

## **PERSPECTIVES ON NIILISM**

*Per Agnese*

**PERSPECTIVES ON NIILISM &  
NIETZSCHE'S OVERCOMING OF HEIDEGGER'S NIETZSCHE**

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## ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to challenge the hermeneutical soundness of Heidegger's reading Nietzsche as a nihilist. Nietzsche finds nihilism to be the logical result of the moral and metaphysical postulations of the Western philosophical tradition. Nietzsche's task is to reevaluate this tradition and seek a way of overcoming its effects. My thesis lays out an interpretative framework within which Nietzsche can be seen to have succeeded by pursuing fundamental questions neglected in Heidegger's reading of him as the last metaphysician of the Western tradition. By following Nietzsche's lead as thinker from the direction of Dionysos, my thesis displays the untenability of Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzschean thought as the culmination of metaphysics' subjectivistic tendencies.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

Note: All Nietzsche references are by section or aphorism number and all Heidegger references are by page number.

### Nietzsche's Works

A	<i>The Anti-Christ</i>
BGE	<i>Beyond Good and Evil</i>
BoT	<i>The Birth of Tragedy</i>
D	<i>Daybreak</i>
EH	<i>Ecce Homo</i>
GM	<i>On the Genealogy of Morals</i>
GS	<i>The Gay Science</i>
HaH	<i>Human, All-Too-Human</i>
PTG	<i>Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks</i>
ToI	<i>Twilight of the Idols</i>
WTP	<i>The Will to Power</i>
Z	<i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i>

### Heidegger's Works

DoT	<i>Discourse on Thinking</i>
N	<i>Nietzsche, Four Volume Series</i>
QT	"The Question Concerning Technology"
WN	"The Word of Nietzsche: 'God is Dead'"
WT	<i>What Is Called Thinking?</i>



**These things you see  
All mean nothing  
These things you are  
All mean nothing  
In all your life  
There is no worth  
All plans you make  
Tumble to earth.**

**DEÄTH IN JÜNE**

## INTRODUCTION

The proper context of Nietzsche's thought is nihilism. Nietzsche's thinking makes its mark as a radical calling into question the value of mankind's highest values. It is the thinking of one who "resists his whole age and stops it at the gate to demand an accounting" (GS 156). Nietzsche speaks out loudly, polemically, against his historical age and at the same time Nietzsche speaks of nihilism. And so he must. For in fixing his perspective on the modern age of Western man's development, Nietzsche finds nihilism standing at the door. Nietzsche's thinking is to be heard as a violent response to the nihilism he finds at the door of modernity, to the nihilism he identifies with the unfolding of Western history. Nietzsche, in effect, is demanding that we look carefully into our historical situation and ask the question, What has become of us? The question reaches us as a demand, an imperative for thought against the background of nihilism.

Nietzsche speaks to us of nihilism with the need to re-question and re-think the values which constitute the conditions of our existence as historical products of the West. Nietzsche calls on Western man to respond to the nihilism he identifies as our historical destiny. Yet his speaking and calling out oscillates in ambiguity and paradox. Nihilism is characterized as having diverse meanings; it is ambiguous. Nietzsche speaks to us of **passive** and **active** nihilism (WTP 22) and indicates that nihilism can be either **incomplete**, unfulfilled, or **complete**, fulfilled (WTP 28). Moreover, nihilism is seen as symptomatic of weakness and strength; there is a nihilism of **weakness** and of **strength** (WTP 23, 110, 112, 585B). It is evident that Nietzsche approaches nihilism from a variety of perspectives; textual evidence will confirm this. And in turning to textual evidence--most of which is to

be found in the posthumously published notes comprising *The Will to Power*--we find that Nietzsche heightens ambiguity with contradiction.

Reflecting on his position in the history of philosophy, Nietzsche calls himself "the first perfect nihilist" who, however, wishes to be understood as having left nihilism behind, "outside himself" (WTP Preface 3). Nietzsche identifies himself as a nihilist (WTP 25) and, in the same breath, rejects the identity. On the one hand, Nietzsche sees his philosophic project as an overcoming of nihilism--a countermovement to nihilism which finds expression as a "gospel of the future" (WTP Preface 4) in the *revaluation of all values*--and on the other, his philosophy is seen as ecstatically nihilistic where nihilism is conceived as a "divine way of thinking" (WTP 15). It seems that Nietzsche defies a consistent, univocal interpretation of his reflections on nihilism by virtue of the distinctions and diverse meanings named of nihilism and the nihilistic/anti-nihilistic tone of his discourse. Nietzsche, it seems, must be approached as an hermeneutical question mark. Indeed. Yet, in responding to this question mark, thoughtfully, we see that there are Nietzschean reasons for the ambiguity and apparent lack of singularity involved in the delineation of nihilism.

A consideration of the aims and purposes guiding Nietzsche's discourse is called for in order to make matters clearer on the sense in which his philosophic project can be conceived as nihilistic. Nietzsche calls for this consideration which clarifies the nature of his task as polemical thinker. Nietzsche draws us into the orbit of the very *Dionysian* nature of his philosophy "which does not know how to separate No-doing from Yes-saying" (EH XV 2) when he asks us to see how a concealed Yes is the driving force of the ecstatically No-saying, nihilistic movement of his discourse (WTP 405). Nietzsche asks us to understand his reflections on nihilism within the context of the meaning of his polemical project as an attempt to revalue the hitherto highest values, an attempt which speaks nihilistically. Nietzsche's thinking on nihilism is not defeated by ambiguity, paradox and

contradiction. These are not negative features in his philosophy; they show that the question of the meaning of nihilism must be approached as a question concerning contexts of understanding. As such, they are signposts for active thinking.

