human autonomy makes God unnecessary.²⁴⁶ The fact that the idlers do not understand what they have done is also tragic:

²⁴³ *KGW V/2*: 159. *The Gay Science*, 120.

²⁴⁴ “Christianity is a system, a carefully considered, *integrated* view of things. If you break off a main tenet, the belief in God, you smash the whole system along with it: you lose your grip on anything necessary.” *KGW VI/3*: 108. *Twilight of the Idols*, 194.

²⁴⁵ *KGW V/2*: 158. *The Gay Science*, 119.

²⁴⁶ Heidegger notes this in his essay on this passage, saying: “That suprasensory world of purposes and norms no longer quickens and supports life. That world has itself become lifeless, dead. There will be Christian faith here and there. But the love holding sway in that world is not the effectively working and operative principle of

“Lightning and thunder need time; the light of the stars needs time; deeds need time, even after they are done, in order to be seen and heard. This deed is still more remote to them than the remotest stars—and yet they have done it themselves!”²⁴⁷ The disjunction between what people are aware of and what is actually the case in the present is what makes the situation so tragic. The world as we know it (and take for granted), our everyday assumptions about right and wrong, is completely changed after one takes to heart the madman’s message.²⁴⁸

As Nietzsche notes in §108, belief in God may still flicker in some places, but these places will become more rare until the day there is finally none. Only the shadows of God will remain, mere images of God—e.g., utilitarian morality, the idea of perpetual human progress, and scientific optimism. But even these images of God need to be eliminated. In his own way, Nietzsche is following the logic of Plato here. If the real or true world (i.e., God) is no longer there, the shadows (or appearances) of that world cannot exist. There is nothing to reflect on the wall of the cave anymore if the real thing does not also exist.

“Given the way people are, there may still for millennia be caves in which they show his shadow.”²⁴⁹ The puppet show will go on because of the “way people are.” Most are like those idlers in the marketplace, ones who say they believe but do not actually believe. If they do believe, they believe in shadows. Eventually the shadows will disappear along with their

what is happening now.” From his “The Word of Nietzsche,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), 98-99.

²⁴⁷ *KGW V/2*: 159-160. *The Gay Science*, 120. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

²⁴⁸ “The greatest recent even—that ‘God is dead’; that belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable—is already starting to cast its first shadow over Europe . . . for many people’s power of comprehension, the event is itself far too great, distant, and out of the way even for its tidings to be thought of as having arrived yet. Even less may one suppose many to know at all *what* this event really means—and, now that this faith has been undermined, how much must collapse because it was built on this faith, leaned on it, had grown into it—for example, our entire European morality.” *KGW V/2*: 255. *The Gay Science*, 199. Also, see Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger’s insightful comments on this thought in *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 17-18.

²⁴⁹ *KGW V/2*: 145. *The Gay Science*, 109.

source. Science will then have completed its task—and then it too will disappear. But this is something that Nietzsche believes must not be permitted to happen.

Ultimately, the message of the madman, “God is dead,” is something that cannot be proven or refuted. Just as God’s existence was shown to be hypothetical with Kant, so the same must be true for his death. Now that God is dead, the belief in the supersensory world will gradually disappear. God’s existence functioned as the grounding hypothesis that gave order to all of our other beliefs—the world became less frightening and more reliable, more *rational*. But science turned against its own supposed ground when it questioned what it had taken for granted for over two millennia—it made clear to itself that God’s existence was a *hypothesis*, and, as it were, an unnecessary one. God, as a hypothesis, is dead.²⁵⁰ God’s death is also a hypothesis, but a more reliable hypothesis now that Europe has in actual practice stopped believing in God, according to Nietzsche. What will become of the science that demonstrated that the hypothesis of God’s existence was superfluous?

Without a goal, science is an end in itself—it is now about ever-new discovery. This is the theme of Book IV of *The Gay Science*, which discusses the new nature of science as “gay,” as a passion for knowledge. Nietzsche tells us in one section (§289), “Get on the ships!” The world is an open sea ready for our discovery. (This exhortation is not without reason considering that Nietzsche composed much of the work in Genoa—whence Columbus sailed to the New World for the first time.)

²⁵⁰ This is how I interpret Werner Stegmaier’s claim: “A God that men can kill, can only be a God, which men have created.” This means that God functioned as a hypothesis for science long after actual practices of faith had gradually been shed. See his article “Der Tod Gottes und das Leben der Wissenschaft: Nietzsches Aphorismus vom tollen Menschen im Kontext seiner *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*” in *Der Tod Gottes und die Wissenschaft* (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 1-16.

Eternal Recurrence as Scientific Hypothesis

In a world without God, who was both the goal and foundation of knowledge/science, science is turned into a pursuit for its own sake. This is why Nietzsche can speak of a “gay” science in which passion [Leidenschaft] can be joined with wisdom. However, it is not exactly clear how this science will work and in what way it will be able to save human being from the growing threat of nihilism. To answer both of these questions requires a close look at Book IV of *The Gay Science*, wherein Nietzsche speaks several times about the new nature of science. The conclusion of Book IV is where the eternal recurrence is first articulated, the culminating point of the entire work—§342 “*Incipit tragoedia*” is the gateway to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and is therefore both a beginning and an ending. Zarathustra, who will be discussed in the next section, is the teacher of the recurrence—this is why Nietzsche ends *The Gay Science* with Zarathustra’s “going under.”

Nietzsche opens Book IV with a poem to “Sanctus Januarius.” His invocation of January, the first month of a new year, indicates a new beginning after the madman’s announcement of God’s death. The title of the opening section, “For the new year” (§276), confirms this. Nietzsche makes his resolution here: “I want to learn more and more how to see what is necessary in things as what is beautiful in them—thus I will be one of those who make things beautiful. *Amor fati*: let that be my love from now on!”²⁵¹ Necessity is brought back down to earth. At one time God was conceived as the only necessary being, everything else being contingent; now that God is dead everything is made necessary again. This also brings the dialectic of Spirit to an end—one can only affirm or deny existence in its entirety.

²⁵¹ *KGW* V/2: 201. *The Gay Science*, 157. See Chapter 5 for a discussion of *amor fati*.

Negation is nihilism because it denies everything; for this reason Nietzsche says, “Let *looking away* be my only negation!”²⁵² Book IV is devoted to the goal of showing how the affirmation of existence on the whole (including the evil, harmful, and ugly aspects) is possible in the coincidence of life and science, in “gay science.” “All in all and on the whole: some day I want only to be a Yes-sayer!”

Since God is no longer living in the modern world, science has become detached from its end. This also dislodges the life of science from the religious life: “The time is past when the Church had a monopoly on contemplation, when the *vita contemplativa* always had to be first and foremost a *vita religiosa*.”²⁵³ Contemplation can now be considered an end in itself rather than as a mere means to what was considered the most important thing—the salvation of the soul in the afterlife (see §123).²⁵⁴ In fact, Nietzsche wants to move thought away from the concern with what occurs after death to what is going on in the present, so that it can be affirmed as necessary. “It makes me happy to see that people do not at all want to think the thought of death! I would very much like to do something that would make the thought of life even a hundred times more *worth being thought* to them.”²⁵⁵ Contemplation of life and the life of contemplation need to coincide—it is the eternal recurrence that will bring about this union for Nietzsche.

²⁵² KGW V/2: 201. *The Gay Science*, 157. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

²⁵³ KGW V/2: 204. *The Gay Science*, 159.

²⁵⁴ For Nietzsche, contemplation has turned into psychology (the “queen of the sciences,” as he calls it in §23 of *Beyond Good and Evil*). In turn, psychology has turned on the goal of the salvation of the soul: “*Hubris* characterizes our attitude toward *ourselves*,—for we experiment on ourselves in a way in which we would never allow on animals, we merrily vivisection our souls out of curiosity: that is how much we care about the ‘salvation’ of the soul!” KGW VI/2: 375. *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 87.

²⁵⁵ KGW V/2: 203. *The Gay Science*, 158.

Despite the change in the nature of science brought on by the death of God, there still remains the danger that the life of science will be devoured by the life of the active man. This is the vice of the New World, which is gradually spreading throughout Europe in the 19th century. Leisure, the prerequisite for the contemplative life, is now viewed as a necessary evil—it is the repose that is necessary so that one can continue working later. “Joy” [Freude] is no longer associated with intellectual discovery, but rather with rest from the labors of the day—it has become passive rather than active.

How frugal our educated and uneducated have become concerning “joy”! How they are becoming increasingly suspicious of all joy! More and more, *work* gets all good conscience on its side; the desire for joy already calls itself a “need to recuperate” and is starting to be ashamed of itself. . . . Soon we may well reach the point where one can’t give in to the desire for a *vita contemplativa* (that is, taking a walk with ideas and friends) without self-contempt and bad conscience.²⁵⁶

Work, the active life, is starting to consume the contemplative life—the demand for production, which is dependent on the technological drive of the modern age, is a byproduct of the shift in science effected by the likes of Descartes, Bacon, and Galileo. Science has become a means to something else—in the case of Descartes in the *Discourse on Method*, the alleviation of the suffering of mankind through the “mastery of nature.” This moral end has ultimately subordinated science to itself so that it remains a secondary phenomenon (as it was in the Christian Middle Ages). Nietzsche’s demand that science become “more than a means” is the key to his reconfiguration of science and life—science coincides with life, life itself is a means to knowledge.

²⁵⁶ *KGW V/2: 237. The Gay Science*, 184.

To speak of life as science is to speak of science as a passion, as a “very erotic drive: a drive for possession.”²⁵⁷ This is, of course, not the way that modern science wants to be portrayed, for it presents itself as “objective” and “neutral” and takes its axioms as demonstrated truths. However, with the death of God, objectivity also tumbles to the ground—science itself must undergo a drastic change. Science—as Nietzsche’s contemporaries understood it—has become a problem, it has turned on itself because there is no predetermined goal anymore. The presupposition of science (that it can correct life, i.e., Socrates’s basic assumption) is problematic, for the reason that it presupposes life. One can eliminate this problem if life itself becomes an experimental ground for testing hypotheses rather than that which science needs to correct. Knowledge, then, is not “a bed to rest on or the way to one, or a diversion or a form of idleness,” but rather “a world of dangers and victories in which heroic feelings also have their dance- and playgrounds.”²⁵⁸ Passion for science is playful; anyone who says otherwise is prejudiced by the old conception of science as “joyless” (see §327).

With the ever-present danger that man will fall off into nothingness because “God is dead,” Nietzsche believes that there needs to be something to restore a sense of balance to the human being. He poses this question to himself at the end of Book III: “*What do you believe in?*—In this: that the weight [Gewichte] of all things must be determined anew.”²⁵⁹ The hierarchy of being, which the tradition has held fast to for two millennia, has collapsed and there is the danger that in the process of leveling down man will slide back into the animal.

²⁵⁷ *Words in Blood, Like Flowers*, 63.

²⁵⁸ *KGW V/2*: 233. *The Gay Science*, 181.

²⁵⁹ *KGW V/2*: 197. *The Gay Science*, 152.

Man needs a new weight to give him a sense of orientation. What is this weight? For Nietzsche, the greatest, or heaviest, weight [das größte Schwergewicht] is the eternal recurrence, which affirms all existence without addition or subtraction. Indeed, it restores the greatest sense of the importance of existence because life is regarded as the most important experiment. The passage §341, “The heaviest weight,” needs to be examined in detail under the light of what Nietzsche considers to be “gay science.”

It begins with a hypothetical statement, a “what if.” What if some demon [Dämon] confronted you in your loneliness and challenged you with the thought that you would have to live your life an infinite number of times over again? Would you affirm this and say “Yes!” Or, would you say “No!” This is the challenge of Nietzsche’s experiment. The first thing to notice about this whole challenge is its hypothetical nature. The eternal recurrence is a hypothesis that can only be worked out within one’s lifetime—and it is something that requires a great deal of courage.²⁶⁰ Its challenge comes from a hypothetical demon, which recalls Descartes “malign genius” [genius malignus] in the *Meditations on First Philosophy*. The difference between Descartes’s genius and Nietzsche’s demon is not only the fact that Descartes supposes the genius to be evil, but also that the genius’s power is finite. Descartes’s experiment in the *Meditations*, therefore, is of a limited duration—it lasts six days. Nietzsche’s experiment consumes the entirety of one’s existence—“it would transform and possibly crush you.”²⁶¹

²⁶⁰ “*The sense of truth.*—I approve of any form of suspicion to which I can reply, “Let’s try it!” [Versuchen wir’s!] But I want to hear nothing more about all the things and questions that don’t admit of experiment. This is the limit of my ‘sense of truth’; for there, courage has lost its right.” *KGW V/2*: 89-90. *The Gay Science*, 62.

²⁶¹ *KGW V/2*: 250. *The Gay Science*, 194.

It is no mistake that Nietzsche begins Book IV with a reference to Descartes—he is seeking to change the nature of science just as Descartes did at the beginning of the 17th century. The concluding section of *The Gay Science* best formulates this change: life is the playground of science; life and science coincide in the teaching of the eternal recurrence. One can see this in Nietzsche’s circular expression in §276: “*Sum, ergo cogito: cogito, ergo sum*” [I am, therefore I think; I think, therefore I am].²⁶² Nietzsche completes Descartes’s conception of science by bringing it to its perfection: life and thought coincide instead of existence being determined by thought. Life, then, is an experiment (and a temptation). If you had to live again and innumerable times again, “how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life *to long for nothing more fervently* than for this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?”²⁶³ The thought of the eternal recurrence transforms one’s life into a grand experiment—it is all-comprehensive because it leaves no detail of life untouched, everything is made necessary to “becoming who you are.” Eternal recurrence is the way to ground the human being and establish a new hierarchy of values now that the old hierarchy of values (being) has been buried with God. This is also where Nietzsche’s conception of science and life is seen in its proper perspective.

If “God is dead,” then the old science is also gone—this is why Nietzsche talks about “The dying Socrates” (§340) before talking about the new science (§341) and its teacher, Zarathustra (§342). Science must be conceived anew in terms of its relation to life; in its old configuration, life was threatened with destruction by the demand that life serve science. Life and science must coincide if both are to be rescued from the pervading darkness of

²⁶² One should compare this to Nietzsche’s earlier reference to Descartes in §10 of the “History” essay. See previous chapter.

²⁶³ *KGW V/2*: 250. *The Gay Science*, 194-195. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

nihilism. Theory and practice must be reconsidered after the death of God because the intelligible world has been detached from the sensible world. Thus, the teaching of the eternal recurrence, which seeks to join life and science, cannot be conceived as either practical or theoretical. It overcomes this distinction entirely. Nietzsche's philosophy of history seeks to give a place to the human being in a world of infinite becoming, nothing more. It is something that cannot be proved or demonstrated because the argumentative tools of the old science are no longer effective. This is why he says: "What decides against Christianity now is our taste, not our reasons [Gründe]." ²⁶⁴ The ground of our reason has been taken away—one cannot argue, i.e., demonstrate, for or against the existence of God. Similarly, one cannot demonstrate the truth or falsity of the eternal recurrence.

Nietzsche stopped trying to give "scientific" proofs for the truth of the eternal recurrence in 1881—those he wrote in the notes that comprise *The Will to Power* differ only slightly. ²⁶⁵ The change in the nature of science brought on by the death of God makes demonstration impossible anymore—all that is left are varying perspectives within the world (not an all-comprehensive one). As the guarantor of truth and reason, God is what ensured the validity of one's reasoning. This is not the case now. Proofs and demonstrations do not make sense without the ground of reasoning to ensure their validity. Nietzsche realized this early on—this is why he stopped trying to make up proofs to demonstrate the truth of the

²⁶⁴ KGW V/2: 163. *The Gay Science*, 123.

²⁶⁵ I do not regard the "proof" of the eternal recurrence in §1066 of *The Will to Power* as something Nietzsche took seriously because he never published any of these demonstrations. The fact that he never offered a proof of the eternal recurrence in any of his published materials should show that he did not think that a proof could be offered. David Allison confirms this when he notes that Nietzsche "does not advance the eternal return as a verifiable truth at all." From Allison's *Reading the New Nietzsche* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 124.

eternal recurrence.²⁶⁶ He does not include these proofs anywhere in the first or second edition of *The Gay Science*, which indicates that he did not think that highly of them. However, his formulation of the teaching of recurrence is hypothetical—“what if . . .” It remains an open hypothesis, one that transforms existence making for the innocence of becoming (a non-dialectical view of history). Nietzsche’s philosophy of science is experimental; it is the science of possibility that is brought about through the eternal recurrence. Passion “lovingly” [zärtlich] joins hand with profundity, life “lovingly” joins hands with science in the eternal recurrence—one is not forced on the other as in the old configuration (in Alexandrian, Socratic culture). Nietzsche’s science is one beyond good and evil because it is a matter of passion, a labor of love.²⁶⁷

Reflecting back on the new nature of science for Nietzsche, one can detect a continuation in his disdain for Hegel—the paragon of the old “joyless” science. The dialectic of Spirit, as Hegel describes it in the “Preface” of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, is an arduous, painful process. The Spirit evolves from the contradiction of opposites, from the interplay of pain and pleasure. For Hegel, Spirit’s becoming is viewed in terms of the gradual alleviation of guilt just as in the Christian conception of time and history. In contrast, Nietzsche’s perception of becoming is that of innocence—morality, the knowledge of good and evil, is not the origin of the movement of time. This is why Nietzsche considers

²⁶⁶ His basic position on the teaching of the eternal recurrence is best expressed in the opening line from the “Preface” to the second edition of the work: “This book might need more than one preface; and in the end there would still be room for doubting whether someone who has not experienced something similar, could by means of prefaces, be brought closer to the *experiences* of this book.” *KGW* V/2: 13. *The Gay Science*, 3. Nietzsche’s emphasis. No amount of explanation could ever be sufficient for this kind of lived experience.

²⁶⁷ “Whatever is done out of love takes place beyond good and evil.” *KGW* VI/2: 99. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 70.

himself an immoralist, for he views becoming beyond good and evil. The eternal recurrence is the non-dialectical, anti-Hegelian view of history.

The appearance of Zarathustra at the end of the work is not mistaken. The final section of *The Gay Science* forms the portal to Nietzsche's most enigmatic book, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Coming directly on the heels of *The Gay Science*, *Zarathustra* is imbued with a scientific character: "Zarathustra *rigorously* determines his task—it is mine as well,—and there can be no mistake about what he *means*: he is *affirmative* to the point of justification, to the point of salvation, even for everything past."²⁶⁸ Zarathustra is the teacher of the eternal recurrence. As the first person to see the interplay between good and evil as the driving force behind history, Zarathustra must be the first to recognize "this fateful error of morality."²⁶⁹ The dialectic of good and evil is transferred not only to Judaism and Christianity, but also to Platonic idealism. It pervades Western thought to the core—therefore, Nietzsche can say that thought since Plato has been determined *morally*. As the first immoralist, he wants to think beyond the terms of good and evil, to see the innocence of becoming.

Nietzsche concludes *The Gay Science* with tragedy. It concludes with "Zarathustra's going under," his return to human beings in order to teach them the eternal recurrence. To return to the consideration of §1: tragedy and comedy are a matter of perspective within the whole since there is no absolute standard (i.e., God) anymore; this means that the human being is now something to be ridiculed and treated with dignity; the "gay science" allows this type of questioning—it is the deepest, most profound, questioning because it leaves nothing unquestioned. Zarathustra is also the one who leaves nothing unquestioned: "Zarathustra is

²⁶⁸ *KGW VI/3*: 346. *Ecce Homo*, 133. Emphasis added.

²⁶⁹ *KGW VI/3*: 365. *Ecce Homo*, 145.

more truthful than any other thinker.”²⁷⁰ Unlike other philosophers, he is not lead astray by “health, future, growth, power, life . . .” but rigorously pursues the truth in the teaching of the return. *Zarathustra* is, therefore, not only a tragedy, as the concluding section of *The Gay Science* would seem to indicate, but also a comedy.²⁷¹ “Human being is something that must be overcome.”²⁷² The human being is no longer taboo—the value of human existence can be questioned. (In fact, human existence must be questioned or else one’s silence on the matter condemns humans to a place of no value since they are no longer worthy of being questioned.)²⁷³ This is the task of Zarathustra, the teacher of the eternal recurrence and the overman [Übermensch].

Zarathustra, Teacher of the Eternal Recurrence

Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1883-1885) is arguably one of the most difficult works in the history of Western philosophy to interpret. It has multiple layers; its author, who is not always clear in his other works when it comes to his references, gives little to no clues about what or who the character Zarathustra is talking about; it is not clear how the three first parts of the work relate to the fourth and final part; and, perhaps worst of all, there is no indication about how *Zarathustra* should be read (whether as a disconnected series of speeches or as a coherent whole). Nietzsche often declares in his later writings and letters to friends that this

²⁷⁰ KGW VI/3: 365. *Ecce Homo*, 145.

²⁷¹ “*Incipit tragoedia*, we read at the end of this suspiciously innocent book. Beware! Something utterly wicked and mischievous is being announced here: *incipit parodia* [the parody begins], no doubt.” KGW V/2: 14. *The Gay Science*, 4.

²⁷² KGW VI/1: 8. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 5.

²⁷³ Perhaps this is why Nietzsche says later in the Preface to *On the Genealogy of Morality*: “We are unknown to ourselves, we knowers, we ourselves to ourselves, and there is a good reason for this. We have never looked for ourselves,—so how are we ever supposed to *find* ourselves?” KGW VI/2: 259. *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 3. See the following chapter for a more detailed discussion of this passage.

is his most important work and that it contains his most important thoughts. He goes on to say in *Ecce Homo*, “This work stands entirely on its own.”²⁷⁴ This gives the impression that one need only read *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in order to understand Nietzsche’s philosophy—a mistake to which too many scholars fall prey, beginning with Löwith’s misdirected interpretation. Nearly every Nietzsche scholar feels compelled to say something about this work and, thereby, no one really has anything to say about it—in this way, its subtitle is prophetic “A Book for All and None” [Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen]. A closer look at his discussion of *Zarathustra* in the section of *Ecce Homo* “Why I Write Such Good Books” shows that the work needs to be considered in relation to what came before (*The Gay Science*) and what came after (*Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morals*).

The main thing to notice about what Nietzsche has to say about *Zarathustra* is that “the whole of *Zarathustra* can be considered music;—certainly a rebirth in the art of *hearing* was one of its preconditions.”²⁷⁵ The work is a piece of music—i.e., something inspired by the Muses. It will become clear through the interpretation that follows that Nietzsche’s inspiration for this work came from the Greek god of music, art, and fertility, Dionysus. Nietzsche notes that *The Gay Science* had hints of this change in his taste for music, especially when one considers the poem that opens Book Four. Nietzsche’s “highest dreams” are the words that end the first work and begin the next work—the music of *Zarathustra*. In fact, music is a large part of the “gay science,” which combines the roles of “*singer, knight, and free spirit*” into one. His poetry is reminiscent of the Provençal culture of the Middle Ages, which combined tones of mockery with the heartfelt longing for courtly

²⁷⁴ KGW VI/3: 341. *Ecce Homo*, 129.

²⁷⁵ KGW VI/3: 333. *Ecce Homo*, 123.

love (tragedy). He admits that at some points the poetry in *The Gay Science* can be considered “exuberant dance songs.”²⁷⁶

The significant shift in the style of *Zarathustra* is indicative of a change in Nietzsche’s musical tastes. By this time, he had stopped listening to Wagner’s music most likely because he viewed it as being infected by Hegel’s influence (see previous chapter on this). As early as *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche recognized that music had undeniable communicative power. Music can tell us things about ourselves and the world more effectively than a logical statement—it attunes us to the world in a certain way, a fact that Socrates takes note of in *The Republic* (398c-403c, especially 401d-402a) and that Heidegger also points out later in *Being and Time* (especially §29). Nietzsche wants us to see the world in a different light, under the aspect of the eternal recurrence; therefore, music must form an important part of the “gay science.” *Zarathustra* is, in fact, the application of “gay science,” which means that it is a work of music. Nietzsche’s seemingly outrageous claims about the lack of poetic skill in the likes of Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe now seem less so. His expression of “gay science” as the coincidence of life and wisdom takes the form of music.

Wisdom, investigations of the soul, the art of speaking—none of this existed before *Zarathustra*; here, *what is closest and most everyday speaks about things the likes of which have never been heard*. Sayings trembling with passion; eloquence become music; bold strokes of lightening hurled forwards into futures never before anticipated.²⁷⁷

The coincidence of statement and its melody makes *Zarathustra* so important—its entire rhythm is unlike any other work in the history of the West. This change in music transforms the relation between life and wisdom because it is the unity of the two. *Zarathustra* is the

²⁷⁶ KGW VI/3: 332. *Ecce Homo*, 123.

²⁷⁷ KGW VI/3: 341-342. *Ecce Homo*, 130.

unity of science and life in an unprecedented, coherent view of the world, for it is there that “sayings” (logos) are “trembling with passion” (pathos). The music of this work is where “profundity lovingly joins hands with headstrong passion.”

Zarathustra is indeed the culminating point of Nietzsche’s creative and scientific powers. His declaration that the work must be considered as a piece of music only makes sense in light of the opening line of §25 of *The Birth of Tragedy*: “Music and tragic myth both express, in the same way, the Dionysiac capacity of a people, and they cannot be separated from one another.”²⁷⁸ This work is the combination of music and tragic myth—the enigmatic phrase “*Incipit tragoedia*,” which opens §342 of *The Gay Science*, now makes sense. The death of music, and therewith tragedy, at the hands of Socratic scientific optimism is overcome by Nietzsche’s “gay science” in which the tragic aspects of existence are combined with the comic ones. Once Alexandrian culture had reached its completion in Hegel’s system, it has already begun to decline. The first tremors within the sciences of the 19th century indicated that a crisis was on the horizon for Western culture. Nietzsche was one of the first to diagnose this problem and offer a new vision of the world that was independent of the current scientific attitude. *Zarathustra* is the combination of music and tragic myth that he thought would constitute an alternative, coherent view of the world.

Nietzsche’s reason for saying that the “work stands entirely on its own” [Dieses Werk steht durchaus für sich] becomes clear when one considers its relation to his later works. *Zarathustra* stands on its own because it contains Nietzsche’s *fundamental* thought, the eternal recurrence. This thought is the foundation for the project of the “revaluation of all

²⁷⁸ *KGW* III/1: 150. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 115.

values” that Nietzsche takes up in *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morality*. The style of these later works returns to that of *The Gay Science*. In regard to *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche says: “In every respect, particularly in its form, you will find a *deliberate* turning away from the sort of instincts that make a *Zarathustra* possible.” He states that this was his recuperation from his grandest creation just as the serpent was God’s recuperation after the seven days of creation. “He [God] had made everything too nice.”²⁷⁹ This is where the hard work of revaluation begins after Nietzsche had been tempted to posit the eternal recurrence. How the eternal recurrence is connected to these later works is the task of the following chapter.

With good reason, then, whenever one talks about the teaching of the eternal recurrence, it is inevitable that the discussion will lead to Nietzsche’s most enigmatic work. Eternal recurrence and *Zarathustra* must go together, according to Nietzsche, for the reason that “this is *Zarathustra*’s doctrine.”²⁸⁰ For the most part, Nietzsche always claimed that the eternal recurrence was *Zarathustra*’s teaching—not his own. Only at the end of *Twilight of the Idols* (1888) does Nietzsche assert that he is the “last disciple of the philosopher Dionysus” and the “teacher of the eternal return . . .”²⁸¹ In the same line, he identifies discipleship to Dionysus with the teaching of the eternal recurrence. The question that I will work out in this section is: How does *Zarathustra* relate to Dionysus, the Greek god of music? If this question can be answered, I think that a few of the key passages of

²⁷⁹ *KGW VI/3*: 349. *Ecce Homo*, 135.

²⁸⁰ *KGW VI/3*: 311. *Ecce Homo*, 110.

²⁸¹ *KGW VI/3*: 154. *Twilight of the Idols*, 229.

Zarathustra will become clearer. In turn, this will further elucidate the scientific nature of the eternal recurrence and the nature of its teacher, Zarathustra, as the last scientist.

In regard to the structure of the rest of this section, I have divided *Zarathustra* according to Nietzsche's own division of it into four parts. The passages that I have chosen to highlight in *Zarathustra* all bear some connection to Nietzsche's reconfiguration of wisdom and life in the "gay science." These passages all point toward this new harmony that is achieved in the eternal recurrence. I will treat the work as a continuous and connected whole. The narrative structure of the work is based on Zarathustra's own development away from the dominance of science (wisdom) over life (Parts I-II) to a point of crisis where he chooses the "gay science" (Part III). Finally, Zarathustra turns toward his "work" in Part IV—i.e., the project of revaluation after accepting the eternal recurrence as his destiny. At several points through his development, Zarathustra makes profound statements about the nature of wisdom and life, but he is not prepared to draw the necessary conclusion until the closing sections of Part III. Thus, the parallel between these inchoate pronouncements in Parts I and II and the reconfiguration of life and wisdom in *The Gay Science* will be noted along the way. They merely serve as guideposts.

First and Second Parts

In the final speech of Part I of *Zarathustra*, "On the Bestowing Virtue," Zarathustra speaks to his disciples about the need to purify themselves of thousands of years of error in spirit and virtue. He exhorts them to be creators and to fight the sickness within themselves. "Knowingly the body purifies itself; experimenting with knowledge it elevates itself; all

instincts become sacred in the seeker of knowledge; the soul of the elevated one becomes gay” [Wissend reinigt sich der Leib; mit Wissen versuchend erhöht er sich; dem Erkennenden heiligen sich alle Triebe; dem Erhöhten wird die Seele fröhlich].²⁸² Only through experimentation will anyone come to knowledge of himself and make ready the path of the overman—human being is merely an experiment, a failed one at that. Experimentation is key to the production of the overman, that being which gives meaning to the earth after the death of God. The greatest experiment is the one that calls for the total affirmation of life, the eternal recurrence—Zarathustra, though, does not go this far yet. Affirmation is the sign of the overman—thus, Nietzsche connects the overman with the eternal recurrence in Zarathustra’s teaching.

By the end of Part I of *Zarathustra*, he has given away [schenken] the wisdom he has collected over the years in his mountain cave. He was weary of his wisdom. Now that it has been distributed he wants to return to his solitude. He now wants to walk alone. However, he makes a promise to his disciples to return “to be with you a third time, to celebrate the great noon with you.”²⁸³ Zarathustra’s “last word” concerns the great noon “where human beings stand at the midpoint of their course between animal and overman and celebrate their way to evening as their highest hope: for it is the way to a new morning.”²⁸⁴ Noon is the joining of morning and evening, the beginning and ending of the day. The going under of human being is at the same time the overcoming of human being in the overman. Noon is also the time when the sun, the metaphor for wisdom in Platonic philosophy, reaches its

²⁸² *KGW VI/1: 96. Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 58.*

²⁸³ *KGW VI/1: 98. Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 59.*

²⁸⁴ *KGW VI/1: 98. Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 59.*

zenith—the eternal recurrence is then the height of wisdom. Zarathustra’s language in this closing passage of Part I suggests that noon is where life and wisdom coincide. At the age of 40, Zarathustra returned to dispense his wisdom; now that his wisdom is gone, so too has his life run its course. He will return in Part II to grapple with life.

The teaching of the eternal recurrence is already suggested then in the first Part of *Zarathustra*. Zarathustra must return two more times, though, before he is able to work out the eternal recurrence fully. In Part II, he struggles with the problem of the inevitability of suffering—the fact that the will does not have power over the past. The main focus of Part II is on the passive dimension of human existence whereas the focus in Part I was on the active dimension. Suffering—*pathe* in Greek, from which we get the term “passion”—then receives special attention from Zarathustra in this part. T.K. Seung points out the dialectical nature of Zarathustra’s thought in his excellent work, *Nietzsche’s Epic of the Soul: Thus Spoke Zarathustra*:

The more deeply we get involved in the active dimension of our existence, the more keenly we feel its passive dimension or our vulnerability to suffering. Thus, the problem of the creative will inevitably leads to the problem of suffering. This dialectical development between the active will and the passive feeling may have led to the birth of Zarathustra’s new wisdom, which was conceived and delivered as a young cub after his return to his cave from his first teaching mission. In that case, his new wisdom is an essential complement to his old wisdom.²⁸⁵

If the eternal recurrence is to transform every aspect of existence, it must also account for that over which the will has no power—the past. Human beings want revenge on the past because it determines the present and the future. This is the overwhelming power of life to

²⁸⁵ T.K. Seung, *Nietzsche’s Epic of the Soul: Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 59.

which everything that exists is subject. Zarathustra must contend with this power in Part II and learn from it.

Zarathustra begins to speak of life in the section, “On the Tarantulas.” This is also the first time that he speaks of the spirit of revenge. Justice for the tarantulas—i.e., “the preachers of *equality*”—is itself revenge on those who deny the equality of all men and women. However, justice was not always restricted to the sense of equality, as it is in the modern age. One of the first times justice is mentioned in the Western philosophical tradition is in the Anaximander fragment (B2), which speaks of Time sitting like a judge. Justice then has been connected with Time for over 2500 years in the Western mind. Zarathustra’s speech in this section reveals more than the speaker currently realizes—revenge is something that is connected to what has been called justice and, therefore, also to time. The actual condition of things is that of injustice, of inequality between opposites struggling to overcome each other. “Life itself wants to build itself into the heights with pillars and steps; it wants to gaze into vast distances and out upon halcyon beauties—*therefore* it needs height! And because it needs height, it needs steps and contradiction between steps and climbers!”²⁸⁶ Life cares not for equality; thus, it has no sense of revenge but is innocent.

In the section “On the Famous Wise Men,” Zarathustra continues his reflections on the nature of life. Those who are famous for their wisdom have always served the people—they are not true seekers for the reason that they will not venture beyond what is known. They do not know what spirit is: “Spirit is life that itself cuts into life; by its own agony it

²⁸⁶ *KGW VI/1: 126. Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 78.*

increases its own knowledge.”²⁸⁷ Only by experimentation on oneself will one’s knowledge ever increase. It is life that makes knowledge possible—life plays a game with itself. Life is related to wisdom as night is related to day. One cannot have life without wisdom nor wisdom without life, for, as Heraclitus says, “they are one.” Zarathustra makes the connection between wisdom and the sun in the “Prologue”; the natural correlate between life and night comes in the next section, “The Night Song.” In fact, the second Part of *Zarathustra* reaches its most profound point during the cycle of songs found in the center: “The Night Song,” “The Dance Song,” and “The Grave Song.” It is at this point that the connection between life and Dionysus is made explicit for the first time.

The first thing to notice about these passages is that they are all songs. Nietzsche had identified the origin of tragedy, Dionysus’s traditional domain of art, in music in *The Birth of Tragedy* twelve years earlier. All of the themes are Dionysian: night was the time that the initiates of the cult gathered for the ceremonies; dancing is the natural complement to the music making god, whom the maenads (the female retinue of the god) honored; and death was an important component in the myth of Dionysus Zagreus, who was torn apart and miraculously resurrected. Night is the time when everything is united—everything that is distinguished in the light is returned to the one at night. Day is the time of loneliness: “I am light; oh that I were night! But this is my loneliness, that I am girded by light.”²⁸⁸ Light is also the metaphor for wisdom. Zarathustra, the one who wanted to give away his wisdom in the “Prologue,” has become isolated because of it. He has become calloused from his bestowing—he no longer wants to bestow, his thoughts have now turned malicious because

²⁸⁷ KGW VI/1: 130. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 80.

²⁸⁸ KGW VI/1: 132. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 81.

of his hatred of the receiver. Only lovers know how to reciprocate, and night is the only time that “the songs of the lovers awaken.” Life joins everything just as night makes everything indistinguishable.

In the following passage, Zarathustra happens upon a group of dancing girls, who are accompanied by Cupid (Eros). He sings the tale of his encounter with life, the “unfathomable” [unergründlich], his only love. However, he is also enamored with wisdom, which resembles so much life with “her eyes, her laugh and even her little golden fishing rod.” When life asks Zarathustra about wisdom, he replies that no one can resist her because of her seductive ways. Life responds: “Whom are you talking about? Surely about me?”²⁸⁹ Both wisdom and life are seducing—in other words, they are tempting. Gay science is itself a temptation and experiment [Versuch], life and wisdom “lovingly join hands.” Zarathustra joins the two because he is the teacher of the eternal recurrence, the greatest temptation and the greatest experiment.

Life is itself wisdom for Zarathustra. He is one of the few (along with Nietzsche) who “knows what Ariadne is.”²⁹⁰ It is likely that Zarathustra is speaking to Ariadne/Dionysus when he talks to life in “The Dance Song.” Ariadne and Dionysus are said to be lovers—life is love, which is beyond good and evil. Dionysus, however, remains in the background here (he comes to the foreground in Part III’s “The Other Dance Song”). Although life is feminine and Dionysus is masculine, one can identify the two for the reason that Dionysus is the ancient Greek god of fertility. Nietzsche’s identification makes sense

²⁸⁹ *KGW VI/1*: 137. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 85.

²⁹⁰ *KGW VI/3*: 346. *Ecce Homo*, 133.

because he notes that life is “that *which must always overcome itself*.” In other words, life is both masculine and feminine, for it has the power to create itself from out of itself.

Life is a riddle because it is both comic and tragic at the same time. Like every good riddle, life is multifaceted. There are several answers that can be given to this riddle; the most profound answer, however, is also the one that goes deepest into the labyrinth of the Minotaur. Whenever Nietzsche speaks of truth (wisdom), he also identifies it as a woman: “Suppose that truth is a woman—and why not? Aren’t there reasons for suspecting that all philosophers, to the extent that they have been dogmatists, have not really understood women?”²⁹¹ There is good reason for his identification of life and truth with women. For better or worse, Nietzsche thinks of women as having several different layers. They have their surface beauty but are full of tricks and games underneath. Women, according to Nietzsche, are subtler than men—they have a depth to them that men lack. They are also more devious; they are capable of greater evil than men.²⁹² This is precisely what Dionysus wants of the human being in his dialogue at the end of *Beyond Good and Evil*: he wants humans to be more evil, in other words, wiser. Life is amoral and it does not care for morality.

“The Grave Song” is the natural complement to “The Dance Song” that immediately precedes it. In the earlier song, Zarathustra sings to the girls while they dance with Cupid (Eros). For the Greeks, Eros had a special connection with Death (Thanatos). These are the two basic motivations for human action—love of life and fear of losing life are two sides of

²⁹¹ *KGW VI/2: 3. Beyond Good and Evil*, 3. For a more detailed discussion of Nietzsche’s association of truth with woman see the following chapter.

²⁹² “Where neither love nor hate are in play, woman is a mediocre player.” *KGW VI/2: 93. Beyond Good and Evil*, 65.

the same coin. In his song, Zarathustra reflects on the damage done to his earlier teaching by his enemies. He had once said “Godlike shall all beings be to me” and “All days shall be holy to me.” The project of making divine everything that was once profane is a large part of the project of the “gay science.” But what has happened to Zarathustra’s “gay wisdom” [fröhliche Weisheit]? His past visions and apparitions of youth have been driven off by his enemies, thus cutting short Zarathustra’s eternity. The playfulness of youth has been destroyed by serious thoughts, ones about death (especially the death of his youthful dreams and desires). How was Zarathustra able to arise from the death of his youth? It was through his will, something that is “invulnerable” and “unburialable” [Unbegrabbares]. No matter what Zarathustra’s will cannot be snuffed out: his dreams and desires may die out, but not his will.

The will is a key component to Zarathustra’s teaching of the eternal recurrence. Life is “that *which must always overcome itself*.”²⁹³ The struggle for power among the living is infinite—no one gives up the struggle, stronger or weaker. Life sacrifices itself for more power. Schopenhauer did not conceive of the will correctly, according to Nietzsche; there is no will to existence for the reason that one cannot will until one already exists. “Only where life is, is there also will; but not will to life, instead—thus I teach you—the will to power!”²⁹⁴ Unfortunately, mankind is no longer willing to will the future. Their gaze is focused on the inescapability of the past. In this sense, the will flounders when it comes to the past and its “it was.” From its impotence in regard to the past, the will turns on everything else in the spirit of revenge. Living and willing must proceed from past to present to future—the will suffers because it is caught within the net of time. Existence has been conceived morally as a

²⁹³ *KGW VI/1*: 144. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 89. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

²⁹⁴ *KGW VI/1*: 145. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 90.

form of punishment; the will has no power over the past, and it suffers from its lack of power.

“On Redemption” points toward the full articulation of the eternal recurrence in Part III of *Zarathustra*. Zarathustra already hints at the nature of the eternal recurrence, which is like a shadow that follows him around. The only way to redeem all existence would be for the will to turn the “it was” into a “thus I willed it!” In other words, the will must will backward in the way that it wills forward. But how would this ever be possible unless time were not linear? Only if the past were also the future—only if time were cyclical—would this ever be possible. He does not want the will to be reconciled with time; he does not want the will to resign itself to the force of time. “Who would teach it [the will] to also will backward?”²⁹⁵ At this point in his speech before the cripples and his disciples, Zarathustra suddenly breaks off. He has “become frightened to the extreme” [auf das Äußerste erschrickt] and cannot speak anymore. He is not prepared to give voice to his abysmal thought. Zarathustra cannot respond to the hunchback’s inquiry: “Why does Zarathustra speak otherwise to his pupils—than to himself?”²⁹⁶ Zarathustra must be alone before he can grapple with his most abysmal thought, the one that he is afraid to speak of before his pupils.

Third Part

Part III of *Zarathustra* is the culminating point of the work, for it is there that Zarathustra finally comes to terms with his teaching, the eternal recurrence. In the opening section of Part III, “The Wanderer,” Zarathustra walks alone across the Blessed Isles in order

²⁹⁵ KGW VI/1: 177. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 112.

²⁹⁶ KGW VI/1: 178. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 112.

to reach the coast where he intends to board a ship. However, he must cross over the mountains. Zarathustra is a mountain climber and is constantly restless. His existence no longer seems to be an accident. And he speaks to himself, saying: “I am standing now before my last peak and before what has been saved for me for the longest time. Indeed, I must start my hardest path! Indeed, I have begun my loneliest hike!”²⁹⁷ While Zarathustra kept company with his disciples in both Parts I and II, he goes alone in Part III. His fear of speaking his darkest thought before others is confirmed because his speech is essentially a monologue.²⁹⁸ He also knows that his steepest hike requires that he go down deeper than he has ever descended before. He affirms it as his destiny [Schicksal]. Another difference between the first two parts of *Zarathustra* and the third part is what Zarathustra teaches. In Part I, he teaches the possibility of willing the overman as the meaning of the earth after the death of God. In Part II, he learns from life and teaches the will to power as the nature of reality. It is also in this part that Zarathustra takes note of the “spirit of revenge” in the will and what needs to be done to redeem existence. However, he is unwilling to speak this thought because he is frightened by it. In Part III, his sole concern is the eternal recurrence. His earlier teachings—the overman, the death of God, and the will to power—are all predicated on the eternal recurrence in Part III, which dominates the entire action of Part III beginning with the second section.

In this section, entitled “On the Vision and the Riddle,” Zarathustra relates his riddle after keeping silent for two days on board the ship. He is among those who are friends, those

²⁹⁷ *KGW VI/1*: 189-190. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 121.

²⁹⁸ Fink also takes note of this: “Zarathustra speaks about the overman to all, about the death of God and the will to power to fewer and about the eternal return of the same really only to himself.” *Nietzsche’s Philosophy*, 72.

“who make distant journeys and do not like to live without danger.” He addresses these sailors and travelers, who were once strangers to him, as searchers [Sucher] and researchers [Versucher]—but they can also be considered tempters, attempters, and experimenters. He does not actually talk to them about the nature of the eternal recurrence, for it is something that only the individual can grasp. It is *his* destiny, no one else’s. All that he does is speak to the voyagers in riddles. His listeners cannot “deduce” [erschließen] his meaning, they are only able to “guess” [erraten] his meaning in the riddle. Just as he refuses to speak of his hidden thought with his disciples in Part II (as the hunchback guessed) likewise he will not tell the voyagers on the ship the meaning of his vision/riddle. This should indicate to the reader that the eternal recurrence is only implied. Zarathustra never actually communicates his teaching/thought with anyone else—even his animals are playfully rebuked in “The Convalescent” when they try to interpret his thought for him.²⁹⁹ Part III is Zarathustra’s circling around the abysmal thought until he *accepts* it as his fate—he never communicates it explicitly, though.

Zarathustra tells the tale of his climbing up a desolate mountain, forcing himself upward at every step. However, something is dragging him down, making it difficult for him to find his way up the mountain path. It is his “archenemy,” or what he refers to as “the spirit of gravity” [der Geist der Schwere]. He refers to this archenemy as a dwarf that sits upon his back, following him wherever he goes. The dwarf mocks Zarathustra’s efforts to climb:

“Oh Zarathustra,” he murmured scornfully, syllable by syllable. “You stone of wisdom! You hurled yourself high, but every hurled stone must—fall! Oh Zarathustra, you stone of wisdom, you sling stone, you star crusher! You hurled yourself so high—but every hurled

²⁹⁹ “You do not love your knowledge enough anymore, as soon as you communicate it.” *KGW VI/2*: 100. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 71.

stone—must fall! Sentenced to yourself and to your own stoning; oh Zarathustra, far indeed you hurled the stone—but it will fall back down upon *you!*”³⁰⁰

Zarathustra’s wisdom, his unspoken thought, will ultimately crush him for seven days as he sits in his cave later in Part III. The weight of it will prove to be nearly too heavy for him to bear. His wisdom has reached its peak—it is only a matter of time before it falls back down upon him with all of its force. After testing his wisdom with life in Part II, he has become wiser. But will Zarathustra not be crushed by his thought?

It is significant that the dwarf is the only one who mentions the teaching of the eternal recurrence in this section, albeit in a terse, gnomic form. “‘All that is straight lies,’ murmured the dwarf contemptuously. ‘All truth is crooked, time itself is a circle.’”³⁰¹ T.K. Seung has identified the dwarf as Zarathustra’s “animal self”—the part of him that he must come to terms with later in Part III. This is true on another level. The dwarf [Zwerg] is the “spirit of gravity,” one who has been squished by the thought of the eternal recurrence due to its weight [Gewicht]. The dwarf is Zarathustra made small by the weight of the thought of the eternal recurrence. Later in “The Convalescent” Zarathustra feels compelled to lie down—he is brought closer to the earth. He is literally made small by the thought of the eternal recurrence; his thought falls back down upon him and he is not strong enough yet to bear it.

In his vision, the dwarf jumps off his back and sits upon a rock. Zarathustra gives a speech to the dwarf on the nature of time. The past and future collide in the gateway “Moment.” Both past and future flow away from the gateway into eternity. After this the

³⁰⁰ *KGW VI/1: 194. Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 124.*

³⁰¹ *KGW VI/1: 196. Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 125.*

dwarf utters his statement that time is a circle. Zarathustra then becomes angry with the dwarf because he claims that the dwarf is making it too easy for himself. However, it seems that Zarathustra is merely frightened of this thought—his courage fails him. He is so frightened by this thought that he begins to whisper with the dwarf:

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?³⁰²

Zarathustra's rant takes the form of a series of questions posed to the dwarf, who does not respond. He never makes a direct statement about the eternal recurrence; all of his questions, though, indicate that he is talking about it. Just as in §341 of *The Gay Science* the eternal recurrence takes the form of hypothetical statements here.³⁰³ Its power to lie on one's actions as the heaviest weight is so great that it runs the risk of crushing everything. It is the most powerful scientific hypothesis because of its extreme weight—it will transform one's existence (life) through this thought. Life and wisdom are united at this point to such an

³⁰² *KGW VI/1*: 196. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 126.

³⁰³ Heidegger is careful to note the “unscientific” (i.e., according to the standards of science of Nietzsche's day) character of the eternal recurrence. The fact that the recurrence puts everything into question, rather than assuming to provide answers for everything (like the positive sciences at the end of the 19th century), clearly indicates that the doctrine is not scientific in this sense. In one case, Heidegger writes: “In order to hold at bay the scientific misconception of Nietzsche's train of thought it is not even necessary to refer to the straightforward state of affairs represented in Nietzsche's reflections—namely, the fact that he never limits those reflections to the region of knowledge attained by physics or the other natural sciences. On the contrary, he is concerned with the totality of beings: ‘Everything has returned: Sirius and the spider and your thoughts during this past hour and this very thought of yours, that everything recurs’ (XII, 62). Since when are ‘thoughts’ and ‘hours’ objects of physics or biology?” *Nietzsche, Volume Two*, 114. Again, the eternal recurrence does not admit of “scientific” proof.

extent that one cannot tell the difference between the two—just as Zarathustra was confused about the two in “The Dance Song” of Part II.

Immediately after asking the dwarf these questions, and as Zarathustra’s voice becomes more and more quiet, he is left alone. He then has a horrific vision of a shepherd with a snake hanging out of his mouth. The snake has bit itself fast inside the shepherd’s throat. Zarathustra tries to tear the snake out of the shepherd’s throat but he is unable to do so. He commands the shepherd to bite off the head of the snake and spit it out. Once he does this the shepherd is no longer full of nausea and dread; he begins to laugh. “Never yet on earth had I heard a human being laugh as *he* laughed!”³⁰⁴ Zarathustra notes that this was a transformed being. The riddle he poses for his fellow searchers and researches (and experimenters) concerns the identity of the shepherd, who stood before him laughing. Since he asks this question, it is clear that he does not recognize himself in the shepherd at this point in Part III. The shepherd is a “transformed, illuminated, *laughing* being,” he is the perfect practitioner of the “gay science.” Laughter is an integral part of the new science that Nietzsche outlines in §1 of *The Gay Science*. Zarathustra has never heard a laughter that mocks existence as a whole and it “gnaws” [frißt] at him. It agitates him; he feels drawn toward this laughter, but does not understand it. The riddle is like that of Oedipus, one who does not know his own identity. Zarathustra is dwarf, shepherd, and the laughing being—but he does not make the connection.

No one ventures an answer to Zarathustra’s riddle, for the reason that he must solve it himself (like Oedipus). He sails on for four more days on the ship. There he promises to

³⁰⁴ *KGW* VI/1: 198. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 127.

work on himself in order to prepare for the arrival of his children, whom he will say are about to arrive at the end of Part IV. He must remain alone in order to accomplish his completion. Once he reaches dry land, Zarathustra does not go directly to his mountain cave where his eagle and snake await him. He decides to wander among the people and through various towns. He eventually returns to his cave after a period of wandering. Back in his cave, once he is completely alone, he confronts his most abysmal thought in “The Convalescent.”