Nietzsche realized the importance of the question of contexts and made his philosophy a living testimony to it. Nietzsche understood that interpretation is a seeing of something in a certain context. He understood that what is "found" or "discovered" is always relative to the perspective, the interpretative framework, one adopts. Nietzsche knew, moreover, that he would be misunderstood. He knew that he would be found to be what he is not when placed within a context of understanding irresponsive to the thrust of his texts, the meaning project of his work. Nietzsche challenges us with the question of how he is to be understood, provokes our interpretative activity, and, at the same time, points us to the nature of his Dionysian philosophy as the place where he must be met and understood. In this hermeneutical domain, we find that Nietzsche's identification of nihilism with the history of the West does indeed involve a singular and non-contradictory interpretation and understanding. When placed within a context of understanding which is wide enough to accommodate and give voice to the meaning of the questions posed in the multiple perspectives expressed in his reflections on nihilism, Nietzsche does have something definite and unambiguous to say of the nihilism he finds standing at our door.

In Heidegger's *Nietzsche*<sup>1</sup> we find a rigorous hermeneutical response to the Nietzschean question marks and ambiguities which makes sense of the multiple views on nihilism by situating them in what is understood to be the proper context for understanding Nietzsche's philosophic project as a whole. Heidegger's hermeneutic demonstrates the necessity of first coming to terms with how Nietzsche is to be understood as a polemical thinker in order to then come to an understanding of what nihilism means in Nietzsche's thought. The diverse and apparently contradictory perspectives on nihilism are approached from a perspective which claims to be guided by the movement of

Nietzsche's thought project (NI p. 24) so that the question of how to understand the Nietzschean question marks can be answered in a genuine way. It is thus that Heidegger considers his "thoughtful confrontation" with Nietzsche on the question of nihilism as a "*searching for the realm of his genuine questioning*" (NI p. 66), a searching which is guided by the aim to reflect on Nietzsche's thinking "and to trace it in its effective force" (NI p. 5).

Heidegger's hermeneutic wishes "to follow Nietzsche's lead, to move in the direction he is headed" (NII p. 84), and establishes a promising guideline by means of which this aim is to be realized. He explains:

*In order to draw near to the essential will of Nietzsche's thinking, and remain close to it, our thinking must acquire enormous range plus the ability to see beyond everything that is fatally contemporary in Nietzsche [Heidegger's italics]. (NI p. 127.)*

Heidegger's reading proceeds as a cautionary movement against the hermeneutical urge to import foreign meaning into Nietzsche's thought, an urge which Nietzsche himself seems to facilitate by virtue of the provocative metaphors his explosive manner of writing calls forth. Heidegger heeds this tendency, claims to put it out of action, in his attempt to show respect for Nietzsche by bringing to light what is essential in his thought.<sup>2</sup> The essential reading of Heidegger's "hermeneutics of respect" expresses its "enormous range" of sight in seeing Nietzsche's thinking as proceeding "within the orbit of the ancient guiding question of philosophy, 'What is being'" (NI p. 4)? To be drawn into the spirit and movement of Nietzschean thought is to therefore see Nietzsche's polemical dialogue with the tradition, his revaluation of the hitherto highest values, as guided by the metaphysical question "which asks what the being is and in what the truth of beings is unshakably grounded" (N4 p. 110). This is understood to be essential in Nietzsche's thought. And by viewing Nietzsche in such a metaphysical context of understanding, Heidegger is able to offer a consistent and coherent interpretation of the meaning of the principal concepts of Nietzsche's polemical thought, an interpretation voiced as an hermeneutical imperative

insofar as it claims to be *the* perspective to take in order to remain close to the meaning of Nietzsche's thinking.

On the basis of his closeness to Nietzsche's thinking, Heidegger concludes that Nietzsche was unable to overcome nihilism. Nietzsche's range of sight into the meaning of nihilism is inadequate to overcome it. Nietzsche cannot overcome nihilism because he cannot see nihilism in its proper light. He cannot see far enough into what must be overcome. In consideration of the direction and essential aim of Nietzschean thought, Heidegger concludes that Nietzsche's thinking must be understood as "the ultimate entanglement in nihilism" (N4 p.203). But must it? Must we read Nietzsche's overcoming of nihilism as unsuccessful? How must we read Nietzsche? Can we not read him in another way? Should we? These are the kind of questions Heidegger's hermeneutic invites with its claim of essentiality.

If we question Heidegger on the reading of Nietzsche as consummate nihilist, we question the perspective which finds Nietzsche's range of sight inadequate and shortsighted. The question of questioning the essentiality of Heidegger's reading is one that bases itself on the question of Heidegger's honoring of the hermeneutical guideline he sets for himself. Heidegger invites such questioning. We question him on his own terms. For in questioning Heidegger's Nietzsche perspective, we question its propriety in terms of its claim of enormous range and genuine responsiveness to the thrust of Nietzschean thought. The question can stand thus: Does Heidegger draw near to the movement of Nietzsche's discourse through his metaphysical perspective? In other words, does Heidegger's reading give voice to the tone of Nietzsche's polemical discourse when it is heard to be set by the aim to render a "fundamental metaphysical position"?<sup>3</sup> The question is one of the necessity of adhering to what Heidegger finds in Nietzsche's response to nihilism. How hermeneutically binding is Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche as a nihilist? The question is not whether Heidegger's conclusions follow from a metaphysical perspective (and hence are

"correct"), but whether they follow Nietzsche's discourse and are drawn from where Nietzsche wishes to take us (and hence are genuine).