A few days after his return to the cave, Zarathustra jumps up like a madman [ein Toller] and screams as though someone else were lying in bed with him. He summons his abysmal thought: “I, Zarathustra, the advocate of life, the advocate of suffering, the advocate of the circle—you I summon, my most abysmal thought!”³⁰⁵ However, he is immediately seized by nausea and collapses under the weight of this thought. For a long time he remained as though he were dead; but when he finally regains himself, he refuses food and drink for seven days. In the meanwhile, his eagle gathered food for him, which he does not touch until the seventh day. The first thing he picks up is an apple—the traditional symbol of knowledge/wisdom. He does not eat the fruit; he only smells it. This is an inversion of the story of Genesis. Instead of eating the fruit and being kicked out of the Garden of Eden, and thus inaugurating a history that is driven by the forces of good and evil, Zarathustra smells the apple and is invited to return to the garden by his animals (one of which is a snake).³⁰⁶ Nietzsche’s inversion of this beginning point of the Western intellectual tradition trades a

³⁰⁵ *KGW VI/1: 267. Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 174.

³⁰⁶ Paul S. Loeb also notes the fact that this is a parody of the story of Genesis in his article “The Dwarf, The Dragon, and the Ring of Eternal Recurrence: A Wagnerian Key to the Riddle of Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*,” *Nietzsche-Studien* 31 (2002): 109. But he does not note the connection this story has to morality/science.

dialectical understanding of history (in which becoming, or history, is a sign of guilt) for that of the “innocence of becoming.”

The animals please Zarathustra with their babbling, and he asks them to continue talking with him. They speak to him, saying: “Everything goes, everything comes back; the wheel of being rolls eternally. Everything dies, everything blossoms again, the year of beings runs eternally.”³⁰⁷ Zarathustra laughs at his animals and responds that they know that a monster crawled into his throat and choked him for seven days. He was finally able to bit off its head and spit it away. He cries that the animals are cruel for watching his agony—they are like human beings in this way. But human beings are not cruel enough for him: “Oh my animals, this alone have I learned so far, that for mankind their most evil is necessary for their best—that whatever is most evil is their best *power* and the hardest stone for the highest creator; and that mankind must become better *and* more evil.”³⁰⁸ Zarathustra’s demand that human beings become more evil is a sign of his Dionysian wisdom, for this is what Dionysus asks for at the end of *Beyond Good and Evil*. He wants humans to be amoral in the same way that life is amoral (and in the same way that the eternal recurrence is an amoral conception of history). However, mankind is not evil enough yet; human beings are too small—even those who are considered great. This thought makes him shudder again.

The animals speak again, commanding Zarathustra to go outside “where the world awaits you like a garden.” Zarathustra must sing again and he must fashion a lyre so that he can make music. It is significant that Zarathustra’s animals are the ones who remind him of his destiny [Schicksal], which he was trying to determine in the opening scene of Part III. In

³⁰⁷ *KGW VI/1*: 268. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 175.

³⁰⁸ *KGW VI/1*: 270. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 176. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

“The Wanderer,” Zarathustra says: “I stand before my highest mountains and before my longest hike: therefore I must descend deeper than I ever climbed before:—descend deeper into suffering than I ever climbed before, down into its blackest flood! My destiny wills it so: Well then! I am ready.”³⁰⁹ His abysmal thought is the greatest weight, i.e., the eternal recurrence, which drags him down further than any other thought. His animals remind him of his destiny: “Behold, *you are the teacher of the eternal recurrence*—that now is *your destiny!*”³¹⁰ The difficulty for him is that this was “never before a human’s destiny.” Zarathustra has reached the deepest point, his going under is now his coming over. All existence has been questioned in the experiment of the eternal recurrence—this is why Zarathustra laughs at his animals.

After the long speech of his animals, Zarathustra remains silent because he is conversing with his soul. He speaks of his thought of recurrence with no one but himself. When he asks his soul to sing to him, his soul responds with the two songs that conclude Part III, “The Other Dance Song” and “The Seven Seals (Or: the Yes and Amen Song).” His soul has become Dionysian, for it can only sing now. Thus he goes about praising life in the first song. After his song, life responds that Zarathustra does not love her enough and that he will abandon her between the hours of midnight and one. He answers, “Yes, but you also know—” His thought breaks off into a whisper so that only life can hear it. She responds: “You *know* that, oh Zarathustra? No one knows that.” It is at this point that Zarathustra loves life more than all of his wisdom. He loves life in its wisdom, for she knows what no one else knows—the eternal recurrence of the same. Here is “gay science” where

³⁰⁹ *KGW VI/1*: 191. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 122.

³¹⁰ *KGW VI/1*: 271. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 177. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

“profundity lovingly joins hands with passion,” where life and wisdom commingle and dwell in unity. Once the clock strikes twelve, there is silence; it would seem that Zarathustra and life have parted ways.

In “The Seven Seals (Or: The Yes and Amen Song)” it is unclear who is speaking. The passage does not end with the characteristic “Thus spoke Zarathustra” (or even its alternative “Thus sang Zarathustra”). Paradoxically, in his parting with life, Zarathustra has been irrevocably joined to life, the eternal one. The voice that speaks is life’s (Dionysus’s). All of the seven seals end with the following lines: “Oh how then could I not lust for eternity and for the nuptial ring of rings—the ring of recurrence! Never yet have I found the woman from whom I wanted children, unless it were this woman whom I love: for I love you, oh eternity! *For I love you, oh eternity!*”³¹¹ As the conclusion of the original edition of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, it would seem that Zarathustra has been consumed by the earth, which he sought to sanctify with the teaching of the overman in the “Prologue.” Zarathustra follows the path of Empedocles, who was reputed to have tossed himself into the volcano of Mt. Etna. However, Zarathustra emerges again and again in the same way that life emerges again and again only to overcome itself.

Parts I-III of *Zarathustra* track the change in language of the character of Zarathustra, which is indicative of the changing nature of Zarathustra. Friedrich Georg Jünger notes how Nietzsche continues the work of freeing oneself from the constraint of dead concepts that he began in *The Birth of Tragedy*.³¹² Throughout the originally published parts of the work,

³¹¹ KGW VI/1: 283. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 184-185.

³¹² “The precariousness of *Zarathustra* lies in an in-between, in the move back from intellectuality to poetry, from the sharp, penetrating prose of concepts and thoughts to the language of picture and symbol, which is somehow solemn and ceremonial, without advancing to the pure dithyramb, to a rigorous, pure metrical and

Zarathustra teeters between didactic statements and poetry. He does not move to the pure dithyramb, to singing until the conclusion of Part III when he surrenders himself to life by parting with it. His animals “notice that he still has not mastered the full, sharp, penetrating sounds of the flute of Dionysian music; there’s too much instruction, admonition, lecture, and argument in his sermon.”³¹³ They do not understand why he still speaks when he should make a lyre and sing. Zarathustra eventually does dissolve into song, but only once he is joined to life in “The Seven Seals.” Music finally overcomes the stifling effect of cold concepts and the constraints of language (logos); Dionysus/life is served at this point. As Zarathustra dissolves into song, the tragedy/comedy concludes.

Fourth and Final Part

The nature of Part IV is ambiguous, for it remains a matter of debate among Nietzsche scholars to this day. Nietzsche wrote the “Fourth and Final Part” of *Zarathustra* in 1885 and distributed a few copies among his close friends. Since it was not published along with the other three parts during his lifetime, some scholars think of Part IV as a burlesque, something tacked on as an afterthought. Others insist on the structural integrity of *Zarathustra* as a whole—Part IV must be considered along with the other three parts. Nietzsche would not have published the final part of *Zarathustra* and distributed it privately if he had not intended it to form the proper conclusion to the work. This is true even if he

musical form . . . Zarathustra as preacher—that is somehow ambiguous. Is it still necessary to preach? Why doesn’t he dance and sing, why doesn’t he make music?” *Nietzsche*, 13.

³¹³ Ibid., 14-15.

only wanted his close friends to read it.³¹⁴ The relation of the fourth part to the rest of the work is that of the revaluation of all values to the eternal recurrence. Parts I-III build up to the climax of the eternal recurrence, which Nietzsche admits is the central thought of the work. Part IV already begins the project that Nietzsche will be engrossed in for the remaining years of his productive career, the revaluation of all values. A brief discussion of Part IV is necessary to see how the eternal recurrence forms the basis for the project of revaluation.

Part IV opens with the section titled “The Honey Sacrifice.” Zarathustra has become older but remains in his cave with his animals. The eagle and the snake ask him if he is on the watch for his happiness. He responds: “What does happiness matter! I haven’t strived for happiness for a long time, I strive for my work.”³¹⁵ His first words concern his abandonment of the goal of happiness. What this indicates is Zarathustra’s break with the Western intellectual tradition. Socrates equated happiness with virtue, and virtue was considered to be a special kind of knowledge. Plato went further stating that the wisest man was the just man (and the just man was always happier than the unjust man). What matters to Zarathustra is his work, for he wants honey to use as bait to catch the “oddest human fishes.” Just as life had a golden fishing rod in both “The Dance Song” of Part II and “The Other Dance Song” of Part III, Zarathustra now has the fishing rod. He wants to use it to raise human beings up to himself; he is not ready to descend among them.

³¹⁴ In his recent biography of Nietzsche, Julian Young insists that Nietzsche believed that he wrote only for the few—those with similar thoughts and philosophical dispositions. Part IV of *Zarathustra* forms the natural dénouement to the book as a whole even if it were only privately distributed among Nietzsche’s friends and family.

³¹⁵ *KGW* VI/1: 291. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 191.

In the next section, “The Cry of Distress,” Zarathustra’s wish is granted. He will not descend to find the “oddest human fishes” because they are coming to his territory, the mountains (his *Hazar*, a chain of mountains in eastern Persia). The old soothsayer has come to Zarathustra to tempt him to his final sin, pity for these higher men. While speaking with the soothsayer by his mountain cave, Zarathustra hears the cry of distress of the higher men. He leaves to search for these higher men and ensure their safety while the old soothsayer remains in his cave. In the following sections, Zarathustra travels in his territory and comes across several different characters: the two kings; the conscientious of spirit; the magician; the last pope; the ugliest human being; the voluntary beggar; and the shadow. Finally, after encountering all of these characters in his territory, he wants to quench his thirst because it is now noon—the hour when all shadows are shortest. Instead of plucking grapes, though, he decides to sleep under the tree. He finally arises and returns to his cave where he finds all of the men he encountered during his walk that day.

The cry of distress he hears from his own cave, and he knows that all of the men he had encountered were higher men. However, he is displeased with them and says: “You may indeed be higher men, collectively. But for me—you are not high and strong enough.”³¹⁶ He tells them that they are merely steps over which still higher and greater men will pass on their way to Zarathustra’s height. These men are distorted images of Zarathustra, which cannot be made to reflect him rightly. Zarathustra advises the higher men in “On the Higher Man” to “*learn to laugh over and past yourselves.*”³¹⁷ They do not know how to do this, however, because they do not practice the “gay science” like Zarathustra. The higher men’s attempt to

³¹⁶ *KGW VI/1*: 346. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 228.

³¹⁷ *KGW VI/1*: 363. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 240.

take the eternal recurrence to heart falters—even they are not ready for it. All of the higher men are on the run from the last man and they seek protection from the highest man, Zarathustra, in his cave. The process of leveling-down, which was on the rise in the 19th century, threatens to reduce everything to sameness. The teaching of the soothsayer is what these higher men are afraid of: “Everything is empty, everything is the same, everything was!”³¹⁸ The hierarchy of being has been reduced to the lowest common denominator—the last man cuts everything down to his own contemptible size.

Zarathustra demands a revaluation of all values. He wants to smash the old table of values and make a new one—only through the destruction of the old can the new be created. In the “Preface” to *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche says that those who will understand the work are those who understand *Zarathustra*. The project of revaluation begins with Zarathustra—his “work” [Werke] is foundational for this task. It is important to think of why Zarathustra emphasizes his work over happiness. In the Aristotelian tradition, happiness was an activity that was already contained within the activity—the telos was already always present. In this way, happiness must be considered the completion/perfection of human life. It would be all too easy to think of the eternal recurrence as an activity—something self-enclosed. Zarathustra, on the other hand, is concerned with his work, a process that aims at something beyond itself. The eternal recurrence is self-contained—but it is self-contained becoming, it is not static and always complete. It is his work that points beyond the traditional framework of Western thinking. This is why he finds contemptible the higher men. They may be the highest specimens of humanity but they are still not high enough because they have not

³¹⁸ *KGW* VI/1: 168. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 105.

transcended the tradition like Zarathustra. Zarathustra awaits his children at the end of Part IV: “*My children are near, my children.*” His children are the ones who have gone beyond even Zarathustra to a place beyond humanity.

A New Vision: Recurrence and Revaluation

The relation between *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is not that difficult if one pays attention to what Nietzsche has to say about both of these works. Both works constitute a decisive change in the way Nietzsche does philosophy—especially *Zarathustra*. The “death of God” results in the crumbling of the edifice of Alexandrian culture. Its myth of mythlessness (i.e., objectivity) evaporates along with scientific optimism. For this reason, Nietzsche wants to sing a new myth in his *Zarathustra*; he wants to give human existence the most solid foundation in the eternal recurrence. The “gay science,” with its emphasis on song and the combination of wisdom and life, must, therefore, be considered along with *Zarathustra* for a proper interpretation.

Throughout his later writings, Nietzsche usually says that Zarathustra is the teacher of the eternal recurrence. But what does it mean to be a teacher after the “death of God”? For Nietzsche, the teacher is the questioner, the one who pushes questioning to the furthest extreme (e.g., Zarathustra’s questioning of existence as a whole). The traditional sense of teaching—the dialectic between student and teacher—no longer holds for the simple reason that traditional science no longer holds. Science has crumbled since the ultimate pillar of God (the guarantor of truth and the ground of logical reasoning) has been removed. Traditional teaching also begins to falter because there are no longer the same common

terms—the “death of God” literally changes everything about our existence.³¹⁹ Therefore, teaching too necessarily changes. This may explain why Zarathustra never directly states his doctrine throughout *Zarathustra*: he becomes frightened by his thought and refuses to tell his disciples about it in “On Redemption”; his conversation with the dwarf in “On the Vision and the Riddle” is in the subjunctive (he only asks questions); his animals in “The Convalescent” tell him that he is the teacher of the eternal recurrence; he whispers into the ear of life about what he knows. The eternal recurrence is only ever *implied* in all of these encounters.

According to Nietzsche, the teacher is no longer the source and communicator of knowledge, the philosopher who descends to the cave in order to turn others around toward the light. In Nietzsche’s inversion of Plato, the wise man leaves the people and is called the teacher. Zarathustra only converses with his own soul about the eternal recurrence. I believe the reason for this can be found in what has already been said about the nature of “gay science.” Nietzsche’s new vision of science entails hypothesis and experimentation. Zarathustra is his own teacher because he is an experimenter [Versucher], and his own nature is the subject of his investigations. It is unclear what the nature of human being is after the death of God. Zarathustra establishes his own identity through his experiment of the eternal recurrence—Zarathustra teaches himself about the nature of Zarathustra through suffering from the greatest experiment. His acceptance of this teaching, *his own* teaching, unifies Zarathustra through his affirmation of existence as a whole (even the ugly, bad aspects of it). Thus, the eternal recurrence is Nietzsche’s fundamental thought because it revalues

³¹⁹ Language is also included in this transformation. Grammatical structures can no longer reflect the world around us and yet we still hold fast to them: “I am afraid that we have not got rid of God because we still have faith in grammar . . .” *KGW VI/3: 72. Twilight of the Idols*, 170.

everything in existence. It is this thought that forms the basis of his criticism of the Western intellectual tradition in *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morals*.³²⁰

Everything, including the human perception of time, needs to be reevaluated once the truth of the death of God is taken to heart. This is because *everything changes*. The linear, teleological view of time as a dialectic, as the guilt of becoming, striving toward reunification with the source of things, collapses once the madman's proclamation is realized: "*We have killed him—you and I!*"³²¹ The synthesis of all opposites and contradiction in the highest being (the conceit of Hegelian idealism) is impossible now that the third term within Hegel's logic is absent. All that remains is the "eternal recurrence of war and peace"—i.e., war followed by peace, followed by war, followed by peace, ad infinitum. The perpetual conflict of opposites with no resolution results in the unending struggle for power over opposites—this is why life proclaims that the world is the will to power in "On Self-Overcoming" in Part II of *Zarathustra*. The tension between opposites with no possibility for resolution in a higher synthesis results in a deepening in the well of power: "There is a lake that one day refused to let itself flow off and formed a dam where it used to flow off: ever since, this lake rises higher and higher. Perhaps this very renunciation will lend us the strength to bear renunciation; perhaps man will rise ever higher when he no longer *flows off* into a god."³²²

³²⁰ Löwith also understands the significance of the recurrence for Nietzsche's project of revaluation: "From *Zarathustra* on, everything further fits easily into a philosophy of the eternal recurrence as the self-overcoming of extreme nihilism. The critique of all values so far that is contained in *The Will to Power*, the No to modernity, presupposes the already gained Yes to the eternal cycle of things." *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, 24. He does not, however, consider the teaching within the context of Nietzsche's "gay science."

³²¹ *KGW* V/2: 159. *The Gay Science*, 120.

³²² *KGW* V/2: 208. *The Gay Science*, 162.

The tension that comes from the strife of the opposites generates ever-newer possibilities within reality. This is why there is tension within the eternal recurrence—this is why the experiment of the recurrence has the capacity to “transform and possibly crush” those who are tempted by it. Eternal recurrence has the potential to bring one to the height of joy by bringing one to the depth of despair. Zarathustra’s going under is at the same time his coming over.

Nietzsche’s thought of the eternal recurrence constitutes his foundation for the critique of the moral interpretation of existence. The unification of wisdom/science and life in this thought is crucial: one’s knowledge (theory) is not used as a correction to one’s life (practice). Wisdom and life “lovingly” [zärtlich] join hands in an eternal dance, in the dance of Dionysus. Life is itself a “means to knowledge” if one considers life as the testing ground for hypotheses. To experiment on oneself will result in the discovery of ever-new truths, ones that were not within our grasp because of the taboo placed on the human being. “Gay science,” or the response to existence after the death of God, is the ability to question all existence—its fundamental hypothesis, the eternal recurrence, questions (or revalues) everything. Anything other than the total affirmation of existence, including the ugly, monstrous, and evil parts of existence, is a form of nihilism. This means that Christianity, and its secular offspring, idealism are nihilistic because they deny the absolute importance of the present life in favor of the eternal life afterwards.

Chapter 4: The “Critical Stage” of Nietzsche’s Philosophy

Shortly after completing *Zarathustra* Nietzsche seems to change the direction of his thinking. In his next two works, *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) and *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), he criticizes everything from Christianity and otherworldly religions to idealism and modern science. His critical gaze pierces to the core of Western thinking, which he believes has succumbed to a moral interpretation of reality. Morality, “good and evil,” becomes the target of his all-comprehensive critique of the Western intellectual tradition. This stage of his thought has often been said to come at the height of his philosophical powers—it is the time when he questions most radically and most thoroughly. Scholars breathe a sigh of relief after the ambiguous nature of *Zarathustra* and are glad to see Nietzsche return to the themes of his earlier works (such as *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Untimely Meditations*). However, there is a necessary connection between his most ambiguous work and those that follow. Without a proper understanding of the central teaching of *Zarathustra*, the eternal recurrence, the power of his critique is diminished. My purpose in this chapter is to show how his later critical works draw the strength of their arguments from a carefully considered positive position (i.e., his philosophy of history).

Introduction

From the late 1870s until his descent into insanity a decade later, Nietzsche lived alone, traveling throughout the Alps. As his personal contact with friends and relatives gradually dwindled, his correspondence with complete strangers slowly began to increase. Men and women whom he had never met began to take an interest in the hermit Nietzsche.

His intellectual integrity and rigor impressed them; his critique of morality in earlier works such as *Daybreak* and *The Gay Science* had piqued their curiosity. Scholars from other countries began to seek out Nietzsche.³²³ This included the Danish professor Georg Brandes and the American journalist Karl Knortz, both of whom attempted to give an outline of Nietzsche's thought. Knortz had requested Nietzsche's works in early 1888 in order to write an essay on his philosophy in English. Writing to Knortz on June 21, 1888, Nietzsche gives him some peculiar advice when it comes to reading his works: "I would almost like to advise you to begin with the latest works, which are the most far-reaching and important ones (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse* and *Genealogie der Moral*)."³²⁴ This seems like an odd suggestion, especially in light of the fact that in the "Preface" of the later work Nietzsche tells his audience to do the opposite.³²⁵ He says that people should start with his earlier works and wind their way toward this most recent work. Why would he contradict himself?

The most probable reason for advising Knortz to do the opposite of what is said in the "Preface" to the *Genealogy* is that his later works deal with the same topics as his earlier works except in greater detail and rigor. In his "Attempt at Self-Criticism," which he wrote as a second preface to *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1886, Nietzsche notes how he had gotten hold of "a problem with horns, not necessarily a bull, but at any rate a *new* problem; today I would say that it was the *problem of science* itself, science grasped for the first time as something

³²³ "I have readers everywhere else [but Germany]—nothing but *select* intelligences and proven characters, educated to high positions and duties; I even have real geniuses among my readers. In Vienna, in St. Petersburg, in Stockholm, in Copenhagen, in Paris and New York—I have been discovered everywhere: *not*, however, in Germany, the flatlands of Europe . . ." *KGW* VI/3: 299. *Ecce Homo*, 102. Although this might be an exaggeration on Nietzsche's part, his correspondence confirms that some outsiders were beginning to take an interest in his work.

³²⁴ June 21, 1888, *KGB* III/5: 340 (no. 1050). *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, 299.

³²⁵ This also would appear to contradict the methodology at work in this dissertation—see the "Introduction" above (footnote no. 16).

problematic and questionable.”³²⁶ His main problem in his “first born” was that of science, a difficulty that plagued him in his later works from the “History” essay up to *The Gay Science* (as I have already noted). However, Nietzsche says that his latest works are “the most far-reaching and important ones [weitgreifendsten und wichtigsten].” Also, in 1886, he notes that *The Birth of Tragedy* is “a first book in every bad sense of the word despite its old man’s problem [seines greisenhaften Problems].”³²⁷ The problem he dealt with as a young man was too mature for him in 1872—now he is mature enough for it. It seems that Nietzsche has turned in a circle in his writings, returning to where he first began—a critique of science. What would make *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morality* different from his first works? Why does he consider them “the most far-reaching and important”? I believe that both of these questions can be answered if one places the two works in the context of Nietzsche’s overall development—i.e., after *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and its main teaching, the eternal recurrence.

After Zarathustra

In the years that followed his most ambiguous work (1886-1887) it seems that Nietzsche changes the direction of his thinking. While he was concerned with finding the correct expression for his “most abysmal thought” between 1882 and 1885, he came to the conclusion that the eternal recurrence is “the highest possible formula of affirmation.” The emphasis he places on this teaching is appropriate: it is his task, for the recurrence affirms every aspect of existence without subtraction or alteration. It is, then, the positive ground for

³²⁶ KGW III/1: 7. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 4-5. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

³²⁷ KGW III/1: 7. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 5.

his attack on the Western intellectual and religious tradition, which he identifies as the root of nihilism. His excitement over Zarathustra's teaching is well founded. But, suddenly, the eternal recurrence drops out completely from his published works. He stops talking about it in *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morality*, instead he seems to shift his focus to critiques of modern science, truth, and morality/religion. This begs the question: "What happened to the eternal recurrence, which seemed to be everywhere in his previous work, *Zarathustra*?"

Most scholars in response to this question would simply say that Nietzsche does not have a systematic approach (like Löwith and Jaspers). Nietzsche's denial of truth results in a fragmented view of reality—and this is reflected in the disorder of his aphorisms and topics among his various publications. Evidence for this claim can be found in one of his later works: "I distrust all systematizers and avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity."³²⁸ In their interpretation of his project, the eternal recurrence drops out because Nietzsche arbitrarily turns his attention toward criticism. However, such an interpretation is an oversimplification of Nietzsche's philosophy—it is all too easy to interpret his thought in this way. This aphorism may apply to Hegel and the all-encompassing systems of the German Idealists (and others like them), but it does not eliminate the possibility of a systematic approach and rigorous thinking. In reality, Nietzsche is a systematic thinker; he is an unaphoristic writer of aphorisms. There is a specific method to the structure and ordering of his aphorisms within the individual works; and there is a specific order to the topics he covers among his works considered as a whole. He does not jump around from topic to topic

³²⁸ *KGW VI/3: 57. Twilight of the Idols*, 159.

at whim, but has a specific goal in mind.³²⁹ This should indicate that Nietzsche has a coherent view of things.

With this in mind, it can be said that the eternal recurrence is preparatory for the project of the revaluation of all values. Acceptance of this teaching necessarily entails a monumental shift—and the possibility of this change is prepared for by tearing down all of the earlier values found within the Western intellectual and religious tradition. Nietzsche writes in *Ecce Homo* that his task is two-fold: “The task for the years that followed [1886-1887] was as clear as could be. After the yea-saying part of my task had been solved it was time for the no-saying, *no-doing* half: the revaluation of all values so far, the great war,—summoning a day of decision.”³³⁰ The affirmative, positive part of his task was that of the articulation of the eternal recurrence; the negative part of the task comes after the ground has been laid by his new science. For Nietzsche, then, the eternal recurrence and the revaluation of all values go together like two sides of the same coin; once you say “yes” you must then say “no.” Dionysus is not only eternally creative, he is also eternally destructive: “One of the preconditions of a *Dionysian* task is, most crucially, the hardness of a hammer, the *joy even in destruction*.”³³¹ Creation of values in the eternal recurrence entails the destruction of the

³²⁹ Karl Jaspers also considers Nietzsche’s thought to have a specific goal and definite pattern, although it takes a great deal of effort to understand the point of Nietzsche’s thinking. He goes on, though, to say that there can only be a “guiding idea” in interpreting Nietzsche’s thinking, for it [his thinking] “will always elude all attempts at a well-ordered presentation.” *An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity*, 13. Jaspers grasps one of the largest difficulties in interpreting Nietzsche: that Nietzsche can only be understood by referring to both his life and thought (writings) at the same time. But doing this never results in the harmony of the whole, in Jaspers opinion. To a certain extent Jaspers is making the same claim as Löwith in regard to the teaching of the eternal recurrence—i.e., it is self-contradictory. Nevertheless, I still claim that Nietzsche is a systematic thinker.

³³⁰ *KGW VI/3*: 348. *Ecce Homo*, 134.

³³¹ *KGW VI/3*: 347. *Ecce Homo*, 134.

old values. Nietzsche awaits the creation of new values based on the eternal recurrence after he destroys the old values in *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morality*.

Negative Works

The style and structure of these two works differs drastically from *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Considering what he had just written, it is surprising to see Nietzsche return with a magnifying glass to what had started his career as a writer—the “problem of science.” What is even more surprising is that *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morality* are arguably the most similar of Nietzsche’s works.³³² (His other works are distinctive in their differences in style from all the rest.) These later two are similar in three respects: they are both polemical; they are both preparatory in nature; and, they share a similar methodology. Instead of treating these two works chronologically (as I would have done in earlier chapters), I will consider them together since they share so much in common. For a proper understanding of his arguments in these two works, it is necessary to examine the polemical, preparatory, and methodological aspects of these works in more detail.

Although he only identifies one of the two works as a “Polemic” (*Genealogy*), Nietzsche says *Beyond Good and Evil* can also be considered a polemical work. “This book (1886) is in essence a *critique of modernity*, including modern science, modern art—even modern politics—, along with indications of an opposite type who is as un-modern as

³³² In fact, as Julian Young points out, Nietzsche intended the *Genealogy* to be “an expansion and elaboration” of *Beyond Good and Evil*—an expression that was on the back of the title page in the first edition (no longer in the Colli and Montinari collected works). In his correspondence with his publisher, Nietzsche also toyed with the idea of using the “catchier” title of *Beyond Good and Evil* with *Appendix: Three Essays* following the subtitle. See Young’s *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, 459.

possible, a noble, affirmative type.”³³³ In both of these works, he is on the attack especially against “modern ideas,” whose roots lie within the Judeo-Christian (and Platonic) tradition. His demolition of these ideas does not take the form of a disinterested critique—Nietzsche is an interested party to the demise of the Western intellectual tradition. In fact, his destruction of morality (and everything that stems from it) comes from within. He often describes his work as the manifestation of the self-overcoming of morality, morality turning into immorality. This is especially true in these two works, wherein he criticizes his former virtue of “intellectual integrity/honesty” [Redlichkeit] and attempts to replace it with the expression of *his* will.³³⁴ His description of himself as dynamite is, therefore, appropriate—by his will, he is going to implode the tradition (everything will crumble inward).

Even though the launching point for his critique of modernity is the eternal recurrence, it remains hypothetical in nature. Of course, as I have explained in the previous chapter, this does not dilute its significance for Nietzsche’s thinking as a whole. Eternal recurrence remains the fundamental, “heaviest,” thought for him. Nevertheless, it is true that both *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morality* must be considered preparatory works. Nietzsche says so in regard to the latter: “A psychologist’s three crucial preparatory works [entscheidende Vorarbeiten] for a revaluation of all values.”³³⁵ Similarly, the first work can be considered preliminary based on the subtitle: “A Prelude to the Philosophy of the Future.” His thought of the eternal recurrence is key in the preparatory nature of these two works. Nietzsche begins to tear down the old values based on this new

³³³ KGW VI/3: 348. *Ecce Homo*, 135.

³³⁴ I will discuss Nietzsche’s rejection of this virtue in greater detail in the next chapter.

³³⁵ KGW VI/3: 351. *Ecce Homo*, 136.

teaching—he calls *Zarathustra* a “counter-ideal”—in order to make room for the new values. This may explain why he says that *Beyond Good and Evil* contains indications [Fingerzeige] of the new noble type that will be responsible for forming the new tables of values. Both of these works use the counter-ideal of Zarathustra (and his teaching) as a hypothetical basis for the critique of modernity.

Since his goal is the destruction of the old values, it is necessary to consider Nietzsche’s methodology in these two works. One must pay careful attention to the kind of arguments he offers because he is imploding the tradition. Just as in the demolition of a building, for this implosion to work, one must set the charges in the appropriate locations so that nothing is left standing. (The foundation was ripped up when God died.) All that Nietzsche has to do is place his charges on the main pillars of the tradition in order to make them collapse—the rest of the edifice will fall immediately to the ground. His order of attack is important: he first goes after truth (and, therewith, philosophy as a whole), then he attacks science, and finally religion. Science includes not only modern science, which has its foundation in the new conception of nature articulated in the works of Bacon and Descartes, but also the tradition that stretches all the way back to Socrates and his optimism. His critique of religion includes Judaism, Christianity, and any other religion that posits a world beyond this one. The conception of truth is the supporting column for both science and religion, which may explain why Nietzsche starts *Beyond Good and Evil* with a critique of truth in the first section. It is for this reason that I will follow the thematic order within these two works in the three sections that follow this one.

Nietzsche's preferred argument within these two works is genealogical. A genealogical argument combines three separate elements: philological, historical, and psychological analyses of a phenomenon.³³⁶ Making use of the skills he acquired as a philologist, Nietzsche observes the origin of moral concepts in language—and how that language has changed based on who was using the terms. His use of philological analysis is most evident in the first essay in the *Genealogy*, “Good and Evil,” “Good and Bad,” and it ultimately enlarges into the larger circles of historical and psychological analysis. People remain unknown to themselves because they have not sought themselves—much like a genealogy functions as a source of knowledge about one's past (and, thus, allows one to know who one is), Nietzsche's use of this genre does the same. Nietzsche's genealogical arguments show how things are interconnected as forms of life that constantly flow away and back into one another; they show that things like our moral values are not absolute, but have specific historical, all-too-human, origins and continue to evolve (and devolve). No one knows what good and evil are because we have taken the origin of moral concepts in a metaphysical realm on trust; therefore, from the Socratic perspective, we do not know ourselves.

When I came to mankind, I found them sitting on an old conceit: they all conceited to have known for a long time what is good and evil for humanity. To them all talk of virtue seemed an old worn out thing; and whoever wanted to sleep well even spoke about “good”

³³⁶ Another way to say what Nietzsche is doing in this work is expressed by James I. Porter when he says: “Nietzsche's genealogy has as its primary aim to unsettle the claims of moral reason by unsettling those of historical reason. And the latter is accomplished by illustrating how fragile any product of historical sense can be.” One need only consider what Nietzsche says in §357 of *The Gay Science* to see that this is true. But I think that Porter overreads the *Genealogy* when he says (next): “*Genealogy mimics the fragility and confusion of historical sense. It is meant to be a symptom of the modern cultural subject and of the cunning artistry of its unconscious mechanisms.*” See Porter's article, “Theater of the Absurd: Genealogy as Cultural Critique” in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84/2 (2010): 319-320. It would seem strange for the *Genealogy* to function in this way when placed in context with *Beyond Good and Evil* (Porter does not connect the claims about truth and science in the latter with those in the former).

and “evil” before going to bed. I disturbed this sleepiness when I taught: what is good and evil *no one knows yet*—except for the creator!³³⁷

According to Zarathustra’s speech in “On Old and New Tablets,” only those who are creators (of values) know the meaning of good and evil. One needs to examine the history of humankind to find the origin of moral concepts because, Nietzsche believes, it is all-too-human.

The *Genealogy* thus already takes aim at the tradition because Socrates and Plato thought the study of the “idea of the Good” was the highest form of contemplation, which leads men away from the earthly (and human) and toward the metaphysical. Psychology is all-important to Nietzsche’s critique because of its focus on the human mind’s potential for creativity and passivity. As he notes at the end of the first part of *Beyond Good and Evil*, psychology must be recognized as the “queen of the sciences,” all the other sciences exist and prepare for it. “From now on, psychology is again the path to the fundamental problems” [Denn Psychologie ist nunmehr wieder der Weg zu den Grundproblemen].³³⁸ Now that God is dead, psychology has taken the place of metaphysics because human being is now the highest being. Nietzsche’s philosophy is a philosophy of values, which means it is essentially a psychology of the value-positing being.³³⁹ Since all values are subjective, one must examine the human subject who posits values. The main problem shifts away from the traditional one of the West—i.e., “What is truth?”—to a new question—“What is the *value* of

³³⁷ *KGW* VI/1: 242-243. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 157. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

³³⁸ *KGW* VI/2: 33. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 24.

³³⁹ This is something that Eugen Fink points out: “The basic equation ‘being equals value’ characterizes his [Nietzsche’s] philosophy. It cannot be ignored without ignoring Nietzsche on the whole. It is his basic, operative presupposition. Perhaps all human psychology is a finite patchwork where fundamental assumptions always remain obscure.” *Nietzsche’s Philosophy*, 11. Perhaps this is why Nietzsche says that we are unknown to ourselves—science does not take into account its own assumptions (which are posited values) concerning the nature of reality.

truth?” or “What does truth mean to me?” Truth can become a problem only after its highest manifestation is no longer living—truth does not hold sway anymore, which may mean that falsity is a necessary condition of all life. Nietzsche’s genealogical argument begins here with truth and shows how moral concepts originate out of their opposites; thus, there are no oppositions in valuations with any metaphysical basis.

The Value of Truth

Nietzsche’s opening reflection in the “Preface” to *Beyond Good and Evil* sets the tone for the development of his thought in the years 1886-1888. “Suppose that truth is a woman—and why not? Aren’t there reasons for suspecting that all philosophers, to the extent that they have been dogmatists, have not really understood women? That the grotesque seriousness [schauerliche Ernst] of their approach towards the truth and the clumsy advances they have made so far are unsuitable ways of pressing their suit with a woman?”³⁴⁰ Truth, as is often forgotten by those in the English speaking world, is gendered in several languages (both ancient and modern) such as Greek, Latin, French, and German [αληθεια, veritas, vérité, and Wahrheit]. Thus, Nietzsche is saying that truth has eluded thinkers in the ancient, the medieval, and the modern world. The reason that truth has “spurned” philosophers from all times is that their “grotesque seriousness” is not the proper approach to a woman. Dogmatism, or the belief in the unquestionable nature of truth, is dying because truth continually turns philosophers away. “Perhaps nobody has ever been truthful enough

³⁴⁰ KGW VI/2: 3. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 3.

about what ‘truthfulness’ is.”³⁴¹ Has no one ever questioned the value of truth before and might this not be the reason why truth constantly eludes thinkers?

The scientific seriousness that is the cornerstone of dogmatism is really built on the ground of superstition (or assumptions, such as the value of the good, and truth). So far no one in the West has been rigorous enough to escape this all-too-human prejudice toward truth. Philosophers are serious when it comes to the truth—there is an assumed connection between the approach (seriousness) and the object of pursuit (truth). (It should be noted that “seriousness” [Ernst] is masculine while “truth” [Wahrheit] is feminine in German, something of which Nietzsche would undoubtedly be aware, and is perhaps intentional on his part. Is the proper way to approach a woman with serious, dry demeanor or one of playfulness?) But what if truth is a woman—i.e., an actor, who plays with appearances?³⁴² What if truth is playful, hiding behind various masks, and vindictive like a woman? What if truth is not good, but exists beyond good and evil? These are questions that Nietzsche poses in *Beyond Good and Evil*. This work is really a continuation of the “gay science” he had developed earlier—but it is pushed to the most extreme when all of *his* truths at the end of the book are open to laughter (see §296). Everything is susceptible to mockery and parody, even existence as a whole (including the human being, which was considered a serious thing for the past two millennia). The correct approach to a woman, then, is not that of being straightforward (i.e., objectivity) but one of a back and forth, paying attention to appearances

³⁴¹ *KGW* VI/2: 103. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 73.

³⁴² In a section of Book V of *The Gay Science* (in its second edition of 1887), Nietzsche talks about the problem of the actor. At the end of the section he speaks about women: “*Women*: consider the whole history of women—*mustn’t* they be actresses first and foremost?” *KGW* V/2: 291. *The Gay Science*, 226.

and flourishes—of a dance.³⁴³ One assumes too much when one supposes that the way one pursues something is the only way; dancing entails the back and forth movement of two (the seeker and the truth) and not the movement of only one. Can everyone approach truth—do all have the essential qualities of the truth-seeker?

Socrates was the first to make truth something boring, according to Nietzsche, by identifying it with simplicity of speech in the *Apology* (see 17a-18a). His own defense before the court in Athens is a testament to his conception of truth. Nietzsche took note of this defense in his “first born,” saying that Socrates had a notion of the relation between himself and the drive-wheel of logic in motion behind him. This relationship is articulated in the “dignified seriousness” [würdevollen Ernst] with which Socrates asserted his divine calling before his judges. Plato took this a step further in his doctrine of the eternal, immutable Forms. He, and the Judeo-Christian religious tradition, made truth immobile—truth has become something static that can be studied in a disinterested manner. Truth cannot dance if her feet are not planted on the ground: “Talking about the spirit and the Good like Plato did meant standing truth on its head and disowning even *perspectivism*, which is the fundamental condition of all life.”³⁴⁴ Dogmatism demands that truth stand still so that it can be observed under the microscope. Its seriousness and bungling efforts to seduce truth have been exhausted—and this is the problem, spiritual, intellectual exhaustion. (Perhaps God is dead because everyone is bored with a neutered, “objective,” truth?) Nietzsche is not mocking

³⁴³ “Learning to *think*: our schools do not have any idea what this means. Even in the universities, even among genuine philosophy scholars, logic is beginning to die out as a theory, a practice, a *craft*. Just look at German books: there is not even a dim recollection of the fact that thought requires a technique, a plan of study, a will to mastery,—that thinking wants to be learned like dancing, as a *type* of dancing.” *KGW VI/3*: 103. *Twilight of the Idols*, 191. One should remember Nietzsche’s critique of scientific “objectivity” in §6 of the “History” essay. See Chapter 2 for a discussion of this.

³⁴⁴ *KGW VI/2*: 4. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 4.

dogmatism and its truth simply for the sake of mockery—he is interested in truth (albeit not the same boring truth of the Western tradition). New questions open up a new sea for exploration, one that thinkers had not dared set sail on before. These questions will shatter the entire structure of the Western intellectual tradition.

One of these questions comes at the beginning of the first part of *Beyond Good and Evil*, titled “On the Prejudices of Philosophers” [Von den Vorurteilen der Philosophen]. Truth is often opposed to ignorance and prejudice—why would those who profess to seek truth be prejudiced? Philosophers are prejudiced because they have never questioned the *value of truth*.³⁴⁵ Truth was never allowed to be a problem because it was presumed to be the highest authority (God) in the same way that modern science is now viewed as an authority. To call science into question, i.e., to make it a problem as Nietzsche did in *The Birth of Tragedy*, entails questioning God and truth. In his latest work, Nietzsche puts things in their correct order: he starts with truth because it is fundamental to the traditional conception of science and religion.

*What in us really wills the truth? In fact, we paused for a long time before the question of the cause of this will—until we finally came to a complete standstill in front of an even more fundamental question. We ask about the value of this will. Granted, we will truth: why not untruth instead? And uncertainty? Even ignorance? The problem of the value of truth came before us,—or was it we who came before the problem?*³⁴⁶

³⁴⁵ In the preface for *Daybreak*, a book whose subtitle is “Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality,” Nietzsche writes: “For as long as there has been speech and persuasion on earth, morality has shown itself to be the greatest of all mistresses of seduction—and, so far as we philosophers are concerned, the actual *Circe of the philosophers*.” *KGW* V/1: 5. *Daybreak*, 2. Nietzsche’s emphasis. In 1886, when this preface was written and affixed to the front of the second edition of the book, Nietzsche had seen clearly the connection between morality and truth; no philosopher before him had escaped from the moral interpretation of truth and existence; no one was willing to question the value of truth, for it was always presupposed and existed *beyond* (behind) all serious questioning.

³⁴⁶ *KGW* VI/2: 9. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 5. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

The problem of the value of truth arises once the faith in the God of the ascetic ideal is denied (*GM* III, §24). Lack of concern with or denial of God's existence turns truth into a problem because God was equated with truth; if God is dead, what happens to truth?

It is the greatest risk to question the value of truth. There is danger in this endeavor because such radical questioning entails one to call into question the entire Western intellectual project (all the way down to Socrates). Two millennia of thought—the moral interpretation of existence—would be overthrown with this single question. Nietzsche is not opposed to truth as such, but rather the prejudice that truth and morality are coextensive and coeval. One could summarize his philosophical project in one phrase: *to dislodge truth from the confines of the moral interpretation of existence through the self-overcoming of morality in his own work (and person)*.³⁴⁷ He wants to see what truth would be like beyond good and evil—i.e., morality. Thus, he begins with a criticism of truth with good reason: “‘Knowledge for its own sake’—this is the final snare morality has laid; with it, we become completely entangled in morals again.”³⁴⁸ The last temptation of morality is also the strongest since it comes from modern science, which Nietzsche calls the “*most recent and noble manifestation*” of the ascetic ideal.³⁴⁹ To remove truth from the dominion of morality, though, necessitates the emergence of an entirely new way of thinking (and valuing)—it calls on us to revalue all values hitherto. And this poses a grave danger for the West as a whole.

³⁴⁷ His obvious hostility to Plato in the Preface is well founded: Plato identified the True with the Good and, thus, engendered the greatest error in the history of the West. This may also be why Nietzsche later considers the truth to be dangerous (even to the point of destruction): “How much truth can a spirit *tolerate*, how much truth is it willing to *risk*? This increasingly became the real measure of value for me. Error (—the belief in the ideal—) is not blindness, error is *cowardice* . . . *Nitimus in vetitum*: my philosophy will triumph under this sign, because it is precisely the truth that has been absolutely forbidden so far.” *KGW* VI/3: 257. *Ecce Homo*, 72.

³⁴⁸ *KGW* VI/2: 85. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 58.

³⁴⁹ *KGW* VI/2: 414. *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 116. Nietzsche's emphasis.

Such a risk in this question leads to great danger. Who would be willing to risk great danger by questioning this radically? Certainly it would not be the metaphysicians, whose tie to Plato and Aristotle is just as strong in the 19th century as it was in the medieval era despite the subtlety of their reasoning.³⁵⁰ Nietzsche thinks that the basic belief of the metaphysicians is the “*belief in the opposition of values*,” an unquestioned assumption (or prejudice) among all philosophers in the Western tradition. For them, good and evil are distinct because they have an ideal origin; but what if good and evil do not have an ideal origin, but are human, all-too-human? It might be the case the good and evil are connected, even the same: “Perhaps!—But who is willing to take charge of such a dangerous Perhaps! For this we must await the arrival of a new breed of philosophers, ones whose taste and inclination are somehow the reverse of those we have seen so far—philosophers of the dangerous Perhaps in every sense.”³⁵¹ These new philosophers, who are not afraid of danger, are the only ones willing to see that value is part of human creativity—values are not absolute and given from above.

Nietzsche’s anticipation of the new philosophers goes hand in hand with his view of Dionysus as a divine philosopher. One of the sure signs of these new philosophers will be their capacity for “*golden laughter*” [goldnes Gelächter], a superhuman way of laughing “at the expense of everything serious.”³⁵² Laughter is of course fundamental to the “gay science” that Nietzsche had proposed earlier. It is a mockery of all that had been held taboo

³⁵⁰ Morality has always been the fuel for the fire of intellectual activity in the West, from Plato all the way to Schopenhauer: “I have gradually come to realize what every great philosophy so far has been: a confession of faith on the part of its author, and a type of involuntary and unself-conscious memoir; in short, that the moral (or immoral) intentions in every philosophy constitute the true living seed from which the whole plant has always grown.” *KGW VI/2*: 13-14. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 8.

³⁵¹ *KGW VI/2*: 11. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 6.

³⁵² *KGW VI/2*: 246. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 175. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

(the human being and God) through philosophical seriousness. Real questions and problems have not even been posed yet, according to Nietzsche. After surveying the “inland sea of ideals,” and taking them to their logical conclusion, the new explorers, these future philosophers, want a new seriousness. They demand the great seriousness [der große Ernst] because the “real question mark is posed for the first time,” “the destiny of the soul changes,” “the hand of the clock moves forward; the tragedy begins” when the old values fall away.³⁵³ All of this indicates that Nietzsche is concerned with truth, for these philosophers will question and doubt more radically than any other thinker has so far. They question because they want to find truth (or “truths”). Laughter is the most effective argument against what was previously held to be serious; it prepares the ground for a new seriousness when real questions are asked for the first time.

But will these new philosophers not also be prejudiced in the same way that past philosophers were? No, for the simple reason that prejudice is dependent on moral valuation—and these new philosophers will be beyond good and evil. One can speak of the past philosophers as being prejudiced because they were always biased *toward* morality. More often than not, these older philosophers based their rationalizations on some old superstition and tried to pass it off as though it were calm and cool reasoning—a truth for everyone. For the most part, “they are sly spokesmen for prejudices that they christen as ‘truths.’”³⁵⁴ The new philosophers, on the other hand, will be the great experimenters and tempters [Versucher]; they will risk danger by setting sail again on open seas in order to circumnavigate the soul. In fact, the new philosophers will be the psychologists *par*

³⁵³ KGW V/2: 319. *The Gay Science*, 247.

³⁵⁴ KGW VI/2: 13. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 8.

excellence, for they will be condemned to “invention” [erfinden] and “perhaps to *discovery*” [finden].³⁵⁵ The denial of the soul-hypothesis may lead to new perspectives on the nature of human being and perhaps discovery of the greater depths in the human psyche.

All of what Nietzsche promises his audience here is only possible if the True and the Good are dissociated. Plato’s identification of the two has denied “perspectivism,” which Nietzsche believes is a basic condition of all life. Perhaps falsehood, and not truth, is a necessary precondition of life. The falsity of judgments does not count then as objections against them—it might be the case that such judgments are necessarily preservative of a certain kind of life. “To acknowledge untruth as a condition of life: this clearly means resisting the usual value feelings in a dangerous manner; and a philosophy that risks such a thing would by that gesture alone place itself beyond good and evil.”³⁵⁶ The false might be identified with the good because it is what preserves life—conversely, the true might be what is actually harmful to us. Prejudice toward the truth as good has prevented us from seeing that this might be the case. Nietzsche’s criticism of judgments here paves the way for his criticism of science, which is based on the philosophical conception of truth. Although most positivist scientists would object to this, Nietzsche recognizes that science is really dependent on a certain conception of truth: “It is still a *metaphysical faith* upon which our faith in science rests—that even we knowers of today, we godless anti-metaphysicians, still take *our* fire, too, from the flame lit by the thousand-year old faith, the Christian faith which was also Plato’s faith, that God is truth; that truth is divine.”³⁵⁷ After he sets about dissociating truth

³⁵⁵ KGW VI/2: 21. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 15.

³⁵⁶ KGW VI/2: 12. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 7.

³⁵⁷ KGW V/2: 259. *The Gay Science*, 201.

from the good, he turns his gaze toward science, which he had turned into a problem in his “firstborn,” *The Birth of Tragedy*.

The “Problem of Science”³⁵⁸

As Nietzsche has insisted, the ascetic ideal (morality, life negation) lies at the bottom of every philosophy so far. He also thinks that science is the “*most recent and noble manifestation*” of this ascetic ideal—thus, it remains chained to the moral conception of truth. Modern science is dependent on a specific kind of truth that is derived from Descartes’s “subjective turn” in philosophy in the early 17th century, which limited the scope of truth to the certainty of the thinking human subject. No matter how hard modern science may try to escape its roots through positivism, it remains true that all the sciences are dependent on this conception of truth. In a certain respect, modern science is the heir of the Socratic optimism that Nietzsche identified as the murderer of ancient Greek tragedy (as Nietzsche outlines it in *The Birth of Tragedy*—see Chapter 1). The world can be altered and changed according to the dictates and standards imposed on it by reason (in this sense, then, the “mastery of nature” is Socratism brought to its logical conclusion). The original problem with which Nietzsche began his publishing career returns here after he finishes his critique of

³⁵⁸ Babette Babich clarifies what Nietzsche means by the “problem of science” nicely: “Nietzsche’s philosophical critique of scientific reason puts the critical *rationality* of science in question. Thus Nietzsche means to pose the question of science as a critical problem rather than as a patent or resolvable problem. This critical project involves the articulation of the problem of science as such, which means that Nietzsche adverts to the prime difficulty of putting science in question as the difficulty of questioning what is ordinarily unquestionable. Indeed, science as authority and as ‘method’ *is* the means of critique or critical questioning. For this reason, Nietzsche regards raising ‘the problem of science itself . . . as a problem, as questionable’ (*BT* ‘Self-Criticism’ 2), as a task to be accomplished over time, not merely as a point to be made or a problem to be remedied.” “Nietzsche’s Critique of Scientific Reason and Scientific Culture,” 140. Babich’s emphasis. As should be clear by now, Nietzsche’s entire career revolves around this one question—his questioning of science remains with him from his first to last publications.

truth—and it comes back with devastating force now that he has put things in their proper order.