If we are to concern ourselves with the question of the adequacy of Nietzsche's range of sight regarding nihilism, we must consider what fixes his perspective in order to see how far Nietzsche was able to see into the meaning of nihilism. In so considering, we necessarily turn our attention to the Dionysian horizon in which Nietzsche forms his perspective on nihilism. We turn to Dionysos as the guiding voice of Nietzsche's violent, destructive discourse and see how Heidegger's reading does not respond to this basic movement of Nietzschean thought. Heidegger's perspective is drawn without regard to the Dionysian nature of Nietzsche's radical calling to question our age, his revaluation of values. As a result, Heidegger's perspective excludes a great deal more than what it brings to light and becomes too narrow and restricting of a view to take on the essential meaning of Nietzsche's thinking. The determination of what fixes Nietzsche's range of sight and the subsequent conclusion regarding his inability to overcome nihilism issues from a limited perspective whose hermeneutical soundness is challenged when Nietzsche's project is seen in the light of a broader context of understanding. In heeding the meaning of Dionysos as the qualifying force of Nietzschean thought, we can see that Nietzsche's range of sight into the meaning of nihilism is substantially greater than Heidegger's reading allows. The response to the question of Nietzsche's ability to overcome nihilism is therefore relative to the interpretative framework one chooses to employ. For by means of a Dionysian qualification of Nietzsche's reflections on nihilism, it can be seen how he was indeed able to overcome the nihilism he identified with the history of the West.

Our ability to see Nietzsche's response to nihilism in a different light than the one Heidegger's reading casts is not, however, the result of an arbitrary decision regarding perspectives. There are many interpretative paths to follow for questioning and taking account of Nietzsche. Heidegger shows us one path to follow in order to find Nietzsche.

In questioning the propriety of this path, we question its ability to take us into the proper domain of Nietzsche's thought. For Nietzsche calls on us to question and understand him as a "disciple of Dionysos." This constitutes the proper domain of Nietzsche's thought. It is the realm of genuine questioning that Nietzsche's thinking invites and challenges and Heidegger's "hermeneutics of respect" fails to penetrate. We can question Nietzsche in many ways, from a variety of angles. But our questioning and perspectives can be genuine only when they remain open and responsive to the enigmatic meaning of the pagan symbol of Dionysos that Nietzsche chooses as his trademark.



## NOTES

1. This study will primarily focus on the issues raised in Volume Four of the English translation of Heidegger's two volume *Nietzsche* lecture series. The remaining three volumes are also a fruitful source for reflecting on the development of Heidegger's Nietzsche interpretation and will be turned to accordingly.
2. "We show respect for a thinker only when we think. This demands that we think everything essential thought in his thought" (WN p. 99).
3. See N4 p. 92 for the four guidelines which "determine the essence of a fundamental metaphysical position." See also pp. 150 - 151.

## PART ONE

### HEIDEGGER ON NIETZSCHE ON NIHILISM

#### I. Preliminary Diagnosis

For Heidegger, Nietzsche's conception of nihilism is ultimately nihilistic (N4 p. 22). Nietzsche's manner of responding to nihilism is itself expressive of the nihilism it responds to. How does Nietzsche respond to nihilism? As something that is to be overcome, with an aim to overcome it. Nietzsche was unable to realize this aim, an inability owing to the way in which he thought nihilism. To overcome something, Heidegger writes, is "to bring something under oneself, and at the same time to put what is thus under oneself as something that will henceforth have no determining power" (N4 p. 223). Nietzsche's thinking does not leave nihilism behind; it submits to nihilism in the most radical of ways.

Speaking as a physician of sorts, Nietzsche characterizes modern man as a disease (Z "Of Great Events"). The basis of this characterization is a diagnosis which uncovers a lingering, malignant nihilism as the formative feature of Western man's historical being. Modern man is a disease because nihilism is identified as his basic condition; it is the basic element of his values and ideals. The cure with which Nietzsche responds to man's diseased state, however, not only issues from a misdiagnosis but, as a result, serves to advance the disease to its most deadly, pernicious dimensions. Nietzsche's cure is itself diseased. To overcome nihilism is to first of all diagnose it properly. Nietzsche's inability to meet this requirement contaminates his thinking with the very disease he sought to overcome. His thinking, which speaks of overcoming nihilism, is itself nihilistic and therefore fated with failure. This is Heidegger's diagnosis.

In order to understand the reasons for Heidegger's hermeneutical diagnosis, we must see that "the realm for the essence and coming-to-pass of nihilism is metaphysics itself" (WN p. 65). On the basis of understanding nihilism to be rooted in the history of metaphysics, Heidegger demonstrates how Nietzsche's thinking remains fatally committed to this nihilistic history. Although Nietzsche himself understood that to overcome metaphysics is to overcome nihilism, Heidegger argues that this understanding is only partial. Nietzsche's views into the metaphysical origin of nihilism are obstructed; they do not properly focus on what has to be overcome. What obstructs an "essentially correct insight into the essence of metaphysics" (N4 p. 137) as the realm of nihilism's provenance is the determinative role that values play in Nietzsche's thought. Nietzsche's "essential insights" are defeated by the valuative nature of his thought. Nietzsche speaks metaphysically against metaphysics; he speaks in values, in subjectivistic notions. As a result, "Nietzsche stands on the ground of metaphysics as laid out by Descartes" (N4 p. 133), the ground on which nihilism is historically cultivated and the ground from which Nietzsche seeks to extricate himself. He fails and, indeed, *must* fail. For "precisely where his deliberations could carry some weight - if they were adequately thought - they recoil directly upon Nietzsche himself" (N4 p. 128). Nietzsche's deliberations on nihilism/metaphysics, because formulated in terms of values, are inadequate means of effecting a successful detachment from the soil of nihilism's growth. This inadequacy and correlative entrenchment figures in the very definition of nihilism Nietzsche delineates and is evidenced in the notion of the will to power with which he attempted a revaluation of all values. Nietzsche's exposition of nihilism is dangerously partial. His attempt to overcome nihilism, the countermovement in which this attempt is made as a radical revaluation, and the principle for this revaluation--the will to power--which gives birth to a counter ideal for humanity hitherto in the figure of the Overman, is, for Heidegger, a testimony to the culmination of Western metaphysics in Nietzsche's thought. Nietzsche is *the* consummate metaphysician of Western

history. The Heideggerian distinction granted to Nietzsche's position in the history of philosophy translates into an authoritative interpretation of Nietzschean thinking as the sheerest form of nihilism. In this chapter, we shall involve ourselves in the dynamics of this interpretation by tracing what is involved in attaining the Heideggerian perspective which speaks so authoritatively. In so doing, we shall prepare ourselves for a "thoughtful confrontation" with the important hermeneutical questions Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche as metaphysician/nihilist will be shown to raise.