There is something odd about Nietzsche's critique of science in both *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Kant is quite often the target of Nietzsche's criticism, something to which modern scientists in both the 19th and 20th centuries would immediately object. (Such scientists insist on the necessary independence of science from the earlier domination of metaphysics.) However, this makes sense after one examines passages from *The Birth of Tragedy*, wherein Nietzsche identifies Kant as one of the thinkers who tried to limit the scope of science.

The hardest-fought victory of all was won by the enormous courage and wisdom of *Kant* and *Schopenhauer*, a victory over the optimism which lies hidden in the nature of logic and which in turn is the hidden foundation of our culture. Whereas this optimism once believed in our ability to grasp and solve, with the help of the seemingly reliable *aeternae veritates*, all the puzzles of the universe, and treated space, time, and causality as entirely unconditional laws of the most general validity, Kant showed that these things actually only served to raise mere appearance, the work of maya, to the status of the sole and supreme reality and to put this in the place of the innermost and true essence of things, thereby making it impossible really to understand this essence—putting the dreamer even more deeply to sleep, as Schopenhauer put it.³⁵⁹

Under the spell of the neo-Kantian Friedrich Lange, Nietzsche understood Kant to be someone whose primary interest was in the boundaries of scientific knowledge. For the young Nietzsche, Kant was primarily a theoretician, who opened the doors for a new way of understanding—a tragic understanding. According to the passage above, he viewed Kant as the one who showed that causality was the result of synthetic *a priori* judgments that the mind is forced to make. These are the same kinds of judgments that Nietzsche attacks so

³⁵⁹ *KGW* III/1: 114. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 87.

vigorously in the first part of *Beyond Good and Evil*. What has made Nietzsche change his opinion of Kant in the meantime?

Although there has been much recent debate concerning whether or not Nietzsche had actually read Kant, there are indications within the works of the 1880s that he had a good grasp on his predecessor's philosophical project as a whole. (It would have been highly unlikely for someone with Nietzsche's educational background in the mid-1800s *not* to have read some Kant or been instructed in his philosophy.) A little after the time of his permanent departure from the University of Basel Nietzsche's opinion of Kant changes. We can see evidence of this in *The Gay Science*: "Kant wanted to prove, in a way that would dumbfound the whole world, that the whole world was right: that was the secret joke of his soul. He wrote against the scholars in favor of popular prejudice [Volks-Vorurteil], but for scholars and not for people."³⁶⁰ According to the older Nietzsche, Kant is a backdoor moralist who, instead of bringing scientific optimism to an end, has merely used language to preserve the common people's prejudice. Eventually Nietzsche came to realize that Kant's project was merely an extension and refinement of the scientific/moral worldview that was inaugurated by Socrates (and Plato), complete with the belief in the "true world."³⁶¹ Instead of drawing the curtain on scientific optimism, Kant merely made it possible under more rigorous (and less naïve) conditions. Let us see how this plays out in Nietzsche's critique of causality.

³⁶⁰ *KGW* V/2: 182. *The Gay Science*, 140.

³⁶¹ This is confirmed by Nietzsche's inclusion of Kant within a section of *Twilight of the Idols* titled "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable": "The true world, unattainable, unprovable, unpromisable, but the very thought of it a consolation, an obligation, an imperative. (Basically the old sun but through fog and skepticism; the idea become elusive, pale, Nordic, Königsbergian.)" *KGW* VI/3: 74. *Twilight of the Idols*, 171.

Nietzsche's assault on modern science begins with its most prominent root in Kant's critical philosophy—synthetic *a priori* judgments, which are essential to the ordering of the natural world according to the rules of cause and effect. According to Nietzsche, judgments concerning cause and effect are only necessary from the perspective of life: “Such judgments [synthetic *a priori* judgments] must be *believed* true for the purpose of preserving beings of our type; which is why these judgments could of course still be *false*! Or, to be blunt, basic and clearer still: synthetic judgments *a priori* do not have ‘to be possible’ at all: we have no right to them, and in our mouths, they are nothing but false judgments.”³⁶² Judgments *a priori* do not necessarily need to be true, as Kant thought, because one only needs to believe them to be true in order for them to be effective. This does not mean that they need to be rejected (see §4 of *Beyond Good and Evil*)—life can only be sustained through these errors. Science, which is dependent on the validity of the causal relation, must be operating based on a false assumption. Perhaps the causal relation has no validity but is, nevertheless, useful for the maintenance of a specific kind of life—human life.³⁶³ By posing such a question, Nietzsche is attempting to show how it might be possible that the good (preservation of life) need not be identified with the true; in other words, falsity might be a condition for life.

To renounce these kinds of judgments for the reason that they may be false would necessarily entail the degeneration and stagnation of life, according to Nietzsche. (Our knowledge needs to serve life, not vice-versa—he retains this view from his “History” essay.) Such judgments belong to the “perspectival optics of life” [Perspektiven-Optik des Lebens]: from the perspective of life, these judgments are absolutely necessary. But this

³⁶² *KGW* VI/2: 19-20. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 13.

³⁶³ Ultimately, according to Nietzsche, science cannot be rejected (as I argued in the previous chapter). Science needs to be transformed into a kind of art, “gay science,” that deals in affirmative/productive illusions.

does not mean that they must be true. Thus, scientific optimism, which is the noblest form of the ascetic ideal, is blind to the core—it demands truth as a panacea to the ills of life, but it does not recognize that it is already based on the presupposition that truth is good. What if it is not good? Its virtue is one that makes life small. The conservative power of science and morality stems from its stubborn insistence on the truth of the causal relation. Science, then, is an automatic reflex to the environment within which certain humans find themselves.

*“The ascetic ideal springs from the protective and healing instincts of a degenerating life which uses every means to maintain itself and struggles for its existence . . . The ascetic ideal is one such method: the situation is therefore the precise opposite of what the worshippers of this ideal imagine,—in it and through it, life struggles with death and against death, the ascetic ideal is a trick for the preservation of life.”*³⁶⁴ So, it is not as though Nietzsche denies the significance of science and morality (a “non-Dionysian art,” as he calls it in *The Birth of Tragedy*) in the conservation of life, but he does note that it is not the only possibility. And it might be the case that the ascetic ideal of science and morality results in the current problem of nihilism in Europe.

With good reason, then, Nietzsche attacks Kant’s insistence on the validity of synthetic *a priori* judgments in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. He realized what was at stake in the Kantian, critical project: the entire purpose of rescuing these kinds of judgments was to protect the domain of morality and religion from the assault of David Hume’s skeptical philosophy in which the causal relation was a matter of custom. If custom is the basis for our positing of causes and effects, then there is no objective, universal ground for morality.

³⁶⁴ *KGW VI/2: 384. On the Genealogy of Morality, 93. Nietzsche’s emphasis.*

Kant's interest in morality and religion is clear when one considers the works that he published in the interim between the first and second *Critique* (1781 and 1788): "Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals" (1785) and "What is Orientation in Thinking?" (1786) to name only two of the more important (and one of the most overlooked).

Why did the world of German scholars, three-quarters of whom are pastors' and teachers' sons go into such fits of delight at the appearance of *Kant*—, why were Germans so convinced (you can still find echoes of this conviction) that Kant marked a change for the *better*? The theological instinct of the German scholar had guessed just *what* was possible again . . . A hidden path to the old ideal lay open; the concept of a "true world," the concept of morality as the essence of the world (—the two most vicious errors in existence!) were once again (thanks to an exceedingly canny skepticism), if not provable, then at least no longer *refutable* . . .³⁶⁵

The root of Kant's project is the preservation of the domain of morality in the possibility of freedom as it might exist in the noumenal world. Members of the "Tübingen Stift" (Schelling, Hegel, and Hölderlin) recognized this, which is why the Kantian conception of freedom is the foundation for German Idealism. By positing the "thing in itself," Kant saves causality for the sake of morality/science.

The purpose of Kant's distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal worlds was to preserve the insights of both morality and science (faith and reason). Writing of his overall purpose in the Preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he notes:

"I have . . . found it necessary to deny *knowledge*, in order to make room for faith."³⁶⁶

Knowledge that purports to be of that which is not an object of experience—the unconditioned—must be criticized because of the possible threat it poses to morality/faith.

Pure reason generates inevitable antinomies whenever it tries to grasp ideas such as freedom,

³⁶⁵ *KGW* VI/3: 174. *The Antichrist*, 9. Nietzsche's emphasis.

³⁶⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 29. Kant's emphasis.

the soul, and God. Kant limited the scope of the possible application of the pure categories of the understanding to experience and, therefore, saved both knowledge and faith from destroying one another. He is the modern Plato since he was able to prevent the world of ideas from being reduced to the world of physical phenomena by dividing noumena from phenomena. (One could think of the phenomenal world as the domain proper to science while the noumenal world was the world of freedom.) Science and faith could be courteous to one another thanks to Kant since their domains had been properly delimited; however, their pre-established harmony gradually turned into open hostility on the part of science when truth was confined to the limits of scientific reason. God was dead because the demand for truthfulness at all costs killed Him.

Soon afterwards science forgot its own origins in morality and religion while it busied itself with the accumulation of knowledge for its own sake. Its self-forgetfulness is a sign to Nietzsche that it has forgotten its purpose (as it was instituted by its founder, Socrates). In reality, modern science still works within the framework established by the predominating morality of good and evil (the ascetic ideal): “This ‘modern science’ is, for the time being, the *best* ally for the ascetic ideal, for the simple reason that it is *the most unconscious, involuntary, secret and subterranean!*”³⁶⁷ Modern science still believes in the unconditional value of truth and is, therefore, incapable of creating its own values—this is why Nietzsche wanted to push science beyond the limits prescribed by the moral conception of truth in “gay science.” For Nietzsche, wherever science does not have a goal (as it once did in the Platonic/Christian conception) or “a passion of great faith” [eine Leidenschaft des grossen

³⁶⁷ *KGW VI/2: 421. On the Genealogy of Morality*, 121. Emphasis added.

Glaubens], it is a “*hiding place* for all kinds of ill-humor, unbelief, nagging worms, *despectio sui*, bad conscience—it is the *disquiet* of lack of ideals itself, the suffering from a *lack* of great love, the discontent over *enforced* contentment.”³⁶⁸ Science has been reduced to a mechanical activity—something that Nietzsche took note of earlier in §7 of the “History” essay. It remains ascetic even if the goal (Truth or God) is lacking.

Although modern science insists on its independence from philosophy, it is confined to the limits of the Cartesian conception of truth (as I noted earlier in this chapter). For this reason, it remains a specific kind of morality because it seeks to correct existence through reason and technological innovation.³⁶⁹ Since modern science still requires one to posit causes and effects (or subjects and deeds), it follows the same pattern as earlier conceptions of science in Nietzsche’s view. Modern scientists, then, are no different from the common people when it comes to the explanation of phenomena: “Basically the common people double a deed; when they see lightning, they make a doing-a-deed out of it: they posit the same event, first as cause and then as its effect. The scientists do no better when they say ‘force moves, force causes’ and such like.”³⁷⁰ In order for science to be effective it must examine the phenomena and search for causes—it presupposes the necessary connection between causes and effects. Kant had done the world of science a favor by positing subjects,

³⁶⁸ *KGW VI/2*: 415. *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 117. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

³⁶⁹ This was a point that Nietzsche made earlier in *The Birth of Tragedy*, especially when it comes to the recent innovation of machines in the 19th century. The optimism of theoretical man “fights against Dionysiac wisdom and art; it strives to dissolve myth; it puts in the place of metaphysical solace a form of earthly harmony, indeed its very own *deus ex machina*, namely the god of machines and smelting furnaces, i.e., the energies of the spirits of nature, understood and applied in the service of a higher egotism; it believes in correcting the world through knowledge, in life led by science; and it is truly capable of confining the individual within the smallest circle of solvable tasks, in the midst of which he cheerfully says to life: ‘I will you: you are worth understanding.’” *KGW III/1*: 111. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 85. The ascetic tendency of modern science is already touched on in this passage from his earliest published work.

³⁷⁰ *KGW VI/2*: 293. *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 28.

“things-in-themselves,” because then science could continue its hunt for causes. What the scientific community of the 19th century did not recognize, though, is that Kant’s purpose was to save the possibility of freedom from the pervading spread of determinism. And by saving morality/faith, he unwittingly saved science.

Nietzsche’s critique of science (via his scathing criticism of Kant) is at the same time a critique of morality since modern science is the “*most recent and noble manifestation*” of the ascetic ideal. Despite all of its postures of independence from both philosophy and religion, the older forms which the ascetic ideal assumed, it remains tied to the ascetic ideal: “Both of them, science and the ascetic ideal, are still on the same foundation . . . that is to say, both overestimate truth (more correctly: they share the same faith that truth *cannot* be assessed or criticized), and this makes them both *necessarily* allies,—so that, if they must be fought, they can only be fought and called into question together.”³⁷¹ According to what Nietzsche says here, the criticism of science necessarily entails the criticism of morality (and religion). The refusal to question the value of truth is what unites these now antagonistic positions—however, they are really on the same footing. Nietzsche’s willingness to call into question one of these spheres naturally entails the criticism of the other. After his critique of science, religion will inevitably come crashing to the ground. The two are tied together in the idea of the moral God—it is only this God that Nietzsche says is dead, i.e., He has become “untenable” (He does not stand to reason), because he cannot disprove the God of revelation. So Nietzsche’s critique of religion, which I will discuss next, is a critique of natural theology with its identification of God with the Platonic Good.

³⁷¹ *KGW VI/2: 420. On the Genealogy of Morality*, 120-121. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

Nietzsche's Critique of Religion

Nietzsche continues his devastating criticism of the Western tradition by turning to look at religion/morality. These areas are also entangled within the nets of truth—this is especially true of Christianity, a religion that identifies the God of revelation with the God of philosophy in the grand medieval synthesis of St. Thomas Aquinas. The fusion of science and religion/morality results in a limitation of the amount of questions that can be asked: some questions are simply taboo (such as Nietzsche's question at the beginning of *Beyond Good and Evil*). Science, therefore, suffers from the influence of morality; but the same is true for religion. "Morality and religion can be exhaustively accounted for by *the psychology of error*: in every single case, cause and effect are confused; or truth is confused with the effects of *believing* that something is true; or a state of consciousness is confused with its causes."³⁷² Science's insistence on finding causes and linking them with effects certainly has a negative effect on the way in which we think about the divine. God is reduced to the *causa sui*, a completely impersonal being that takes no interest in human affairs. With the Scientific Revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries, God simply becomes a constant, a stopgap, within a long equation. It reaches the point of crisis in the 19th century when God no longer matters at all to the idlers in the marketplace (as portrayed in §125 of *The Gay Science*).

Not only is the synthesis of science and morality problematic, but also the fusion of morality and religion is ultimately destructive. The glue that holds science, religion, and morality together is the concept of truth. As Nietzsche notes in Book V of *The Gay Science*,

³⁷² *KGW* VI/3: 89. *Twilight of the Idols*, 181. Nietzsche's emphasis.

which was attached to the end of the second edition in 1887, morality destroyed belief in the divine because it demanded truth above everything else:

One can see *what* it was that actually triumphed over the Christian god: Christian morality itself, *the concept of truthfulness that was taken ever more rigorously*; the father confessor's refinement of the Christian conscience, translated and sublimated into a scientific conscience, into intellectual cleanliness at any price. Looking at nature as if it were proof of the goodness and care of a god; interpreting history in honor of some divine reason, as a continual testimony of a moral world order and ultimate moral purposes; interpreting one's own experiences as a pious people have long interpreted theirs, as if everything were providential, a hint, designed and ordained for the sake of the salvation of the soul—that is *over* now; that has conscience *against* it; every refined conscience considers it to be indecent, dishonest, a form of mendacity, effeminacy, weakness, cowardice.³⁷³

The moral interpretation of truth has developed to a point where the belief in an omnipotent and good God has become *unbelievable*. Morality (truth) ultimately undermines itself—Nietzsche's existence as the first immoralist is the last step in the evolution of morality. Morality finally draws its own conclusion *against* itself and destroys itself thereby—it is, therefore, nihilistic. Its demand for truthfulness at all costs paves the way for morality's destruction because, in the end, it will have to put itself into question. When it does, it will see that its foundations are not solid—they are based in presuppositions. In other words, the moral interpretation of truth is suicidal, the moral God is destroyed by his own pity for humankind.

The alignment of God and Truth, which occurs in the Christian faith (and also Plato's), leads to the current state of nihilism. It does not allow anything else to claim to be the origin of truth: "Christian morality is a command; it has a transcendent origin; it is beyond all criticism, all right to criticism; it has truth only if God is the truth,—it stands or

³⁷³ KGW V/2: 282. *The Gay Science*, 219. Emphasis added.

falls along with belief in God.”³⁷⁴ Since it is a monotheistic religion, Christianity claims that its God is Truth; this means that there can be no other origin of truth. Within the Christian conception, its morality is right (or good) and everything that diverges from it wrong (or evil). If God exists and is Truth, then the Christians are correct in their assessment; this is the presupposition on which all of their conclusions (their theology) depend. It, therefore, does not recognize various moralities as viable—anything that falls outside of the scope of the prescribed morality is immoral (and false). But was it always the case that morality was identified with a specific notion of truth, i.e., God as Truth?

Nietzsche believes that it was not always the case that morality was dependent on the One Truth. In fact, at any given time in the ancient pagan world of Greece and Rome, there were several competing moralities looking for ascendancy. Christianity came along and subverted this original relationship in which truth and morality were not related in a dogmatic fashion. Pilate’s incomprehension of Jesus’ answer to his question and his own response to Jesus (“What is truth?”) are indicative of the pagan conception of things. Likewise, Zarathustra distinguishes truth and goodness: ““This—it turns out—is *my* way—where is yours?”—That is how I answered those who asked me ‘the way.’ *The* way after all—it does not exist!”³⁷⁵ There are several ways—there is no one right way. To posit the way proposed by Christianity as the only right way is a prejudice. What if truth and the good are not the same, as the ancient pagans understood it?

First, though, one must ask how Christianity came to offer the dominant interpretation of the good as the true (moral interpretation of existence). In the third part of *Beyond Good*

³⁷⁴ *KGW* VI/3: 108. *Twilight of the Idols*, 194.

³⁷⁵ *KGW* VI/1: 241. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 156. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

and Evil, “The religious character,” Nietzsche describes how the priests of Christianity devoted themselves to the preservation of the weak and sick. The priests wanted to return to power after their supposed service to the lowly of spirit, and that in good conscience; therefore, they had to “stand all valuations *on their head*” so that “‘unworldly,’ ‘unsensuous,’ and ‘higher man’ finally melted together into a single feeling.”³⁷⁶ Christianity had to reverse the definitions of what had originally constituted the higher, better man to suit its own outlook—it had to revalue all previous values. One need only examine Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount” and compare it with Aristotle’s magnanimous man in Book IV of the *Nicomachean Ethics* to get an idea of the difference between the exemplars in the Christian perspective and the exemplars in the ancient pagan view. Virtue was once the strength and power of the human being; with the advent of Christianity, virtue degenerated into something evil—pride is the first sin. For Christianity to have effected such a monumental change in values required that a set of values had already existed; these values then had to be reconfigured based on the demands of the priests in Nietzsche’s interpretation. Essentially the triumph of Christianity consists in its reversal of values through the negative power of resentment.

The moral interpretation of truth (in which God is Truth) has come to dominate over other possible interpretations. Different tables of values existed in the ancient world (and continue to exist today): “There is a *master morality* and a *slave morality*;—I will immediately add that in all higher and more mixed cultures attempts to negotiate between these moralities appear, although more frequently the two are confused and there are mutual

³⁷⁶ *KGW VI/2*: 80. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 56. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

misunderstandings.”³⁷⁷ These are the two main kinds of morality that can exist anywhere and at any time, according to Nietzsche. Master morality is ontologically prior to slave morality because it is creative. Slave morality is reactive and can only create values through the reversal of pre-established valuations. The original values that can be found in society are those that come from an overflowing abundance of vitality and power: masters evaluate *people* as either “good” (noble, rare, well-born, virtuous) or “bad” (vulgar, common, ill-born, vicious). Master morality, then, creates values based on the strength or weakness of various persons; ancient Greek and Roman aristocrats had a feeling of power that discharged of itself sometimes destroying the weaker—however, their destruction was not done in malice.³⁷⁸ Those who are weaker, which makes up the majority of people, are the bad, vulgar, or common. It is important to note that the master morality not only affirms its own existence but also the existence of another type of morality as necessary.

Nietzsche believes that slave morality is parasitic on the master morality because it is not naturally creative—its power derives from its reactivity. Existing alongside the master morality, it draws its lifeblood from it. As long as the slaves are kept in their place, the two moralities are able to coexist; it is certainly not the case that the masters want to do away with the slaves otherwise their own existence is threatened. Problems arise, however, when the slaves try their hand at creativity. It is important to note that Nietzsche believes that “the

³⁷⁷ *KGW VI/2*: 218. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 153. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

³⁷⁸ “The essential feature of a good, healthy aristocracy is that it does *not* feel that it is a function (whether of the kingdom or of the community) but instead feels itself to be the *meaning* and highest justification (of the kingdom or community),—and, consequently, that it accepts in good conscience the sacrifice of countless people who have to be pushed down and shrunk into incomplete human beings, into slaves, into tools, all *for the sake of the aristocracy*.” *KGW VI/2*: 216. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 152. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

slave revolt in morality begins with the Jews.”³⁷⁹ The Jewish people, with their insistence on the One God (Yahweh), brought about a tremendous change in the relation between the two moralities. Instead of accepting the coexistence of the two moralities, the Jews align truth with their God, which makes all other gods (and moralities) false. This movement is continued and expanded through the rise of Christianity (see §24 of *The Antichrist*), and its priest *par excellence*, Paul. Paul’s desire for power is that of a priest over a herd. His genius is predicated on the ability to reverse the original values: slave morality takes what was originally “good” in the perspective of the master morality and turns it into “evil”; what was originally “bad” has become “good” in this reversal.³⁸⁰ Since slave morality is the only true one, every other morality must perish; it, therefore, undermines itself because the original valuation of the masters is the ground for slave morality. Properly speaking, according to Nietzsche, this is the condition of nihilism.

In Nietzsche’s psychological analysis, the slaves have convinced themselves that the happiness of the nobility is not real, rather it is the appearance of happiness. For the slaves, whatever protects and secures the survival of the herd is that which is good. The concept of the “common good,” which has been handed down from Christianity, informs modern moral theories like utilitarianism and deontological ethics. Themes that were once prominent parts of Christianity have remained in these modern moral theories: selflessness, love of neighbor, pity, and truthfulness, for example. Since these theories are derivatives of Christianity, they too are nihilistic. The morality of pity is self-defeating, as Nietzsche notes in the “Preface” to *On the Genealogy of Morality*: “I understood the morality of pity, casting around ever

³⁷⁹ *KGW VI/2*: 119. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 84. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

³⁸⁰ See the next chapter for a discussion of Nietzsche’s criticism of Pauline Christianity.

wider to catch even philosophers and make them ill, as the most uncanny symptom of our European culture which has itself become uncanny, as its detour to a new Buddhism? to a new Euro-Buddhism? to—*nihilism?*”³⁸¹ The newest expressions of slave morality, the morality of pity, are leading down a dark path—the path of nihilism, the will to nothingness, which is the child of sympathy with man and nausea of him.³⁸² Nietzsche’s proposed remedy for this now rampant disease is the revaluation of values as it is based in his teaching of the eternal recurrence.

Freedom: Beyond Morality?

Nietzsche’s critique of religion must also include a criticism of freedom. This is because of the identification of freedom and truth in the Gospel of John, the Evangelist whom many German Idealists regarded as a Platonist. The following quote from John 8:32 is of particular interest, wherein Jesus is speaking to a larger Jewish audience: “If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Within the Christian mind, the identification of truth and freedom is natural because Jesus had identified the Truth (i.e., God) with the highest freedom. Nietzsche’s rejection of a Platonic conception of truth necessarily entails the repudiation of this conception of freedom that goes along with it. The sharpest edge of Nietzsche’s critique is

³⁸¹ *KGW VI/2: 264. On the Genealogy of Morality, 7.*

³⁸² Peter Sedgwick captures the Christian sense of worthlessness that arises from the sense of the vanity of all human endeavors: “We are faced with a humanity that exists in a state of eternal guilt where the punishment itself is *never* equal to the crime, where the debt can never be annulled. The Christian concept of God becomes in this way susceptible to being interpreted as symptomatic of the dominance of a desire to feel worthless. This desire engenders inactivity and the values that emanate from it reflect this by placing the highest value on passivity and self-abnegation. Christian morality is in this way rendered an expression of the human capacity to suffer from itself transformed into its guiding purpose.” From his article, “Violence, Economy and Temporality. Plotting the Political Terrain of *On the Genealogy of Morality*,” *Nietzsche-Studien* 34 (2005): 176.

again leveled against Kant and his moral theology that had taken firm root in Protestant seminaries throughout Germany. Since morality was grounded in the autonomous rational subject, i.e., in freedom, Nietzsche's overcoming of morality necessitates an overcoming of freedom in its most recent, Kantian formulation. This also entails the disintegration of the all-comprehensive systems of the German Idealists (especially Hegel), who grounded their program in the concept of freedom.