## II. Nihilism's Metaphysical Morphology

Nietzsche identifies nihilism as the historical destiny of Western man and considers his position in the history of philosophy to be marked out by the task of deciphering the signs of this destiny (WTP Preface 2). In speaking of the advent of nihilism as necessary, Nietzsche writes, "I describe what is coming, what can no longer come differently" (WTP Preface 2). Nihilism *must* come. And it is described as coming in "the radical repudiation of value, meaning and desirability" (WTP 1), in the conviction that "nothing is true; everything is permitted" (GM III 24). Nihilism comes to pass as valuelessness, meaninglessness and aimlessness; it manifests itself in a "woeful wisdom" which sighs "All is vain!" and cries out, "it is all one, nothing is worthwhile, seeking is useless" (Z "The Cry of Distress"). Loss of centre, extreme pessimism, violent unrest and a destructive "seduction to nothingness": these are the signs, manifestations, of an historical destiny deciphered as nihilism.

Heidegger's hermeneutical treatment of the meaning of this destiny takes seriously Nietzsche's claims. What Heidegger finds is that Nietzsche's understanding of nihilism is much more extensive than a view fixed on contemporary phenomena of despair, distress, and hopelessness. He argues that the Nietzschean meaning of nihilism is not exhausted when it is understood to merely represent the "dissolution of everything into sheer nothingness" (N3 p. 203). This palpable aspect of nihilism's meaning can mislead us into

thinking that the origin of nihilism lies in destructive phenomena. Nietzsche himself seems to mislead us into this direction of understanding with his explosive statement, "God is dead." We stand on the threshold of this great event, Nietzsche writes (GM III 27; GS 125), and nihilism announces itself as an "uncanny guest." It seems that nihilism is understood to be the result of a crisis in an "absolute system of values" so that its origin is, indeed, found to lie in a ghastly upheaval and overturning of established standards of meaning. Such a view, however, is only partial.<sup>1</sup> There is much more to the Nietzschean meaning of nihilism at work in the announcement of the "great event," God is dead. This the Heideggerian analysis of Nietzschean nihilism makes clear.

According to Heidegger, Nietzsche does not see nihilism as something that just happens as an historically documented event. This is because nihilism signifies an "event of long duration," an "ongoing historical event" (N4 pp. 4 - 5; see also N1 p. 156, WN pp. 62 - 63) whose passage is coterminous with the development of Western history. Heidegger interprets Nietzsche to view nihilism as representing the basic process of Western history (N4 p. 14), a "logical" process where nihilism signifies the "inner logic" or law of history's unfolding (N4 p. 53). In this regard, "the name *nihilism* points to a historical movement that extends far behind and reaches far beyond us" (N4 p. 57). As an historical movement, nihilism comes to pass in different stages (N3 p. 206). Heidegger uses as a starting point the statement "God is dead" for making explicit the Nietzschean meaning of nihilism as an historical process, and contends that the death of God is Nietzsche's way of announcing one stage of a process initiated at the beginning of Western thought in Platonism.

Heidegger points out that the term "God" in the, by now, famous dictum "God is dead" is not exclusively moored in a Judeo-Christian context of meaning. Nietzsche, in other words, should not be heard as expressing some kind of atheistic slogan. Indeed, Nietzsche has been seen as an atheist and probably will continue to be seen as one so long as his polemics are understood to be fuelled by some kind of indignation falling from faith

run amok.<sup>2</sup> However, what *is* to be seen is that the general context of meaning for the term "God" is set by Platonism with its demarcation of two spheres of being: the sensory and the suprasensory (N1 pp. 154 - 156; N3 pp. 201 - 203; N4 pp. 45 - 46; WN pp. 61, 64-65). The religious meaning of God is thus broadened to embody a metaphysical signification that has to do with the Platonic tradition of positing atemporal, ahistorical ideals over mankind. The notion of a transcendent sphere of reality "existing in itself" as the "objective" standard against which to measure our earthly, transitory and contingent existence is clearly not something that theology holds a patent to. The dualistic perspective is distinctively metaphysical. In this perspective, God names the "otherworldly" reality expressed in an historical discourse that develops for itself *transcendent voices of authority*--"authorities and laws from without" (WTP 326)--in such values as truth, purpose, unity and the good. The statement "God is dead," therefore, concerns metaphysics in general. It is a statement about the untenability and collapse, the decline and death, of the metaphysical ideals and values to which Western man has historically turned for meaning.

Consequently, the statement can be found reworked in the following way as a question: "What does nihilism mean? *That the highest values devalue themselves.* The aim is lacking; 'why?' finds no answer" (WTP 2). It is in the light of this formulation of nihilism as the devaluation of the highest values that Heidegger interprets Nietzsche's statement "God is dead" to be a formula for the historical process "whereby the dominance of the 'transcendent' becomes null and void, so that all being loses its worth and meaning" (N4 p. 4). The process of the dissolution of the uppermost values is understood to be a "logical" one insofar as the very positing of an otherworldly sphere *already* includes the possibility of its decline and collapse. That is to say, it is precisely because of the very nature of the transcendent ideal world as unattainable and incapable of realization by man in *this* "actual world" that transcendent voices of authority lose their power to provide

meaning. The dissipation of this power thus means that "the truth of being as a whole is essentially transformed and driven toward an end that such truth has determined" (N4 p. 5). The death of God names nihilism as this logical end; it is the stage in which the highest values "draw their final consequence." At this stage of its manifestation, nihilism "represents the ultimate logical conclusion of our great values and ideals" (WTP Preface 4).

Nihilism is here understood "as the necessary consequence of our valuations so far" (WTP 69 note) which yields the radical "conviction of an absolute untenability of existence when it comes to the highest values one recognizes" (WTP 3). This is radical nihilism and it resounds the "woeful wisdom" of the "in vain" which results from the tension and opposition "of the world we revere and the world we live and are" (WTP 69 note). The untenability of the transcendent ideal world in the face of the earthly world of becoming is the ground for the negation of the highest values--the deposition, devaluation and decisive withdrawal of their authoritative claims from the realm of existence--so that the world of existence now appears meaningless and worthless. "Everything lacks meaning' (the untenability of one interpretation of the world, upon which a tremendous amount of energy has been lavished, awakens the suspicion that *all* interpretations of the world are false" (WTP 1).<sup>3</sup> This is how nihilism makes its radical mark as a consequence of taking seriously the death of God.

But there is more to nihilism than the decline and silencing of transcendent voices of authority. The essence of nihilism--*how* it comes to pass--is manifold, multilevelled and multifarious; "the word *nihilism* . . . permits many applications" (N4 p. 10). Heidegger approaches Nietzsche's exposition of nihilism as a discourse which "oscillates in ambiguity." And this ambiguity is especially evident in Nietzsche's qualification of the different senses of negating the validity of the highest values. There are important distinctions drawn as to kinds of responses to the radical nihilism unleashed with the death of God. What Nietzsche wants to show us with these distinctions is that the meaning of nihilism is not

just a matter of negating metaphysical ideals. Such negation is certainly involved in the meaning of nihilism, but only in a qualified sense. In order, therefore, to understand *how* and to what *extent*, we must turn our attention to the qualifications Nietzsche deems crucial for entering into the broad scope of nihilism's meaning.

Heidegger's analysis of Nietzschean nihilism is attentive in this regard as it labours to show that nihilism is not only the radical lack of belief or faith in metaphysical ideals. There is much more to nihilism than a crisis of beliefs that would be overcome by means of a therapeutic refurbishing of belief in better and renewed metaphysical ideals. To understand nihilism as an event resulting from the destruction of metaphysics, and to understand Nietzsche's polemical project as nihilistic because it sets its course for such destruction, is to maintain a view narrowed by superficiality. A much more penetrating and farther reaching view can be found in terms of understanding the meaning of nihilism as an historical movement beginning, as we have said, with Platonism. For on the basis of such an understanding, what is seen is that the history which precedes the crisis--the radical rejection of ideals--and logically conditions it, is itself nihilistic. The perspicacity of Heidegger's view is demonstrated in its ability to point out the following:

There is more than one kind of "nihilism." Nihilism is not only the process of the devaluing the highest values, nor simply the *withdrawal* of these values. The very positing of these values in the world is already nihilism. (N4 p. 44.)<sup>4</sup>

The meaning of nihilism is not completely elucidated as the becoming valueless of the highest values because the very belief in metaphysical values is itself nihilistic. It is precisely to this fundamental Nietzschean qualification of the meaning of nihilism that Heidegger responds in his provocative assertion, "nihilism *is* history" (N4 p. 53). The reign of nihilism is at the same time the reign of metaphysics; nihilism *is* history inasmuch as history is marked out by the development of metaphysics. We must be clear as to the reasons underlying such a characterization in order to see why Nietzsche employs the disjuncts **complete/incomplete**, **active/passive** and **strong/weak** in his delineation of nihilism



and to especially understand why he identifies his polemical position in the history of philosophy as nihilistic *only* in the sense projected by the first part of these disjunctions. We must see the sense of these terms (and, hence, understand the diverse meanings named of nihilism) in the light of Nietzsche's understanding of Western history as co-determined by nihilism. In so doing, we can properly understand *why* and *how* Nietzsche sees his own brand of nihilism as a transitional stage which is both necessary and positive.

The question of finding nihilism to be sustained and advanced in the historical space occupied by metaphysics draws its force from an inquiry into origins. Nihilism is seen as a result of the faith in metaphysics in consideration of the origin or source of that faith. Nietzsche's inquiry into the meaning of nihilism enters into a deeper level of understanding how nihilism comes to pass when he tells us that "we have to ask about the sources of our faith in" (WTP 12B) transcendent voices of authority. What is the cause of nihilism and "whence comes this uncanniest of all guests" (WTP 1)? In other words, what constitutes the belief in metaphysical ideals, in what is it grounded and what is it expressive of? Nietzsche responds with a very strong set of terms: impotence, fear, decadence, *ressentiment*, world weariness and exhaustion. The negative connotations of these terms converge in the singular expression "will to nothingness." Nietzsche chooses this expression to characterize the guiding principle, law or logic of metaphysical postulations. This Negative will is uncovered as that which lies at the bottom of metaphysics; it is the contemptuous tone in which the transcendent voices of authority speak. In speaking the language of dualisms--ideal/actual world, being/becoming, essence/appearance, mind/body--metaphysics gives voice to this Negative will.

The dualistic framework sustained by metaphysics is guided by a Negative logic which "judges of the world as it *is* that it ought *not* to be" (WTP 585A). The basis of this Negatory judgment is a moral prejudice which Nietzsche finds operative in the historical development of metaphysical concepts beginning with Platonism. The Platonic concept of a

true world of being, for instance, "insinuates that this world is untruthful, deceptive, inessential--and consequently also not a world adopted to our needs" (WTP 586). What Nietzsche wants us to consider is that the metaphysical *needs* which effect the ontological rift between two worlds are ultimately conditioned by moral imperatives which command what *ought* and *should* count as true or real. According to Nietzsche, the history of metaphysics is inseparably a history of morality in regard to the propensity to measure the worth and value of existence against idealized standards of meaning or a "thus it ought to be" (WTP 333).<sup>5</sup> Philosophy, religion, and morality in general are deciphered as symptoms of a certain "will to nothingness" or manifestations of a logic of Negation which spans the course of Western history.