The practical/moral system that had replaced the speculative system undermines its own foundation in freedom, according to Nietzsche. Although God and immortality remain necessary postulates of practical reason, according to Kant, freedom forms the foundation for his system. He makes this clear in the section the "Canon of Pure Reason" in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and also in his writings on religion and the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788). However, Nietzsche asks, if the freedom of the rational subject is the ground for this system, and we are capable of acting on our own because we are capable of thinking for ourselves without the authority of God, why do we need to postulate God? This is the question to which one is inevitably drawn and explains much about the event of the "death of God." Since freedom is essentially connected to truth, one must say that not only did man's pursuit of truth at all costs kill God, but also the evolution of the concept of freedom. Kant's development of the concept of freedom—differentiating negative freedom from positive, true freedom—is a necessary step in the self-overcoming of morality. Nietzsche will go on to say that God's death results in true human freedom for the creation of new values. Even though he considers Kant to have advanced the concept of freedom, he still considers Kant's

thoughts on freedom to be intrinsically linked to the slave morality because freedom is still attached to morality and is not the freedom of creation (and destruction).

Freedom is something that is believed to be an essential component of the human being—everyone has freedom of will, according to the slaves. This belief derives from the slave’s evaluation of actions (and not people). For the slave in Nietzsche’s view, actions are good or evil, and these actions are then traced back to their causes—good men or evil men. Causality is absolutely necessary in order for slave morality to work at all because one must first posit the efficacy of the will. It is also true that one needs to posit the subject (an “I” or the “soul”) in order for slave morality to be consistent. “The reason the subject (or, as we more colloquially say, *the soul*) has been, until now, the best doctrine on earth, is perhaps because it facilitated that sublime self-deception whereby the majority of the dying, the weak and the oppressed of every kind could construe weakness itself as freedom, and their particular mode of existence as an *accomplishment*.”³⁸³ Not only is the base man able to act in such a way that is good, but also he is able to blame the evil man for his actions. Praise and blame only make sense within the logic of freedom—one cannot blame someone for behaving in a certain way if that person was constrained to do so by an external force (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1109b30-1111b). Since the evil man has control over his actions, so reasons the slave, he can be praised or blamed for them; conversely, since the slave has the power over his actions, he can be praised or blamed for them. The distinction between an acting subject and his or her actions is necessary for punishment (whether in the present life or, more gruesomely according to Nietzsche, in the after life).

³⁸³ *KGW VI/2: 294-295. On the Genealogy of Morality*, 29. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

As Nietzsche's genealogical argument attempts to show, the current valuations of "good" and "evil," which are key components of the Western religious tradition, do not in fact derive from some hidden, metaphysical basis. Values themselves are posited by subjects—it is, therefore, nonsense to speak about absolute distinctions between values or "objective values." Thus, values such as "good" and "bad" or "good" and "evil" are products of human creativity (either positive or negative); they are not commands from the realm of the divine. His survey of history and ancient texts illustrates the fluidity of these concepts: there were huge changes in what was considered to be "good" and "evil" from the ancient, medieval, and modern time periods. But will there not be a similar transfiguration of values after the people take to heart the madman's cry, "God is dead"? Nietzsche's madman does say: "There was never a greater deed—and whoever is born after us will on account of this deed belong to a higher history than all history up to now!"³⁸⁴ Convulsions will shake Europe to its core and there will be a day of decision when men will have to reevaluate the current values, or perish. But this day is still very distant as Nietzsche notes several times throughout the late 1880s.

Morality, the insistence on truthfulness at all costs, in Nietzsche's understanding is ultimately responsible for the "death of God," i.e., Truth. Religion is suffocated by truth/morality. This explains why the madman accuses everyone of murdering God: "*We have killed him—you and I!*" Everyone is guilty of this crime because they all exist within the framework of Plato's identification of truth with goodness. Nietzsche's critique of morality takes the form of the survey of the history of the self-overcoming of morality.

³⁸⁴ *KGW* V/2: 159. *The Gay Science*, 120.

Christianity as a dogma (God's existence) was destroyed by Christianity as morality (the Good is identical with the True); soon the same thing will happen with Christianity as morality. "After Christian truthfulness has drawn one conclusion after another, it will finally draw the *strongest conclusion*, that *against* itself; this will, however, happen when it asks itself, 'What does all will to truth mean?'"³⁸⁵ (This is Nietzsche's own question at the beginning of *Beyond Good and Evil*.) Nietzsche, then, stands at the end of this history and at the threshold of a new history. Thus, the history of the West is the same thing as the development and gradual expansion of nihilism. Nietzsche's arrival spells the end of this history and prepares the way for the new philosophers who will create a new table of values—values that affirm life, values that are founded on the teaching of the eternal recurrence. His time (since he was born posthumously) lies in the future.

But what does this mean for freedom since Nietzsche identifies freedom with creation (and destruction)? Once the moral God has died, there is the question of freedom and necessity. If the ground for morality has been uprooted, the distinction between freedom and necessity no longer holds. Nietzsche must mean something different when he speaks of freedom in a positive way. Freedom could only mean creation and destruction—it could not signify the traditional moral conception. In other words, the eternal recurrence allows for the freedom of the will as creative and destructive. Martin Heidegger notes: "The question of freedom, and hence of necessity too and of the relation between these two, is posed anew by the teaching of the eternal return of the same. For that reason we go astray when we reverse matters and try to cram the doctrine of return into some long-ossified schema of the question

³⁸⁵ *KGW VI/2: 428. On the Genealogy of Morality*, 127. Nietzsche's emphasis.

of freedom.”³⁸⁶ Since the teaching of the eternal recurrence is foundational, it transforms all of the old, rigid distinctions in the philosophical tradition. To attempt to understand the teaching of the eternal recurrence in terms of the traditional conceptions of freedom and necessity results in a confused interpretation of it, an interpretation in which the cosmological and anthropological aspects necessarily contradict one another. But this is to put things backwards.

Nihilism and Eternal Recurrence

Nietzsche’s critique of morality touches on the very foundation of the Western intellectual tradition, stretching all the way from Socrates and Plato up to the German Idealists and (in his view) even Schopenhauer. Everyone in between these philosophers is merely a stage in the development of the history of morality (i.e., nihilism).³⁸⁷ Nietzsche’s own arrival signals the demise of the identification of the Good with the True—within his work (and person), morality is overcome (this is why he is as dangerous as dynamite). He believes that the longest error in Western history, the belief in God and the “true world,” is now drawing to a close and there is the possibility for a new understanding of existence. Nihilism stems from the alignment of truth and morality, which affects every possible aspect of human life and thought (including science and religion). “Once morality becomes impossible, does the pantheistic affirmative stance towards all things become impossible as

³⁸⁶ *Nietzsche: Volume Two*, 138. This is the bone of contention between Heidegger and Löwith when it comes to interpreting the eternal recurrence.

³⁸⁷ Heidegger carefully expresses Nietzsche’s thought about nihilism: “Nihilism *is* history. In Nietzsche’s sense it co-constitutes the essence of Western history because it co-determines the lawfulness of the fundamental metaphysical positions and their relationships.” *Nietzsche: Volume Four*, 53. The past is devoured by the present never to return; in Anaximander’s sense of time, we must pay penalty for transgressions; time has been determined morally, as I have said in past chapters.

well? After all, fundamentally it's only the moral God that has been overcome. Does it make sense to conceive of a God 'beyond good and evil'? Would a pantheism in *this* sense be possible?"³⁸⁸ The possibility of such an affirmative stance depends on the unifying thought of the eternal recurrence; however, Nietzsche still speaks of this thought as "perfect nihilism." What does he mean by this? How can the eternal recurrence be the central thought of a new vision of the world and the perfection of nihilism?

An answer to this question can be found in some of Nietzsche's notes from the summer of 1887. In a note from June 10, titled "European Nihilism," he outlines in sixteen steps the meaning of nihilism.³⁸⁹ From the very beginning, the otherworldly religions (Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity) had sought to give human being a sense of importance within the flux of unceasing becoming. This is what constituted one of its main "advantages" [Vorteile]. Morality, taking the guise of religion, was able to give man a sense of orientation, a sense of dignity, and, perhaps most importantly, a sense of meaning to suffering and evil. However, morality cultivated the will to truth, which ultimately turns against morality—the demand for truth at all costs kills God, the foundation for the entire moral system. Christianity in the West (and Buddhism in the East) has bred a more insidious form of

³⁸⁸ *KGW VIII/1*: 217. *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, 118. Nietzsche's emphasis.

³⁸⁹ This note is also known as the "Lenzer Heide outline," as it was written there on a train stop between Nice and Sils-Maria. Werner Stegmaier points to this outline as evidence that the eternal recurrence plays no role in Nietzsche's thinking after *Zarathustra*: "The late justification of the thought of return has forgotten that it had become questionable for Nietzsche in 1887 on the return from Nice to Sils-Maria, so questionable that he makes no use of it anymore from then in his publications. One needs to seek no will to secrecy, to the esoteric behind it. The reasons for the renunciation of the thought of return are clearly recognizable in the Lenzer Heide outline." From his "Von Nizza nach Sils-Maria: Nietzsches Abweg vom Gedanken der ewigen Wiederkehr des Gleichen," in *Entdecken und Verraten: Zu Leben und Werk Friedrich Nietzsches*, eds. Andreas Shirmer and Rüdiger Schmidt (Weimar: Verlag Hermann Böhlaus, 1999), 297. The problem with Stegmaier's claim, as it is based on this brief outline, is that it ignores the important distinction between "science" [Wissenschaft] and the "scholarly" [gelehrt], a distinction that Nietzsche introduces in the "History" essay and makes ever wider after *The Gay Science*. This and the preceding chapter are sufficient to refute Stegmaier's claim.

nihilism that has been unleashed within the 19th century: “Nihilism appears now *not* because unpleasure in existence is greater than it used to be, but because we have become more generally mistrustful of a ‘meaning’ in evil, indeed in existence itself.”³⁹⁰ The one interpretation of existence that gave meaning to the presence of evil in the world has perished, but since it was regarded as the only possible interpretation, existence seems absolutely meaningless. And it appears that the news of God’s death is now beginning to spread ever further, which means that the time for a new vision of existence is ripe.

The vanity of every striving and undertaking is the essence of present day nihilism, according to Nietzsche. What would this vanity look like if it were concentrated and brought to its logical conclusion? It would be the eternal recurrence: “Existence as it is, without meaning or goal, but inevitably recurring, without any finale into nothingness: ‘eternal recurrence.’ That is the most extreme form of nihilism: nothingness (‘meaninglessness’) eternally!”³⁹¹ The acceptance of this teaching requires the strongest will and it necessitates the rigor of “gay science” because Nietzsche believes that it is the “*most scientific* of all possible hypotheses” [*wissenschaftlichste* aller möglichen Hypothesen]. Only the strongest will and self-discipline can contend with the possibility of the most extreme form of nihilism. The temptation of the eternal recurrence is that it calls on one to form one’s own table of values—i.e., to identify oneself with the innocence of becoming, the stream of becoming. It brings the entire history of the West to a conclusion in order to make way for a new understanding of existence.

³⁹⁰ KGW VIII/1: 216. *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, 117.

³⁹¹ KGW VIII/1: 217. *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, 118.

For this reason, Nietzsche is able to call the eternal recurrence “perfect nihilism” and a new vision of existence, the “highest possible formula of affirmation.” It is the nexus point between the old and the new just as Nietzsche considers himself to have a dual nature of creator and destroyer. Eternal recurrence is both the launching point for his negation of all previous values (including the value of truth) and the affirmation of the new table of values that will be established by the philosophers of the future. Everything will fall into a profound crisis the likes of which the world has never seen before; however, the positive value of this event—the collapse of the moral interpretation of existence—will be that it brings about the great cleansing. Antagonistic forces, the extremes, will be brought into collision with one another and obliterate each other. Only the strongest men “who *are sure of their power* and who represent with conscious pride the strength man has achieved” will survive this crisis of conscience—everyone else will perish. “What would such a man think of eternal recurrence?”³⁹² Surely it would be nothing other than: “You are a god, and never have I heard anything more divine.” Existence would be made sacred once more through the hypothesis of eternal recurrence.

As the ground for the revaluation of all values, the eternal recurrence must be thought of as “the heaviest weight” [das größte Schwergewicht]. Not only is it heaviest in the sense that it gives importance again to existence, to suffering and “evil,” it is the center of gravity for the other values. To speak analogically, the eternal recurrence is the unifying element of the new interpretation of existence that Nietzsche puts forward from the time of *The Gay Science* until his final publications. It is the nucleus that holds all of his other thoughts

³⁹² KGW VIII/1: 221. *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, 121.

together and puts them in their proper order, thoughts like the “death of God,” the self-overcoming of morality, the rise of nihilism, the revaluation of all values, and the overman. (His critique of things like truth, science, and religion are thus motivated by this revaluation of all values. The eternal recurrence itself is the revaluation of science—the move from understanding science as distinct from the practical affairs of life to science as a passionate enterprise that entails a transformation of one’s life.) The ultimate collapse of the moral interpretation of existence puts an end to all guilt and bad conscience. Human being falls once more into the ceaseless flow of becoming, history, and is at its whim. This brings an end to teleology, whether natural, biblical, or historical, which is why Nietzsche repudiates purposes and final causes in the section of *Twilight of the Idols* called “The Four Great Errors.” There he notes how a rejection of final causes will change everything:

The fact that nobody is held responsible any more, that being is not the sort of thing that can be traced back to a *causa prima*, that the world is not unified as either a *sensorium* or a “spirit,” *only this can constitute the great liberation*,—only this begins to restore the *innocence* of becoming . . . The concept of “God” has been the biggest *objection* to existence so far . . . We reject God, we reject the responsibility in God: *this* is how we begin to redeem the world.³⁹³

The rejection of God results in the redemption of the world, the return of the innocence of becoming. But has Nietzsche actually escaped beyond good and evil when he says that the repudiation of God and final causality will result in the “great liberation,” i.e., freedom?

³⁹³ *KGW* VI/3: 90-91. *Twilight of the Idols*, 182.

Chapter 5: The “Dynamic Stage” of Nietzsche’s Philosophy

The year 1888 for Nietzsche, his final year of sanity, was dynamic in the fullest sense of the term. Interest in Nietzsche’s philosophy, which had been growing for some time after 1882, exploded across the continent of Europe after the publication of *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morality*. In more than one sense, his philosophy (and his person) was dynamite—an expression of his will to power. Artists, making up by far the largest group, were the first to take notice of the force of Nietzsche’s thoughts. Thomas Mann was one among the first generation of artists to be influenced by his reading of Nietzsche. No doubt the power of Nietzsche’s use of the German language impressed many of these artists, and continues to do so to this day. However, the works of 1888 (like *The Antichrist*, *Twilight of the Idols*, and *Ecce Homo*) have a rhetorical force that seems unprecedented in Nietzsche’s works. Some scholars would like to ascribe this to Nietzsche’s imminent decline into madness. The problem with such an interpretation is that it ignores the fact that Nietzsche’s rhetorical style gradually develops from the time of the early 1880s onwards. What would be the criterion for determining exactly when Nietzsche’s madness arose? I believe that there is no valid criterion for such a determination. Also, one misses the point of Nietzsche’s later works if one concentrates on only their rhetorical dimension. Within this chapter, I would like to discuss briefly a few of the themes of the works of his last year of sanity and see how they connect to the eternal recurrence and his critique of morality.

The Will to Power: Nietzsche as Dynamite

Nietzsche's transformative use of the German language, forcing into ever-newer forms and turning out sentences and paragraphs that had been thought incapable in a non-Romantic language, immediately catches the eye of the reader. (Even in English translation, his works maintain their natural beauty.) However, it is all too easy to get lost in this superficial flash and forget the meaning of what Nietzsche is saying.³⁹⁴ This is especially true when one turns their attention to the most "popular" of Nietzsche's works—those of the last year of his sanity. The content of what he is saying often gets lost in the vortex of his rhetoric, something that several readers of Nietzsche have pointed out. Thomas Mann was one of the first to take note of this:

No matter how much his primarily aphoristic writings gambol in a thousand colorful facets, no matter how many superficial contradictions can be shown in him—he was all there from the very beginning, was always the same; and the writings of the youthful professor, the "Thoughts out of Season" [*Untimely Meditations*], the "Birth of Tragedy," the essay "The Philosopher" of 1873, not only contain the seeds of his later doctrinary message, but this message, a *joyful* one as he believes, is already contained in them, finished and complete. The things that change are only the accentuation, growing ever more frenetic, the key of his voice, growing ever more shrill, the gesticulation, growing ever more grotesque and frightful. The thing that changes is the mode of writing which . . . slowly degenerates into an awesomely mundane and hectically humorous super-feuilletonism, decorating itself with the comic jester's cap and bells.³⁹⁵

Throughout his career, Nietzsche remains focused on a set of problems that one could say forms a constellation: each problem directs itself toward all of the others and calls to mind all of the others. (The only question is how to enter into this constellation to see it from Nietzsche's perspective—I believe the correct entry point is the eternal recurrence because of

³⁹⁴ David Allison notes this: "Perhaps more than any other philosopher who readily comes to mind, Nietzsche writes exclusively for *you*. Not at you, but for you. For you, the reader. Only you. At least this is the feeling one has when reading him." From *Reading the New Nietzsche*, vii.

³⁹⁵ Thomas Mann, "Nietzsche's Philosophy in the Light of Contemporary Events," in *Thomas Mann's Addresses* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1963), 77-78.

its unifying character as “the heaviest weight.”) His problems at the end of this productive life in the year 1888 remain the same as they were sixteen years earlier in *The Birth of Tragedy*. All that has changed is the rhetorical flare of Nietzsche’s writings.

But this change in style requires careful attention.³⁹⁶ The more scholarly form of his earlier works, and even some of his aphoristic writings, is indicative of the intellectual integrity that Nietzsche had characterized as paradigmatic of the modern scientific conscience. The willingness to follow one’s own reasoning, to dare to discover new worlds, no matter the consequences, belongs to modern science. Our virtue of intellectual honesty/integrity [Redlichkeit] is tied up with the entire scientific project of modernity (see §335 of *The Gay Science*). Nietzsche simply takes this virtue and pushes it to its extreme in his conception of “gay science.” However, this necessarily entails the overturning of the concept of intellectual integrity because it turns to examine itself critically. After publishing *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche becomes ever more critical of the new virtue that he had once promoted in his earlier works. Gradually Nietzsche became aware that the impetus of intellectual integrity (in its modern formulation) remained *moral*: although it does not advocate telling the truth to others, it does demand that one tell the truth to oneself. I believe that this development needs to be examined thoroughly in order to understand the content of his last writings.

During the time in which Nietzsche remained true to his sense of integrity, he demands the unity of theory and practice. The scathing glance of his eye on everything in the

³⁹⁶ Much of what I say in the following about Nietzsche’s evolving relation to the virtue of intellectual integrity is thanks to Holger Zaborowski’s essay, “From Modesty to Dynamite, from Socrates to Dionysus: Friedrich Nietzsche on ‘Intellectual Honesty,’” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84/2 (2010): 337-356. My thanks to Prof. Zaborowski for sharing his essay with me before its publication.

modern world is only possible because he has turned his critical gaze on himself—all in the effort to be truthful to himself. The motto of Nietzsche’s later philosophy can be characterized as “nitimur in vetitum” [We strive for the forbidden]. One must strive to question more radically than anyone has so far. But Nietzsche notes that this willingness to question, this curiosity, appears to be nothing more than hubris: “*Hubris* today characterizes our whole attitude towards nature, our rape of nature with the help of machines and the completely unscrupulous inventiveness of technicians and engineers . . . *hubris* characterizes our attitude towards *ourselves*,—for we experiment on ourselves in a way which we would never allow on animals, we merrily vivisect our souls out of curiosity: that is how much we care about the ‘salvation’ of the soul!”³⁹⁷ Intellectual integrity is nothing more than a vice (from the perspective of the current morality), it is “hubris.” This is necessarily the case because being honest, whether to oneself or to others (or both),³⁹⁸ which was highly commended by the Western intellectual tradition, can no longer maintain its status as a virtue after the “death of God.” In the revaluation of all values, honesty must be counted among the vices.

³⁹⁷ *KGW* VI/2: 375. *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 86-87. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

³⁹⁸ The ability to be true to oneself, to remain identical, ossifies the human being from ever reaching beyond itself to further possibilities, as Vanessa Lemm notes: “The possibility of the human self-overcoming (becoming overhuman) reflects the idea that the human being is not a function of what it is, moral or rational, but of what else it could become, if only it keeps overcoming itself. In other words, what is promising about the human being is the possibility of its infinite self-overcomings. Becoming overhuman, therefore, does not reflect an attempt to stabilize human life into some sort of ideal superhuman form but, rather, to provoke a counter-movement against that which stabilizes itself into a fixed identity and nature. It does not entail remaining identical to oneself, but altering oneself, becoming untruthful to oneself.” From Lemm’s *Nietzsche’s Animal Philosophy: Culture, Politics, and the Animality of the Human Being* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 23.

Intellectual integrity, which has its beginnings in Socrates's quest for self-knowledge and thus pervades every development of science (including Nietzsche's),³⁹⁹ undermines its own foundations. Around the time of *Human, All too Human*, *Daybreak*, and *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche followed his intellectual conscience to reach the point of the eternal recurrence. Within his next work, however, *Zarathustra* rebukes the "conscientious of spirit" (the scientist) saying that science has reached its completion in Zarathustra himself, courage made incarnate, the teacher of the eternal recurrence. All scientific striving has developed toward the ultimate goal of this teaching, which is why Nietzsche characterizes it as the "most scientific of all possible hypotheses" in one of his notebooks. One way to interpret this is that this teaching is the necessary conclusion of the drive of "theoretical man" to understand existence as a whole. As the most scientific hypothesis, it both ends the moral interpretation of existence—the teaching is thoroughly amoral—and inaugurates a new conception of the world. It is, therefore, the "center of gravity," which holds Nietzsche's other thoughts together in a coherent fashion. The eternal recurrence can perform these two roles as destructive and creative because of its Dionysian quality, beyond good and evil. Morality undermines itself, as is evident when one looks at the genealogy of the virtue of intellectual integrity, so that the recurrence can perform this dual function.

Since the teaching of recurrence has finally arrived, it is fair to say that history can now be divided into two halves. Everything that happened between the arrival of Socrates, whom Nietzsche once called "the vortex and turning-point of so-called world history," leading up to Nietzsche's philosophy belongs to one half of history. The second half of

³⁹⁹ "Know yourself is the whole of science.—Only when he has attained a final knowledge of all things will man have come to know himself. For things are only the boundaries of man." *KGW* V/1: 49. *Daybreak*, 32.

history comes after Nietzsche in the revaluation of all values that will inevitably occur once the new philosophers arrive.⁴⁰⁰ For this reason, it is possible to consider Nietzsche to be the “Socrates gone mad” because he returns everything to its proper place—i.e., he corrects the error of morality that had been playing out within Western intellectual history. “I know my lot. One day my name will be connected with the memory of something tremendous,—a crisis such as the earth has never seen, the deepest collision of conscience, a decision made *against* everything that has been believed, demand, held sacred so far. I am not a human being, I am dynamite.”⁴⁰¹ Nietzsche’s own existence is a destiny or fate [Schicksal], one that is necessitated by the intellectual tradition itself (based on its prevailing assumptions). Thus, his statements about how there needs to be a new organization of time and history after his appearance on earth are not merely rhetorical—they derive from his thought of eternal recurrence. He is the Antichrist, and he demands a new ordering of time at the conclusion of *The Antichrist* when he gives his “Law against Christianity”: “Given on the Day of Salvation, on the first day of the year one (—30 September 1888, according to the false calculation of time).”⁴⁰² The false calculation of time is the Christian, the linear, teleological one; the true calculation is that of the eternal recurrence.

The title of his autobiography, *Ecce Homo*, has a definite biblical connotation: this is what Pilate said in John’s Gospel when he presented Jesus to the Jewish crowd, “Ecce homo!” [Behold, this man.] It is not mistaken that Nietzsche references this passage in the

⁴⁰⁰ Might not Nietzsche consider himself to be the “*music-making Socrates*” [musiktreibenden Sokrates], which he said the world was waiting for now that logic “bites its own tail” and allows tragic wisdom to break through? His invention of the “gay science” would seem to indicate that Nietzsche has found a new vision of the world through the eternal recurrence, which reconciles science and art. *KGW* III/1: 98. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 75.

⁴⁰¹ *KGW* VI/3: 363. *Ecce Homo*, 143-144. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

⁴⁰² *KGW* VI/3: 252. *The Antichrist*, 66.

Bible because he views himself as playing a role similar to Jesus. The audience must make up their minds for themselves about the character (and nature?) of the man who has become what he is. One must also consider that Nietzsche thinks that he is the dividing point of history in a way in which the advent of Jesus was the turning point of history in the Christian, moral conception. The difference between the two could not be greater, though. Christ came to bring a message of peace and goodwill toward men, as the angel Gabriel announced.