In the realm of *moral-metaphysics*, this logic of Negation has, as we have seen, its first spokesman in Plato who, from out of contempt for the motley world of the senses, turned to the suprasensory for truth and uniformity. In Descartes' "desire for a world of the constant," the same logic is at work in his "contempt, hatred for all that perishes, changes, varies" (WTP 585A) which now translates itself into the laying out of a firm foundation to support and determine indeterminate being--the mind. The modern epistemological/metaphysical world of unities, grounds, order and regularity which evolved out of Cartesian Rationalism, and the Platonic world of being with which Western thought begun, embody a common covert principle which Nietzsche translates as, "the world as it ought to be exists; this world, in which we live, is an error--this world of ours ought not to exist" (WTP 585A). What this principle entails is the denial and denigration, the negation and depreciation, of the immediate world of our lived experience, the "actual" world in which we *are*.<sup>6</sup> The positing of an ideal world to which the transitory, enigmatic and indeterminate world of becoming *should* conform is identified as having "been our most dangerous attempt yet to assassinate life" (WTP 583). This most dangerous logic of Negation or Denial finds, perhaps, its most keenest form of expression in the Judeo-

Christian concept of the afterlife. For Nietzsche, this "thanatological" concept robs "of its innocence the whole purely chance character of events" (D 13) as it sullies the "terrors, deprivations, impoverishments, midnight adventures, risks, and blunders" (GS 338) of *this* life with the introduction of guilt, sin, and punishment as the putative signposts which mark out the path to the *other* life.<sup>7</sup> The whole Judeo-Christian morality of good and evil represents a radical shifting of "the centre of gravity of life *out* of life into the 'Beyond' - into *nothingness*" (A 43), an instilling of a "poisonous vapour over reality" in the institution of "castrationist ideals" which make of man's "earthly" instincts--affects, passions, sensuality--"an antithesis to a purely imagined world of the good" (WTP 786).<sup>8</sup>

The "mortal hostility towards sensuality" (Tol V 2) is identified as a world weariness and pathetic exhibition of weakness which seeks an "escape from becoming," from "plurality and change," out of fear of the senses and passions it counsels against (WTP 778). What, however, this hostility counsels for is a transcendent, otherworldly sphere of values which only serves to negate the value of *this* world and to, indeed, make reality, existence, come into conflict with itself. Put tersely, "it is the instinct of life-weariness, and not that of life, which has created the 'other world'" (WTP 586). "The 'denial of life' as an aim of life" (WTP 707): this is the logic<sup>9</sup> underlying the cultivation of moral-metaphysical concepts and the reason why Nietzsche contends that there is "something weary and sick in metaphysicians and religious people" (WTP 579). *Ressentiment* against actuality creating ideals "contradictory to life" so that the value of life takes on nil: nihilism.<sup>10</sup> Its cause, origin? A will drained of vitality and made impotent by its *need* for transcendent voices of authority to which to turn for meaning, a negative meaning where becoming, the *πολιτειαί* world in which we live and *are*, is sullied by otherworldly condemnatory restraint. Nihilism is thus found to be rooted in the logic of Negation and Denial sustaining and advancing the dualistic framework of moral-metaphysics.

As we have seen, the tension which yields the **radical** "in vain" and the unbridled "yearning for nothingness" transpires as the ultimate end of an historically sustained dualistic framework of meaning. This **radical** sense of nihilism represents a **passive** submission to the Negatory logic in which transcendent ideals are rooted. When transcendent voices of authority wane, a lament for their demise resigns itself to the utter meaninglessness and worthlessness engulfing existence. This lament, however, is a metaphysical one, for it despairs at a loss of meaning only because a *need* for transcendent ideals still prevails. It is precisely from this *need* that that which Nietzsche calls **passive** nihilism draws its force. The **passive** nihilist is convinced that "all is lost," that "nothing is worthwhile," inasmuch as he can find no other meaning and worth in existence than that which moral-metaphysics prescribes. Only because meaning is fixed in relation to existence conforming to an otherworldly sphere of being in the first place does the **passive** nihilism which despairingly utters meaninglessness arise when that other sphere proves untenable. The gnawing "pathos of [the] 'in vain'" (WTP 585A) saturating the pessimistic evaluations formulated in the, as it were, shadow of God's death (where **passive** nihilism makes its mark by casting a dark pall over everything) is symptomatic of a "decay, disintegration, weakness" which flourishes as a cancerous *need* for transcendent standards of meaning. Emerging as an ostensible spokesman for **passive** nihilism, this kind of pessimism "is convinced that all that happens is meaningless and in vain; and that there ought not to be anything meaningless and in vain. But whence this: there ought not to be? From whence does one get *this* 'meaning,' *this* standard" (WTP 36)? As a product of his thorough endeavour to "think pessimism through to the bottom" (BGE 56), what Nietzsche uncovers as ammunition for registering a response is decidedly devastating, to say the least. We have only to remember what he has to say about the nature of the *need* for transcendent ideals and the sources of faith in transcendent voices of authority in order to see why Nietzsche characterizes this kind of pessimism and nihilism as representative of weakness and

impotence. Because the negation of the highest values in the face of their untenability results in a concomitant negation and unbridled repudiation of the *already* repudiated world, this sense of nihilism's manifestation signifies the *explicit* state where the "will to nothingness has become master over the will to life" (WTP 401).

What is to be gleaned here is that the passive and weak responses to the death of God issue from an inability to distinguish the "cause" of nihilism from its "consequences." This inability is effective in the very nature of the reaction to the death of God as one of negativity. The passivistic and weak standpoint reacts to the consequences of God's death--loss of gravity, centre, firm footing in a reliable ground, falling into a void, abyss, opened up by a crisis, anarchy, of beliefs--as the cause or origin of nihilism insofar as it cites such consequences in support of a view intent on demonstrating for itself the worthlessness of existence. The negative, disparaging phenomena following God's death are thus viewed negatively as representing the nihilism to which man, no longer able to justify his existence, must now, with a feeling of powerlessness, resign himself. Such a view, however, cannot see that the root of nihilism's fruition is the logic of Denial and Negation holding sway over the very belief *in* the authority of the transcendent ideal, the very faith *in* the dualistic framework of meaning. Moreover, this shortsightedness gives rise to the *dangerous* illusion that nihilism--inasmuch as it is seen *only* as the negative results of a collapse of transcendent ideals--can be counteracted by the reinstatement of new transcendent voices of authority in the place of the old. Nihilism, however, is not and cannot be averted in this way because the root of its fruition as the Negatory logic of Denial ensconced in moral-metaphysics is not exposed for what it is. That is to say, because the passivistic and weak standpoint is oriented by the residues of a metaphysical longing for new otherworldly values, its response to the death of God is fatally misdirected. As a result, the passivistic and weak standpoint cannot help but to submit to the nihilism it cannot properly see and identify. This submission is drastic and decisive.

Operating under a code of silence prescribed by the unquestioned *need* for transcendent voices of authority, the hitherto unheard "will to nothingness" is now voiced quite radically in the explicit declarations of worthlessness it has long ago cultivated. The **passive** and **weak** nihilism Nietzsche finds standing at the door of modernity thus represents the ripest fruit of a Negative historical cultivation whose harvest is gathered under the auspices of an unquestioned metaphysical *need*. This **passive** and **weak** state of affairs is only the beginning of something even more rotten and *dangerously* overripe. Nietzsche recognized that the obfuscation surrounding the origin of nihilism provides the necessary climactic conditions under which it flourishes to its most *dangerous* form of fruition. Nietzsche's posthumous vision extends into the horizon of the twentieth century as it demarcates for itself, in general overtones, the nihilistic configurations of an historical destiny that will come in the form of: the "economic management of the earth" where mankind will have its meaning determined "as a machine in the service of this economy - as a tremendous clockwork composed of ever smaller, ever more subtly 'adapted' gears" (WTP 866); the modern technological desert, wasteland, of "decaying, unfruitful life" promulgated by a system of values hostile to the flow of the earth and man's place in it; the unmitigated banality of power, money and opinions expressed in the supply and demand character of an entire global culture of consumerism--"who and how many will consume this" (D 175)--and newspaper readers; the systematic reduction, dwarfing, of man into a "calculable unit," a "specialized utility," within a vast and heartless socio-economic network of production charts, development projects, surveys and statistical data; a technological process which orders all facets of existence onto a representational plane of expedience and efficiency; the bureaucratic concentration of authority in new ideals, "modern ideas,"--Progress, Universal Happiness, Future, Security, Technology--under whose reign man, Ultimate man/dwarf and herd animal, as well as Nature, exploited realm of energy and resource, is firmly placed.

The Ultimate man of "herd modernism" is a Nietzschean metaphor for the ultimate display of nihilism in the new "doctrines of weariness and renunciation" (Z "Of the Preachers of Death") that modern man propagates in the wake of God's demise. The **passive** and **weak** responses to the death of God embody a supreme thoughtlessness which serves to hasten the spread of nihilism to an unsurpassed level of destructiveness. Nietzsche anticipated the emergence of a technological "machine economy" as the pinnacle of an historically cultivated logic of Negation and Denial, as the apex of the moral-metaphysical *ressentiment* against actuality, life, body and earth. The cancerous *need* for transcendent voices of authority makes its *dangerous* mark of thoughtlessness at the juncture produced at the death of God and the reinstitution of ideals in such a way as to ensure the unfettered spread of nihilism in the body of modern mankind. Nietzsche writes, "God is dead: but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. - And we - we still have to vanquish his shadow" (GS 108). What has to be vanquished is the deeply rooted *need* for "any kind of ideal still hanging over mankind as 'God'" (WTP 200)!! So long as this *need* prevails, nihilism will prevail, **incomplete**, unfinished, preserved well beyond the death of God in whose shadow Ultimate man is living. What is needed is a radical putting to question the unquestioned *need* for transcendent voices of authority, an aggressive revaluation of the values posited by a *need* for a dualistic framework of meaning. This Nietzschean need is rooted in the following consideration: "Attempts to escape nihilism without revaluating our values so far: they produce the opposite, make the problem more acute" (WTP 28). As a response to the metaphysical residues of belief permeating the passivistic and weak responses to the death of God and the attendant attempts to find support under a new rubric of transcendent ideals, what, for Nietzsche, is necessary is a **complete** and **active** destruction of any lingering *need* to preserve the moral-metaphysical soil from out of which nihilism emerges. This constitutes an ecstatically positive and affirmative response to the death of God which

announces, "everything of today - it is falling, it is decaying: who would support it? But I - want to push it too" (Z "Of Old and New Law-Tables" 20)! In other words, "nihilism does not only contemplate the "in vain!" nor is it merely the belief that everything deserves to perish: one helps to destroy" (WTP 405). This is Nietzsche's brand of nihilism and its meaning is to be found in an attempt to effect an out-and-out detachment from our "old soil" and to thus initiate a thorough "clearing up" of the poisonous residues of a lapsed rubric of ideals.