Nietzsche's message is much different, as he hints in a poem affixed to the beginning of *The Gay Science*:

Ecce Homo

Yes! I know now whence I came!
 Unsatiated like a flame
 my glowing ember squanders me.
 Light to all on which I seize,
 ashen everything I leave:
 Flame am I most certainly!⁴⁰³

Nietzsche announces himself as the “flame” that leaves everything in ashes. Rather than the peace that is the Savior, Nietzsche thinks that war⁴⁰⁴ (the conflict between forces for supremacy, the will to power) will inevitably break out for the total domination of the earth.

⁴⁰³ KGW V/2: 39. *The Gay Science*, 23.

⁴⁰⁴ The revaluation of all values does not mean that Nietzsche is done with truth, as we will see shortly, but that new conceptions are allowed to exist in competition with one another. His kind of war does not seek the annihilation of the opposing party: “Nietzschean *Umwertung* is a philosophical war-praxis that serves, not to establish victory or a personal hegemony over his opponents, not to destroy and be finished with truth, good and evil, equality, or whatever values he is contesting; it serves rather to resist and limit their tyranny, so as to *open* and *re-open* the question of overcoming: what would be the overcoming of these values? What would a standpoint beyond good and evil look like? What would constitute an affirmative practice beyond the hostility to life? The principal orientation of *Umwertung* is not destructive, but productive and experimental: to inaugurate new challenges to hegemonic ideals and stimulate others to do [*sic*] the same, so as to multiply new positions and countervalues.” From Herman Siemen's article, “*Umwertung*: Nietzsche's ‘War-Praxis’ and the Problem of Yes-Saying and No-Saying in *Ecce Homo*,” *Nietzsche-Studien* 38 (2009): 197. New positions open up that can then be used to question the Christian, moral ideal. Since there is no perspective that exists outside of life, according to Nietzsche, this is necessary for questioning the value of moral values. Which set of values are better for the enhancement of life—the new or the old?

“There will be wars such as the earth has never seen. Starting with me, the earth will know *great politics*—”⁴⁰⁵ The will to master the earth is the final phase in the movement of modernity, bringing the logic of subjectivity to its necessary conclusion, and it is indicative of the nature of the world as will to power—and nothing else. One of his last works, *Twilight of the Idols*, is “a *great declaration of war*” on everything that had come before—the “*eternal idols*” of humanity. He even has a code of rules for making war in *Ecce Homo*.

Nietzsche’s “truths” are no longer the radical discoveries that are the fruit of his exploration of the human psyche. They cannot be the products of his intellectual honesty, which is why he often refers to his thoughts as “*my truths*.” These are merely the expressions of his will to power, and nothing more. Truth has become “effective” or “dynamic,” as Friedrich Jünger formulates it. Everyone else does not have their truths, they want to remain honest, as Nietzsche notes in a section of *Twilight of the Idols* called “On the ‘intellectual conscience’” [Zum “intellektuellen Gewissen”]:

Nothing seems rarer to me these days than genuine hypocrisy. I really suspect that the gentle air of our culture is not good for this plant. Hypocrisy belongs to an age of strong faith: where people do not give up their faith even when they are *forced* into pretending to adopt another. People will just drop their own faith these days; or, more likely, they will take on an additional one,—in either case they stay *honest* [ehrlich].⁴⁰⁶

People want to remain honest despite the conflicting, and competing, positions that they assume; it is a sign of his toleration that modern man can accommodate all of this conflict within himself, but it is also a sign that he has no unity to the form of the expressions in his life (as he noted in §§4-5 of the “History” essay).⁴⁰⁷ Nietzsche, on the other hand, believes

⁴⁰⁵ *KGW* VI/3: 364. *Ecce Homo*, 144. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

⁴⁰⁶ *KGW* VI/3: 116. *Twilight of the Idols*, 200. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

⁴⁰⁷ In other words, modern man is afraid of himself, the truth about who he is: “These ‘good people,’—all of them now moralized root and branch and disgraced as far as honesty [Ehrlichkeit] is concerned and ruined for

he has mastered the various forces and strains of thought within himself so as to have “become who he is.” He has fashioned himself out of all of the different “errors” and contradictions of spirit, he has freed himself from the entire history of idealism. Philosophy, as experimentation in the forbidden, has allowed Nietzsche to transform himself into that which he is. He is no longer a human being, a man, but he is dynamite—a force so powerful that he changes the very course of history.

Nietzsche, the Hyperborean

Nietzsche considered *The Antichrist* the “first book of the revaluation of all values.” In this short essay, he builds on his previous arguments concerning the origin of Christian morality in *On the Genealogy of Morality* of the previous year. The appearance of the Antichrist is what calls for a reconsideration of the values of Christian morality. According to Nietzsche, these values are all life-negating. The fact that ascetic ideals, as he described them in the “Third Essay” of the *Genealogy*, mean so much to man “reveals a basic fact of human will, its *horror vacui*; it needs an aim—, and it prefers to will *nothingness* rather than *not will*.”⁴⁰⁸ As far back as the “History” essay, Nietzsche noted how the drive to knowledge, when taken to the extreme, ultimately undermines (and destroys) itself because it removes its own foundation in life. This drive is the “*most recent and noblest manifestation*” of the ascetic ideal, which means that modern science, despite its often open hostility to religion, is the true heir to religion/morality because it still pursues truth.

all eternity: which of them could stand a single *truth* ‘about man’! . . . Or, to ask more pertinently: which of them could bear a *true* biography!” *KGW* VI/2: 404. *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 108. Could these people even bear Nietzsche’s autobiography?

⁴⁰⁸ *KGW* VI/2: 357. *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 72. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

Even those who say no to everything that has come before remain within the framework established by Christian morality. “All these pale atheists, Antichrists, immoralists, nihilists, these skeptics, ephectics, *hectics* of the mind” think that they are all free spirits, liberated from the Christian morality. “I will tell them what they themselves cannot see—because they are standing too close to themselves—this ideal is quite simply *their* ideal as well . . . These are very far from being *free* spirits: *because they still believe in truth.*”⁴⁰⁹ The problem that opens the *Genealogy* is the problem that Nietzsche points out here: these people do not know themselves; they try to understand themselves, but they have never sought themselves; because they insist on the need for this search (even if they never do search) they remain within the confines of the moral interpretation of existence (the “unexamined life” is not worth living).⁴¹⁰ The beginning of *The Antichrist* signifies a change in his situation, though: instead of telling us that we are unknown to ourselves (i.e., we are still scientists looking for ourselves), he says, “Let us look ourselves in the face” [Sehen wir uns ins Gesicht]. To look oneself in the face means to have found oneself, i.e., to know oneself. This must mean that science has come to its completion, and is now over. It is now time for a new understanding of existence—one free of the moral interpretation. But what then happens to happiness, which was the goal of all science (i.e., knowledge)?

In §1 of *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche identifies himself as a Hyperborean, one who lives “off the beaten track,” beyond the North, ice, and death. This “beyond” is what constitutes his life and happiness and distinguishes him from all of the other, supposed “free thinkers” of

⁴⁰⁹ KGW VI/2: 417. *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 118. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

⁴¹⁰ Does this not also apply to Nietzsche since he identifies himself as the Antichrist in 1888? As the antithesis of Christ, he remains within the dialectic of good and evil; he still has an “intellectual conscience” [intellektuelle Gewissen].

his day. Although the Hyperboreans (lit. “those above the Boreas [north wind]”) were often associated with Apollo in Greek myth, Dionysus played an important role also. During the time that Apollo spent half of the year with the Hyperboreans (in the winter), Dionysus is said to have reigned at Delphi. In fact, Dionysus had a shrine there. The connection between these two gods recalls Nietzsche’s claims about the “birth of tragedy” several years earlier. A tragic understanding of existence is about to break out from the writings of Nietzsche themselves, not from the operatic works of Wagner. In §25 of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche notes that music cannot be separated from tragic myth. Increasingly he refers to his own writings as music—especially *Zarathustra*. His own works lead to a new understanding of existence since he believes that he has moved beyond good and evil. If this is the case, then there must be a new understanding of happiness (a topic that arises frequently in his later works).

Nietzsche does not call happiness contentedness, nor does he think that it is an activity. Rather, it is “the feeling that power is *growing*, that some resistance has been overcome. *Not* contentedness, but more power; *not* peace, but war, *not* virtue, but prowess (virtue in the style of the Renaissance, *virtù*, moraline-free virtue).”⁴¹¹ Virtue used to be the link to happiness from knowledge, and the paradigmatic virtue of Christianity was pity (in Nietzsche’s understanding of morality influenced by his reading of Schopenhauer). But now, according to Nietzsche, pity cannot be a virtue because it does not enhance life—as a true virtue should do. It is rather “the *practice* of nihilism” [die Praxis des Nihilismus], the negation of life, life undermining itself. What does Nietzsche mean by this? Christian

⁴¹¹ KGW VI/3: 168. *The Antichrist*, 4.

morality, the religion of pity, destroys life through its ideals/values. His argument against Christianity takes the position of an argument concerning the value that such moral values serve in regard to life. Atheism is still conditioned by the opposing position of the belief in God (theism); therefore, it is impossible for Nietzsche to prove that God does not exist, as other atheists attempted, because such a proof ultimately depends on the conception of truth that is derived from Plato/Christianity. This is why he says, “I have no sense of atheism as a result [Ergebniss], and even less as an event: for me it is an instinct.”⁴¹² It may also explain why the subtitle of *The Antichrist* is not “An Argument Against Christianity” but is instead “A Curse on Christianity” [Fluch auf das Christentum]. Nietzsche is not, then, an atheist in the sense of the term as commonly understood in the 19th century—the denial of God’s ever having existed. He is simply against the valuations that strip the present life of its meaning, which assume their most potent form in Christianity.

If there is a god that exists for Nietzsche, it is the god Dionysus—the god of eternal destruction and creation. While discussing Goethe, Nietzsche notes that Goethe was a man who strived for wholeness, completeness and was able to create himself. “A spirit like this who has *become free* stands in the middle of the world with a cheerful and trusting fatalism in the *belief* that only the individual is reprehensible, that everything is redeemed and affirmed in the whole—*he does not negate anymore* . . . But a belief like this is the highest of all possible beliefs: I have christened it with the name *Dionysus*.”⁴¹³ Dionysus is the antithesis of Christ, according to Nietzsche, for he is the god who affirms life even though it is painful (in one myth he was dismembered and then restored to life). This is the god whose

⁴¹² KGW VI/3: 276. *Ecce Homo*, 85.

⁴¹³ KGW VI/3: 146. *Twilight of the Idols*, 222-223. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

worship guaranteed the “eternal return of life; the triumphal yes to life over and above all death and change; the *true* life as the overall continuation of life through procreation, through the mysteries of sexuality.”⁴¹⁴ Much like Christianity, the cult of Dionysus started off underground in ancient Greece; both guaranteed eternal life; and, both admitted women to participate in their mysteries.⁴¹⁵ However, their valuations of the present life could not be more different: Christianity negates this world in favor of a world to come whereas the Dionysian cult affirmed this life as the only life that eternally returns.

Happiness can no longer be understood, as it once was, within the context of knowledge and virtue. It no longer has a connection to science. One of the promises of Christianity was the perfect happiness, or beatitude, which came with the union of the soul with God. In part, this explains why Christianity had such a strong attraction for the slaves—they might not be able to achieve happiness now (i.e., in the present life), but they hope for happiness in the future state. The negation of life now was for the sake of happiness in the afterlife. Not only that, but the slaves strive with all their force “for a universal green-pasture happiness on earth, namely security, harmlessness, comfort, easy living, and which in the end, ‘if all goes well,’ also hopes to rid itself of all kinds of shepherds and bellwethers.”⁴¹⁶ They want perpetual peace—life free from the domination of masters, the life of the unorganized herd. The drive toward happiness is something that cannot be eliminated, it remains a necessary end for human existence—an unlikely point of agreement between Kant

⁴¹⁴ *KGW* VI/3: 153. *Twilight of the Idols*, 228.

⁴¹⁵ There is good reason for this connection, for Nietzsche mentions the following in *The Birth of Tragedy* while discussing how Socratism drove Dionysus from the stage of Greek tragedy: “As before, when he fled from Lykurgus, King of the Edonians, Dionysus now sought refuge in the depths of the sea, namely in the mystical waters of a secret cult which gradually spread across the entire world.” *KGW* III/1: 84. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 64.

⁴¹⁶ *KGW* VII/3: 307. *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, 31-32.

and Nietzsche. But what would happiness be if it is not the desire for comfortable existence (either here, in the modern sense, or in the afterlife, in the Christian sense)?

For Nietzsche, happiness consists in the growth of power, the overcoming of resistance. Since happiness cannot be determined spiritually/intellectually, the only possibility is that happiness must be determined physiologically. This makes sense if one considers that Nietzsche characterized his philosophy as “inverted Platonism,” an attack on the “true world.” (He even gives a formula for his happiness [Glück]: “a yes, a no, a straight line, a *goal* [ein Ziel] . . .”⁴¹⁷) In a passage from one of his notebooks, Nietzsche points out that the Greeks identified “happiness” with the god Dionysus. The god of intoxication and sexuality, both physiological functions, returns to this position after having been homeless for over two millennia. The eternal return of life through the mysteries of procreation constitutes happiness, according to Nietzsche. In fact, the eternal recurrence plays an important role in this happiness, as he notes in one of the most famous passages from his later notebooks:

This, my *Dionysian* world of eternal self-creating, of eternal self-destroying, this mystery world of dual delights, this my beyond good and evil, without goal, *unless there is a goal in happiness of the circle* [wenn nicht im Glück des Kreises ein Ziel liegt], without will, unless a ring feels good will towards itself—do you want a *name* for this world? A *solution* to all its riddles? A *light* for you too, for you, the most secret, strongest, most intrepid, most midnightly?—*This world is the will to power—and nothing besides!* And your yourselves too are this will to power—and nothing besides!⁴¹⁸

Happiness comes from the goal of the circle, the eternal recurrence of birth and death through the mystery of sexuality. For Nietzsche, the highest will to power, i.e., the increase of power, consists in the power of imprinting upon becoming the character of being. In other words,

⁴¹⁷ KGW VI/3: 60. *Twilight of the Idols*, 161.

⁴¹⁸ KGW VII/3: 339. *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, 38-39. Emphasis added.

happiness consists in the eternal recurrence: “That *everything recurs* is the most extreme *approximation of a world of becoming to one of being.*”⁴¹⁹

Pauline Christianity vs. Dionysus

Nietzsche’s most powerful criticism of Christianity does not even target the historical person of Christ. This is surprising considering how influential David Strauss’s *The Life of Jesus* was for the young Nietzsche (as I noted in Chapter 2). By this point, Nietzsche had developed a new approach—he looks at the psychology of the messiah figure. His model for this investigation is Fyodor Dostoevsky’s novel, *The Idiot*, in which the protagonist leads a simple life unaware of proper etiquette in St. Petersburg society. Christ, like Prince Myshkin, is a “holy fool,” or an idiot (in the classical sense of the term, “one in a private station, as opposed to one who takes part in public affairs”). The way that Christ lived is the Christian life, the “kingdom of God” is this way of life: “The ‘kingdom of God’ is not something that you wait for; it does not have a yesterday or a day after tomorrow, it will not arrive in a ‘thousand years’—it is an experience of the heart; it is everywhere and it is nowhere . . .”⁴²⁰ Ultimately, what Christ left behind after his death was not a set of doctrines, not a precise morality, but rather a “practice”—perhaps the practice of nihilism? “Only the *practice* of Christianity is really Christian, *living* like the man who died on the cross.”⁴²¹

How then did Christ’s way of life turn into a religious system with belief in God (theism) as its foundation and the story of Christ having died for the redemption of all sin? Who was

⁴¹⁹ KGW VII. *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, 138. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

⁴²⁰ KGW VI/3: 205. *The Antichrist*, 32.

⁴²¹ KGW VI/3: 209. *The Antichrist*, 35. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

actually responsible for turning the evangel, the good news of a new way of life, into this system, this religion of slave resentment?

Nietzsche's answer to the second of these questions is Paul. St. Paul turned the evangel into a message of revenge during his missionary travels throughout the Roman Empire. Paul was responsible for turning the "kingdom of God," as Christ understood it, into a kingdom to come—a future state. Friedrich Jünger notes Nietzsche's method in *The Antichrist*, one part of which includes a separation of Christianity from Christ, "the founder from the foundation." Nietzsche seeks to "bring the entire historical construction to collapse"—this goal requires a concentration on the distorting effect of Paul on the original evangel.

The teaching of Christ has been distorted insofar as dogma, formulas, and rites have been put in the place of the practice of living. The kingdom of God, which for Christ was a heavenly kingdom of the heart, was taken chronologically-historically. A teaching of reward and punishment, a teaching of transgression, penance, and forgiveness smuggled in . . . The evangelists, and furthermore Paul, have distorted the teaching of Christ.⁴²²

For Nietzsche, as Jünger notes, Paul is responsible for turning Jesus into the messiah, the redeemer that had been promised by the Jewish prophets in the Old Testament. Thus, Paul had to reinterpret history in a new way, i.e., linearly or teleologically: history develops toward a definite goal after the Fall of Adam and Eve, the redemption of humankind at the end of time. Christ fits into the center of this scheme—he is seen as the redeemer, one who had to make the ultimate sacrifice for all of humankind's sins.

According to Nietzsche, Paul is the priest *par excellence*, for he was able to give power back to the priestly class. Paul's reinterpretation of Christ's message is ultimately

⁴²² Nietzsche, 88.

responsible for the formation and hierarchy to be found within the Church. He is the true founder of what can today be called “Christianity”—thus, Nietzsche reveals the actual origin of Christianity, not in Christ, but in Paul’s epistles.⁴²³ While his influence can be felt throughout Christendom to this day, his most lasting contribution is the transformation of the concept of time. He poured his resentment, his hatred, into everything—including his conception of time, which Nietzsche refers to as the “spirit of revenge.” The past is interpreted as leading to the current generation, and ending there in stasis; the future remains an open possibility, but the past has been closed off to the power of the will in the Christian view of time.⁴²⁴ For the Christian, the will remains powerless against the past and rails against the determination of the past with futility. But what if time were not linear? What kind of power would the will attain then?

Nietzsche’s attack on Pauline (“counterfeited”) Christianity is so powerful because it goes for the main teaching, that of the “kingdom of God” as a historical one. The true founder of Christianity, as it had been known for 19 centuries, was not Christ, but Paul. The life and death of Jesus was misinterpreted by his followers: “The small congregation [of Christians] had evidently *failed* to understand the main point, the exemplary character of dying in this way, the freedom, the superiority *over* every feeling of *ressentiment*:—a sign of

⁴²³ Heidegger disputes this vigorously in an early lecture of 1920-1921 with his commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians: “Paul wants to say further that he has come to Christianity not through a historical tradition, but through an original experience. A theory that is controversial in Protestant theology connects with this: [it is asserted that] Paul had not historical consciousness of Jesus of Nazareth. Rather he has grounded a new Christian religion, a new primordial Christianity which dominates the future: the Pauline religion, not the religion of Jesus. One thus does not need to refer back to the historical Jesus. The life of Jesus is entirely indifferent. Of course that may not be read out of a single passage.” From Martin Heidegger’s *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, trans. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 49.

⁴²⁴ I have pointed out in Chapter 2 that Nietzsche believes that Christian eschatology turns into Hegel’s philosophy of history, and thus leads to the sense of being an epigone.

how little they understood about him in general!”⁴²⁵ Revenge returned because the small congregation would have been the laughing stock of the entire ancient world. If Jesus did not rise from the dead and promise a final judgment at the end of time, the Christians would have no claim over anything. For the first Christians, Jesus came in order to sacrifice himself for the sins of the guilty, i.e., to redeem those who had been tainted by original sin. This was the first part of the misinterpretation of Christ. The second part involved Paul’s guarantee of the priests’ return to power through the doctrine of the immortality of the soul.

Philology arises again as one of Nietzsche’s methods of attack against the New Testament; his praise for the Old Testament is well known. His argument against the first Christians and Paul revolves around the issue of “counterfeiting.” In order to arrive at the original type of the “redeemer” one had to go through several layers of false interpretation that had piled up around the “original text.” Nietzsche believes that he was the first to understand the type of the redeemer because he is primarily a psychologist. He unearthed the type of the redeemer through psychological analysis, he returned to the original, true message of Jesus—that to be free is to live without resentment, to die as he did. Looking at the historical context of his argument, one can say that Nietzsche is the most radical Protestant. Beginning with Luther, there was an attempt to return to the actual word of the Bible, reading the original texts in their original languages (Hebrew and Greek). Nietzsche goes even further than this: he wants to return to the original message of Jesus, a message he thinks has been covered over by various layers of misinterpretation. According to Nietzsche, the central issue concerns the historical/chronological misinterpretation of the “kingdom of God,”

⁴²⁵ *KGW VI/3: 211. The Antichrist, 37.* Nietzsche’s emphasis.

making this kingdom something that will come in the future. In turn, this requires a reinterpretation of the past, the Fall, and the nature of Jesus himself (he is made into the Redeemer of humankind's sins). All of this falls away when Nietzsche turns his psychological gaze toward Jesus to find that his true message concerned a way of life.

Moreover, one can speak of Nietzsche as the most radical Protestant in another sense. He turns the will to truth against itself by negating the divinity of Jesus. His protest is the most radical because he seeks a new conception of freedom—not freedom for the individual to have an unmediated relation with God (Luther), not freedom for the individual to give himself the moral law (Kant), but the freedom for the individual no longer to be constrained by morality. It is, therefore, the opposite of Kant's conception of positive freedom. His conception of freedom includes as its most prominent feature the liberation from the linear, teleological (moral) conception of time. This may explain why Nietzsche concludes *The Antichrist* with a call for the reconsideration of the nature of time: “And time is counted from the *dies nefastus* when this catastrophe began [Christ's death],—from the *first* day of Christianity!—*Why not count from its last day instead?—From today?*—Revaluation of all values! . . .”⁴²⁶ A new evaluation of time is necessary at this point, one that is affirmative for life—i.e., the eternal recurrence as an ateleological philosophy of history. This is the ground for the opposition between Pauline Christianity and Dionysus, and the reason why Nietzsche considers himself a disciple of Dionysus.

Nietzsche's attitude toward Christianity is somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand, he denounces it as a curse upon humanity—he accuses it of being the worst catastrophe ever

⁴²⁶ *KGW* VI/3: 251. *The Antichrist*, 67. Nietzsche's emphasis.

to have befallen humankind. It is a religion of nihilism, which deprives the meaning of this life to the extent that it stresses the importance of the next life. It shifts the center of gravity out of this life and puts it nowhere—the goal of the religion is nothingness. On the other hand, he speaks of the depth of spirit that Christianity granted to its adherents. It was responsible for the rigor of science, which Nietzsche approves of so highly. He also goes on to speak of Christ as a necessary component in his conception of the overman in one of the later notebooks: “Caesar with Christ’s soul.” Nietzsche’s conception of Christ is based on that of Dionysus Zagreus—the god who was torn apart and reborn, the god without resentment but with the superabundance of life. (Nietzsche’s signatures on the last few letters he wrote confirm their relation in his mind—see below for this.) As a “holy fool,” Christ loves the evil ones and shows them no resentment, no hatred. To be a Christian means to follow Christ in the way that he lived and, just as importantly, in the way that he died. His death is rebirth into life, the eternal becoming of life.

Amor Fati: Love of “Necessity”

It might seem odd that in his last work, *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche wants to tell himself the story of his own life. What prompts this retelling of his own life is the following question: “*How could I not be grateful to my whole life?*”⁴²⁷ The point of the work seems to be Nietzsche’s convincing of himself that his entire life is worthy of gratitude, a life without alteration or subtraction. His own life is the only “proof” necessary for the value of the thought of the eternal recurrence. His gratitude, his happiness, is the only “evidence”

⁴²⁷ *KGW* VI/3: 261. *Ecce Homo*, 74. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

available for its “truth.”⁴²⁸ This raises another question about Nietzsche’s self-knowledge: does he not know himself? The retelling of his life illustrates that Nietzsche not only can tolerate the true story of man (a specific man), but rejoices in the life of this man, himself. He has no pity for all that he suffered in his illness and isolation from friends and family; nor does he feel nauseated by the past. Nietzsche described pity and nausea as the main ingredients in nihilism; therefore, by speaking only of his gratitude toward the entirety of his life, he shows that he is not a nihilist.

One of the main difficulties for interpreting *Ecce Homo* concerns the issue of reliability. To what extent should we trust what Nietzsche reports about himself? His exuberance and apparent arrogance concerning his life and his writing would seem to preclude any trust on the part of the reader. But his uninhibited praise of himself and his accomplishments (i.e., his books) are signs of the gratitude that he has toward his life—he is affirmative without restraint. The liberty he takes with self-praise is a sign of the level of freedom he has attained: he is free from resentment toward the past. *Ecce Homo* is a testament to a life lived free from resentment. Even Nietzsche’s sickness has its place within the whole: “Freedom from *ressentiment*, lucidity about *ressentiment*—who knows how much I ultimately have to thank my long sickness for these as well!”⁴²⁹ No longer to be determined by the past is the ultimate freedom and happiness for man, as Nietzsche pointed out in §1 of the “History” essay.⁴³⁰ To accept and affirm the past, to live without resentment toward it,

⁴²⁸ As I noted in Chapter 3, the eternal recurrence does not admit of proof and, therefore, is not verifiable. One can only speak of Nietzsche’s happiness analogously as “evidence.”

⁴²⁹ *KGW VI/3*: 270. *Ecce Homo*, 80.

⁴³⁰ “Man . . . braces himself against the great and ever greater pressure of what is past: it pushes him down or bends him sideways, it encumbers his steps as a dark, invisible burden which he can sometimes appear to

constitutes the “great liberation” of which Nietzsche spoke in *Twilight of the Idols*. The greatest fetter that had been placed on humanity was that great deed of rebellion—original sin—that tied us irrevocably to God in our shared responsibility for this crime. But if God is dead, then this, the greatest event from the past that weighed down on our conscience, can no longer bind us.

The fact that the moral world no longer holds sway in the present is testament to the growing realization that we are no longer bound by moral absolutes. At one time, wisdom [Weisheit] was connected with knowledge of good and evil—it is said in Genesis that the wisdom that comes from the “tree of knowledge” will be concerned with good and evil. This held for millennia, and it included those like Descartes who tried to reconfigure the relation of the sciences in the 16th and 17th centuries. The most important science for Descartes was that of morals—so, wisdom and morality remained connected even in such a radical transformation of the sciences. Based on one’s knowledge, one would try to correct the flaws one saw in oneself and the world. This view goes back to Socrates, and ultimately to Zarathustra (in his first appearance on earth). In the first subsection of *Ecce Homo*, titled “Why I am so Wise” [Warum ich so weise bin], Nietzsche instead speaks of “fatalism” as the most superior kind of reason. “To accept yourself as fate, not to want to ‘change’ yourself—in situations like this [his sickness], that is *reason par excellence*.”⁴³¹ To let things be as they are is the ultimate freedom because one is not trying to change the situation; one is no longer determined by anything outside of oneself. This is the ultimate will to power.

disown and which in traffic with his fellow men he is only too glad to disown, so as to excite their envy.” *KGW* III/3: 245. *Untimely Meditations*, 61.

⁴³¹ *KGW* VI/3: 271. *Ecce Homo*, 82.

Everything that Nietzsche presents about himself in his autobiography consists in necessities. This is clear when one surveys the titles of the subsections in the work: “Why I Am So Wise,” “Why I Am So Clever,” “Why I Write Such Good Books,” and “Why I Am a Destiny.” He makes it clear that becoming who you are sometimes requires the occasional tangent: “Becoming what you are presupposes that you do not have the slightest idea *what* you are. If you look at it this way, even life’s *mistakes* have their own meaning and value, the occasional side roads and wrong turns, the delays, the ‘modesties,’ the seriousness wasted on tasks that lie beyond *the* task.”⁴³² The task he speaks of here is to become who you are—the subtitle of *Ecce Homo* and its only directive to the reader. Ultimately, the goal of the work is to present a picture of a complete human being and how this wholeness was achieved. Man’s division between inner and outer, which begins with the dual substance theory of Descartes, and the arbitrariness of his condition, must be overcome. One way to do this would have been through intellectual integrity/honesty—telling the truth to oneself is a way of achieving ontological unity. Nietzsche opts for the retelling of his life to himself, as necessary (parts of which conflict with the information about himself provided by family, friends, and acquaintances).

The amount of space that he devotes to the description of the food he eats, the proper locations for thinking, and the purpose of selfishness, is not without good reason. He feels that these things are necessary. Such concerns are far more important than the usual things most people consider important: “God,” “immortality,” and “freedom.” Without considerations of this kind, these concepts would not be possible at all—for there would be

⁴³² *KGW* VI/3: 291. *Ecce Homo*, 96. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

no life to support them. For Nietzsche, the great man is the one who embraces necessity: “My formula for human greatness is *amor fati*: that you do not want anything to be different, not forwards, not backwards, not for all eternity. Not just to tolerate necessity, still less to conceal it—all idealism is hypocrisy towards necessity—, but to *love* it . . .”⁴³³ Nietzsche eliminates the constitutive experience of wishing for human being.⁴³⁴ At one time wishing was necessary for a certain worldview, that of idealism and Christianity; since that time has passed, wishing is no longer an essential component of human being. A wish desires for things to be otherwise; the hypothetical nature of the eternal recurrence does not allow for things to be different from the way that they are. This is why Nietzsche calls his teaching the eternal recurrence of the same.

The kind of attitude required for the affirmation of existence as a whole, so as not to be crushed by the hypothesis of the eternal recurrence, can be located in *amor fati*. It is here that the eternal recurrence appears in its proper light. To think that the eternal recurrence is determined by the relation of freedom and necessity (and *not* the other way round) means that one is still within the moral interpretation of existence.⁴³⁵ The “love of necessity” is where freedom and necessity are joined in a new configuration under the light of the eternal

⁴³³ *KGW* VI/3: 295. *Ecce Homo*, 99.

⁴³⁴ See Aristotle on the importance of wishing in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1113a15-1113b). For a phenomenological account of the nature of wishing see Robert Sokolowski’s *Phenomenology of the Human Person* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Ch. 15-16.

⁴³⁵ By and large, this is the source of Löwith’s problem with the eternal recurrence: “Whoever wishes to generate a communicable philosophic teaching cannot satisfy himself with a mere reference to an ecstatic vision or a plan; he must attempt to clarify and solve in his teaching the riddle of his vision and to justify his vision in a carefully reasoned way. The attempt at a natural-scientific justification of the eternal recurrence as the temporal structure of the physical world should not be taken any less seriously than the other attempt, that is, to develop the eternal recurrence as an ethical postulate. Both attempts show that in the seeming unity of world-constitution and self-conduct, the two sides that that unity is supposed to unify are poles apart.” *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, 94. Löwith still lies on this side of good and evil, and has not moved to a position beyond the moral interpretation of existence—it remains a vision, a new way of looking at the world.

recurrence. As the “*most scientific* of all hypotheses,” the eternal recurrence is what is most necessary; however, its necessity is not that of a law, which dictates that given certain conditions, something must occur in a specific way. The necessity that is included within the eternal recurrence is that of the highest freedom—or to put it another way, as Nietzsche did in his high school essay of 1862 (see Chapter 1), “Perhaps . . . free will [is] nothing other than the highest potency of fate.”⁴³⁶ Freedom and necessity must be transformed in order for their joining to be coherent. This would mean that necessity could not be what it had been traditionally. Freedom and necessity are not polar opposites, but have been brought together under a single heading—the eternal recurrence.

Nietzsche’s Explosion

Dynamite, even in large quantities, makes a loud noise and a powerful explosion, but its force quickly dissipates after ignition. The same may be said for Nietzsche: in 1888 he made a big noise (wrote 5 books) and fell into silence for the next 11 years of his life until his death in 1900. Madness overtook him like his hero Hölderlin and he never wrote another book—*The Will to Power* was composed by his sister, Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche in order to make money from her brother’s extensive literary estate in Weimar, over which she had gained control. For someone who insisted that “a grain of the spice of madness”⁴³⁷ was always joined to any innovation moral or political (see §14 of *Daybreak*, “Significance of madness in the history of morality”), it should have been no surprise when Nietzsche himself went mad—as the great explorer of the human psyche and tempter/experimenter of

⁴³⁶ *KGW* I/2: 437.

⁴³⁷ *KGW* V/1: 23. *Daybreak*, 14.

conventional European morality. As someone who called for a vast change in the current (Christian) morality, his madness sealed and confirmed his teaching for the coming generation.⁴³⁸ (*Zarathustra* and the Bible were distributed among the German troops during the First World War.)

If this is the case, then Nietzsche's conception of the eternal recurrence is imbued with religious significance. Far from being opposed to religion per se, Nietzsche always thought highly of the religion that was able to provide a unifying structure to society. The main opposition he sets up on the final page of *Ecce Homo* confirms this: "—Have I been understood?—*Dionysus versus the crucified* . . ." Of course, the crucified he means here is not the historical Jesus, but rather the Jesus of institutionalized, Pauline Christianity. This is the only way one can explain the reason why, in his final letters to friends, publishers, and educators, Nietzsche signs his name in one of two ways: "Dionysus" or "the Crucified" [Der Gekreuzigte]. In those final letters he scribbled and shot off, he alternates between these two names. The alteration (or joining?)⁴³⁹ of these two figures, I think, underlines Nietzsche's belief that he had established a new religious perspective, one in which life is affirmed and suffering is given meaning. What is essential to this new perspective is the teaching of the eternal recurrence: the teaching that signals the overcoming of the distinction between theory and practice, the teaching that embodies the true nature of science, "gay science," the

⁴³⁸ Thomas Mann picks up on this theme and develops it in his artistic reconfiguration of Nietzsche's life in the novel *Doctor Faustus: The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn as Told by a Friend*. During the pact between the devil and Leverkühn, the devil makes the composer this promise: "You will lead, you will set the march for the future, lads will swear by your name, who thanks to your madness will no longer need to be mad. In their health they will gnaw at your madness, and you will become healthy in them." From John E. Woods translation of Mann's novel (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 258-259. Mann was right to make the Nietzsche-figure of this novel into a composer, for Nietzsche himself thought that he had created a new vision of the world—music and myth go hand in hand, according to what Nietzsche says in *The Birth of Tragedy*.

⁴³⁹ One may well ask if this distinction, or any other for that matter, makes sense anymore in a world after the "death of God."

teaching that places absolute demands on those who think it. It is also the teaching that destroys the old, Christian religious worldview (see *The Antichrist*); simultaneously, this teaching accomplishes the unity of life, of which only art and religion are capable (according to Nietzsche in the “History” essay).

In the final note that he wrote to Georg Brandes, Nietzsche says: “Once you discovered me, it was no great feat to find me: the difficulty now is to lose me . . . the Crucified.”⁴⁴⁰ Brandes had spent much time trying to find the nomad Nietzsche in order to offer the first lectures on his philosophy in Copenhagen. The reason why Nietzsche advised Brandes to “lose me” might be explained by the nature of the eternal recurrence—it is the only teaching of Zarathustra’s that is not spoken aloud to anyone. In fact, Zarathustra retreats from the human world in order to be alone with this thought; it magnifies the significance of the individual outside the context of his/her function in society. Since the eternal recurrence makes demands on the individual, it might be the case that one must lose the teacher (Nietzsche/Zarathustra) in order to find the eternal recurrence. Nietzsche in fact loses himself in this way. In his madness “there is also a grain of genius and wisdom—something ‘divine,’ as one whispered to oneself.”⁴⁴¹ That which is whispered to himself (and Life in Part III of *Zarathustra*) is the eternal recurrence; Brandes, and anyone else who is looking for Nietzsche’s teaching, must lose Nietzsche and find himself/herself.

⁴⁴⁰ January 4, 1889, *KGB* III/5: 573 (no. 1243). *Selected Letters*, 345.

⁴⁴¹ *KGW* V/1: 23. *Daybreak*, 14.

Conclusion

Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy has often been considered to serve a negative purpose: he delimits the range of the tradition of Western philosophy, demarcating the extreme limits of rational thought. At least in this sense he is viewed as a necessary component of any introductory course in philosophy. This is, of course, an important insight: to follow Nietzsche in his thinking allows one to look over the entire Western intellectual tradition and see why (and how) it developed in a definite pattern; after nearly 2500 years of philosophy, Nietzsche draws our attention to the sources for thought in the West. This is what Heidegger means when he says: "Nietzsche sees clearly that in the history of Western man something is coming to an end: what until now and long since has remained uncompleted. Nietzsche sees the necessity to carry it to a completion. But completion does not mean that a part is added which was missing before; this completion does not make whole by patching; it makes whole by achieving at last *the wholeness* of the whole, by thus transforming what has been so far, in virtue of the whole."⁴⁴² In other words, Nietzsche brings Western thinking, i.e., metaphysics, to a close by thinking it to its logical conclusion. By so doing, he marks out for us the realm of thought that belongs to Western philosophy.

Nietzsche makes us think about the basic assumptions of thought that we hold in the West by calling them all into question. He questions all of these things by putting them in terms of their value for or against life—this begins with the "History" essay. In this sense, he is often called a diagnostician, one of unsurpassed caliber, for he can identify the ills within European culture like none other before or after. And yet, when most people call him a

⁴⁴² Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper Collins, 1968), 55-56. Heidegger's emphasis.

diagnostician, they think that he is simply the critic of modernity. It is true that Nietzsche had a distaste for modern thinking and ideas—this is undeniable. But when one looks at his critique of science, one must recognize that he is criticizing all of science, beginning with Socrates and leading up to (and including) positivism. His attack is focused on modern science because it is necessarily the conclusion of Socratic optimism, the idea that one can correct existence through knowledge. It is impossible to separate Nietzsche's diagnosis from his prognosis, one cannot break off Nietzsche's critique of science from his other ideas—most certainly not the eternal recurrence. In other words, one cannot separate Nietzsche's philosophy of science (critique of science) from his philosophy of history (the eternal recurrence). This is a point that needs some development.

To return to Heidegger's remarks on Nietzsche's thinking, there is another important point. Nietzsche's philosophy must be thought of simultaneously as both positive and negative. The negative role is touched on constantly throughout academia and is manifested in the addition of Nietzsche to the curriculum in the introductory philosophy class. His philosophy is often cited as an example of what *not* to do when it comes to philosophy. It is often also used to point out that his thinking necessarily led to his insanity for the last 11 years of his life. (This kind of claim is one of those that I pointed out at the beginning that is a superficial form of psychologism—Nietzsche's thought can be resolved into his life, or, in this case, his thought has a negative effect on his life. In either case, one simply tries to avoid addressing the content of Nietzsche's philosophy.) The only proper response to such claims is silence. One can merely point out that Nietzsche himself did not advise anyone to follow him lightly:

Vademecum—Vadetezum

My way and language speak to you,
 you follow me, pursue me too?
 To thine own self and way be true:
 Thus follow me, but gently do!⁴⁴³

Nietzsche's writings serve a positive purpose in that they inspire thinking, they are a challenge to his readers and ought to be read in that way. He wants no disciples because disciples do not have the freedom to think for themselves—they must adhere to the teachings of another. "One repays a teacher badly if one always remains a pupil only. And why would you not want to pluck at my wreath? You revere me, but what if your reverence falls down some day? Beware that you are not killed by a statue!"⁴⁴⁴ This is a point that should be noted by some of his readers—they are in danger of turning Nietzsche into a prophet whose message is to be taken as absolute truth.

A middle way is needed between the extreme poles of complete rejection and unhesitant, unquestioning acceptance of Nietzsche's philosophy. His philosophy is both positive and negative, and it requires careful reading to determine his actual teaching. As it is, one can echo Nietzsche's own assertion about his works: they are for the few. Few are willing to take the time to sift through his various writings and aphorisms to determine the meaning of his work. And his works (and he intends for *all of them* to be read) demand careful attention if one wants to understand him. One must follow his directions on how to read him—moving slowly from *The Birth of Tragedy* step by step to his autobiography (and

⁴⁴³ KGW V/2: 26. *The Gay Science*, 12.

⁴⁴⁴ KGW VI/1: 97. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 59.

autobiography) *Ecce Homo*—but one must watch where one is walking. The method of reading Nietzsche carefully is philological: one begins with the oldest document and looks at the extra layers of interpretation and variation that have accrued over time. Following Nietzsche in the course of his writing “career,” lets the reader see the important points of his thinking and whence they came. It also enables us to see an important transitional point in his thinking wherein his position begins to solidify. I believe that this point can be located in his essay, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life” (1874), as I have sought to argue throughout the course of this dissertation.

The significance of this essay for Nietzsche’s philosophical development is often overlooked. Within this short essay, one can find traces of his later teachings, like the eternal recurrence.⁴⁴⁵ But the real importance of this work does not simply consist in these traces of ideas that are fleshed out in later works. The “History” essay is the point of convergence between Nietzsche’s philosophy of science and his philosophy of history. For him, there is no distinction between these two. In a certain sense, then, Nietzsche remains quasi-Hegelian, because, for Hegel, the ultimate science was that of history. Indeed, Nietzsche’s essay on the problems of historical science is a condemnation of the tradition of Western science as a whole (including—but not limited to—Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Bacon, and, most prominently, Hegel). Hegel’s emphasis on history as the highest science, the study of Spirit’s self-realization over the course of many ages, makes him the

⁴⁴⁵ “Only if, when the fifth act of the earth’s drama ended, the whole play every time began again from the beginning, if it was certain that the same complex of motives, the same *deus ex machina*, the same catastrophe were repeated at definite intervals, could the man of power venture to desire monumental history in full icon-like *veracity*, that is to say with every individual peculiarity depicted in precise detail: but that will no doubt happen only when the astronomers have again become astrologers.” *KGW* III/1: 257. *Untimely Meditations*, 70.

logical conclusion of 2500 years of a specific scientific tradition. History, as science, determines every aspect of man; it can, therefore, tell us the most about our world and ourselves.⁴⁴⁶ Like Hegel, whose philosophy of history was at the same time a philosophy of science, Nietzsche's philosophy of science is at the same time his philosophy of history. Nietzsche remains anti-Hegelian to the core, as Gilles Deleuze correctly points out, but his own position is structured somewhat by Hegel's.

The development of Nietzsche's "gay science" derives directly from his attempt to free himself from dialectical thinking in the "History" essay. This short work ultimately asks the question that will be the focus of his later career ("What is the value of truth?"): "Does the practice of science help or harm the way that we live?" After this work, he sets about reformulating the nature and scope of science; and in the process, he believes that he has brought science and art together in the "gay science" (the "*music-making Socrates*"). And the highest product of this new science is the teaching of the eternal recurrence—what Nietzsche refers to as "the *most scientific* of all possible hypotheses." It is true that he drastically alters the nature of science here, but, nevertheless, science remains bound up with history—thus, there is a residue of Hegelian philosophy in Nietzsche's thought. One can see this when Nietzsche says in a later notebook that he only lets philosophy stand "as the most general form of history, as an attempt somehow to describe Heraclitean becoming and to abbreviate it into signs (so to speak, to *translate* and mummify it into a kind of illusory *being*)."⁴⁴⁷ Such a phrase is comparable to one of the most famous passages of

Phenomenology of Spirit ("Preface: On Scientific Cognition," §§27-29) in which Hegel

⁴⁴⁶ "*Know yourself is the whole of science.*—Only when he has attained a final knowledge of all things will man have come to know himself. For things are only the boundaries of man." *KGW* V/2: 49. *Daybreak*, 32.

⁴⁴⁷ *KGW* VII. *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, 26. Nietzsche's emphasis.

speaks of the labor of Spirit to reach self-consciousness through several phases. Becoming is brought into the center of his thought, as he tries to reconcile it with being. Nietzsche attempts to do the same thing, to a certain extent, with his doctrine of the eternal recurrence; however, Nietzsche believes that he has dropped all pretenses of teleology.⁴⁴⁸

Eternal recurrence is Nietzsche's fundamental teaching, the roots of which can already be detected in the "History" essay even if this doctrine is not articulated there. The doctrine of the eternal recurrence is central to a proper understanding of Nietzsche's philosophy as a whole. Without knowledge of this ambiguous teaching, it is difficult to provide a coherent picture of Nietzsche's other ideas like the rise of nihilism, his critique of morality, the overman, and the "death of God." It plays a grounding role in his thought, as Heidegger has pointed out: "In opposition to all the disparate kinds of confusion and perplexity vis-à-vis Nietzsche's doctrine of return, we must say at the outset, and initially purely in the form of an assertion, that the doctrine of the eternal return of the same is the fundamental doctrine in Nietzsche's philosophy. Bereft of this teaching as its ground, Nietzsche's philosophy is like a tree without roots."⁴⁴⁹ He goes on to say that "if the doctrine of return is sundered and removed to one side as a 'theory,'" what will inevitably happen is that it will no longer serve as a fundamental teaching. It will only be regarded as an eccentricity. To separate the doctrine as "theoretical" (or cosmological), or alternatively as "practical" (or anthropological), results in a misunderstanding concerning the nature of Nietzsche's philosophy. As I noted in the "Introduction" of this dissertation, this is precisely

⁴⁴⁸ Nietzsche's self-assessment is one thing, but it is fair to ask the question: does he actually overcome teleology or is there a crypto-teleology at work in the eternal recurrence? This is a question that I raised in a paper recently presented for the conference *Examining Teleology* in March 2010 at the Catholic University of America, titled "The Eternal Recurrence: Nietzsche's Ateleological Philosophy of History."

⁴⁴⁹ *Nietzsche: Volumes Two*, 6.

what came about through the influence of Löwith's understanding (interpretation?) of the eternal recurrence.

The purpose of Nietzsche's philosophy is to overcome the distinction between theory and practice after the event of God's death in order to ground human being in a world of infinite, eternal becoming. His radicalization of science in his "gay science" makes science self-reflexive—it performs an auto-critique. The importance of Nietzsche's contribution to the philosophy of science has been well defended within the past two decades (after a welcome revival of Continental style approaches to Nietzsche).⁴⁵⁰ However, what has been lacking has been a proper appreciation of Nietzsche's philosophy of history and its implicit connection to his philosophy of science. It is here that his philosophy has the potential to have a positive influence on his readers, which will drive them to try to understand what Nietzsche is saying. Such an influence does not equate with unquestioning acceptance of his philosophy—just as the negative influence I spoke of above does not equate with an absolute rejection of Nietzsche's philosophy. A true comprehension of his thought requires the virtue of patience and it cannot be achieved through a cursory glance at his aphorisms: "I admit that you need one thing above all in order to practice the requisite *art* of reading, a thing which today people have been so good at forgetting—and so it will be some time before my

⁴⁵⁰ Leading this front has been Babette Babich with such works as *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Science: Reflecting Science on the Ground of Art and Life*; *Words in Blood, Like Flowers: Philosophy and Poetry, Music and Eros in Hölderlin, Nietzsche, and Heidegger*; plus the many articles published in *New Nietzsche Studies* over the past decade. See also the collection of essays edited by Babich and Richard S. Cohen, *Nietzsche, Theories of Knowledge, and Critical Theory* and *Nietzsche, Epistemology, and Philosophy of Science* both of which appeared in the "Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science" series (nos. 203-204) in 1999.

writings are ‘readable’—, you almost need to be a cow for this one thing and certainly *not* a ‘modern man’: it is *ruminatio*n . . .”⁴⁵¹

More than any other philosopher of the past two centuries, Nietzsche stands closest to us. He speaks directly to us on an individual, conversational level, as David Allison has pointed out. Hence, he is one of the philosophers that has the capacity still to excite us about thinking, in its rigor and joy. His importance for contemporary Continental philosophy is undeniable—Heidegger, Gadamer, Fink, Foucault, and Derrida (to name only a few of the most important philosophers of the 20th century) all publicly acknowledge their debt to Nietzsche. That his philosophy has been a stimulus for finding new ways to philosophize among these (and other) thinkers demonstrates that Nietzsche’s longest lasting legacy is the demand to think for oneself, freely. As much as he denies it, he remains a “free thinker,” in the truest sense of the term: no one else can think for you, this is why he proclaims his thoughts as his own in his last years of sanity—no one else has the right to them. No matter how much he raged against Kant and Hegel, he is the fullest manifestation of the Kantian command “*Sapere aude* [Dare to know]! Have the courage to use your *own* understanding!”⁴⁵² Nietzsche betrays himself in the opening lines of his autobiography when he says: “*Listen to me! I am the one who I am! Above all, do not mistake me for anyone else!*”⁴⁵³ His message is one of revelation, a message of the highest enlightenment. Nietzsche’s philosophy is a positive impetus to thought because it encourages thinking for oneself; thinking remains a task that is freely chosen for its own sake. In this sense,

⁴⁵¹ *KGW* VI/2: 268. *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 10. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

⁴⁵² Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” in *Political Writings*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 54.

⁴⁵³ *KGW* VI/3: 255. *Ecce Homo*, 71. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

Nietzsche remains a part of the Western tradition as a whole, and an important part of German philosophy.

Nietzsche is able to function as an impetus to thinking for us, and for anyone willing to take the time to read him carefully, because of his “untimeliness.”⁴⁵⁴ His thoughts and insights are as novel as they were over a century ago, which is why he constantly attracts new readers to him through his writing. One can see that he thought about himself (and his thought) in this way when he says in *Ecce Homo*: “I am living off my own credit, perhaps it is just a prejudice that I am living at all?”⁴⁵⁵ “To live on one’s own credit” means to be constantly pawning something that one does not have, but which one soon will. It is a strange play between presence and absence, between the present and the future. Nietzsche is only able to live in the present because he has already borrowed from the future—and this remains true at any time, he is only able to excite us because of his orientation and concern for the future (where his thought still remains). Despite what some postmodern interpreters believe, Nietzsche is not a philosopher who was far ahead of his time and whose time has now come.⁴⁵⁶ This is why in one of his last writings, *Twilight of the Idols*, he has a subsection entitled, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man.” It would not be surprising if he would engage in such attacks even today—on anyone and everyone.

⁴⁵⁴ This is a point that Heidegger makes about philosophy in general in his 1935 lecture series, *Introduction to Metaphysics*: philosophy itself is essentially “untimely,” it can never become fashionable (or “timely”) if it is true philosophy.

⁴⁵⁵ *KGW VI/3*: 255. *Ecce Homo*, 71.

⁴⁵⁶ This is a point that is made in Alenka Zupancic’s *The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Two* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003). One wonders, however, whether it is even necessary to appeal to the authority of Jacques Lacan in order to make such a simple point when it can be extrapolated from Nietzsche’s writings themselves, as Heidegger’s own reading of Nietzsche demonstrates.

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