The polemical nature of this attempt is, of course, oriented by, as we have seen, the penetrating insight into the root or origin of nihilism's fruition as lying in the Negative principle operative in the dualistic framework of meaning sustained by moral-metaphysics. Because of his understanding of how life is turned into a desert by a "Spirit of Gravity" through which man ladens "too many *foreign* heavy words and values upon himself" (Z "Of the Spirit of Gravity" 2), Nietzsche's polemical project announces the necessity of an explosive reevaluation as "a freedom from everything 'European,' by which I mean the sum of the imperious value judgments that have become part of our flesh and blood" (GS 380). It is Nietzsche's task literally to shake us out of our metaphysical habits which lend an ear to transcendent voices of authority and so advance the spread of nihilism. And it is only in the context of this task as an attempt to radically stray from the nihilistic path of moral-metaphysics that the meaning of Nietzsche's own brand of nihilism is to be found.

### III. Beyond Metaphysical Nihilism

In order to put an end to the reign of nihilism and cut off its growth at the roots, Nietzsche holds that we must liberate ourselves from the *dangerous* metaphysical habits ensconced in our outlooks and lift the "Spirit of Gravity" through which we see life. This is why the death of God is to be experienced as a "new and scarcely describable kind of light, happiness, relief, exhilaration, encouragement, dawn" (GS 343). The nihilism which erupts as a **radical** crisis of belief can be seen to clear the path for an affirmative



response to the "actual world of existence," becoming, once one recognizes that the moral-metaphysical ideals from which existence has historically derived its value and meaning are the true "source of misfortune and man's loss of value" (WTP 50). It is precisely this recognition which delineates the scope of meaning projected by Nietzsche's understanding of himself as an **active, complete and ecstatic nihilist**.

What Nietzsche wants us to understand is that nihilism "can be a sign of strength" (WTP 23), a "sign of increased power of the spirit" (WTP 22) and "crucial and most essential growth" (WTP 112) when it is seen as "an expression of the uselessness of the *modern* world - not the world of existence" (WTP 34). The "belief that there is no truth at all, the nihilistic belief, is a great relaxation for one who, as a warrior of knowledge, is ceaselessly fighting ugly truths" (WTP 598). Nietzsche's polemical dialogue with moral-metaphysics makes known to us the degenerate, impotent nature of the Negative principle on which the ideal, true world of being is grounded in such a way as to facilitate an understanding of why nihilism, "as the denial of a truthful world, of being, might be a *divine way of thinking*" (WTP 15). Such a "divine way of thinking" is symptomatic of strength and vitality rather than decline and weakness because it registers a negative response to the negativity expressed in transcendent voices of authority. This is Nietzsche's brand of nihilism; it *actively* sets out to deny the denying elements that permeate and define the essence of otherworldly values. The Nietzschean response to the death of God is, thus, one of affirmation and positivity because it is directed by the aim to aggressively remove *all* remnants of otherworldliness from the face of the "actual world of existence." Nietzsche's **active** nihilism is at the same time an **ecstatic** rejection of the *need* for transcendent voices of authority. Nietzsche not only announces the death of God as the historical process whereby the hitherto highest values become untenable, but also pushes the crisis of belief beyond any point of return to transcendent voices of authority. Nietzsche's **active** nihilism voices the imperative that in order to counteract the influence

of nihilism over the reinstatement of ideals following the death of God, we must first "see through the naiveté of our [former] ideals, and while we thought that we accorded it the highest interpretation, we may not have given our human existence a moderately fair value" (WTP 32). Not only is the *need* for transcendent voices of authority a nihilistic one, but such a *need*, shrouded, as it were, in weakness, is also representative of a certain naiveté regarding the essence of otherworldly values. Nietzsche shows us that our moral-metaphysical ideals are really the "results of certain perspectives of utility, designed to maintain and increase human constructs of domination" (WTP 12B). Nietzsche brings home a devastating point that the whole of moral-metaphysics is an extended historical "exercise in the hermeneutics of comfort"<sup>11</sup> with his discovery of the will to power as that which expresses itself in the formulation of otherworldly ideals.

With his insight that the "supreme values hitherto are a special case of the will to power" (WTP 400), Nietzsche unleashes his suspicion and malice against the view which holds transcendent voices of authority to speak irrespective of the changing cultural considerations and values of an historical people.<sup>12</sup> To lend an ear to transcendent voices of authority as if they issued from a "realm existing 'in itself' within which and from which they are supposed to acquire absolute validity for themselves" (N4 p. 50), is to remain thoroughly deaf to what is really spoken here. It is the "utility of preservation" which really speaks in our highest values. Values are posited on the basis of erecting conditions of preservation and growth, power, in order to be able to live in a world of indeterminacy and uncertainty. "Truth," "Purpose," "Unity"--the leading values and postulates of a whole moral-metaphysical tradition--are clever "coping devices," "the invention of formulas and signs by means of which one could reduce the confusing multiplicity to a purposive and manageable schema" (WTP 584), whose criteria of validity "resides in the enhancement of the feeling of power" (WTP 534). All moral-metaphysical interpretations of reality are "perspective valuations by virtue of which we can survive in life, i.e., in the

will to power, for the growth of power" (WTP 616). The Cartesian quest for certainty (which develops the concept of a transcendent world of "objective" determinate being toward a definition of truth) is, for instance, seen to have as its real motive "not some abstract theoretical need not to be deceived" (WTP 480), but, rather, an anthropological thirst for power over the indeterminate and chaotic character of Nature, becoming.<sup>13</sup> With his "knowledge of the essence of values and of valuation" (N4 p. 50), Nietzsche shows us in a definitive manner how man's *need* for transcendent voices represents the epitome of naiveté insofar as man does not see that what he takes for an absolute unconditional has its origins in a certain expression of the will to power and is, hence, conditioned by man. And in so showing, Nietzsche delivers a death blow to moral-metaphysics as he makes clear the "uselessness of old ideals for the interpretation of the totality of events, once one knows the animal origin and utility of these ideals; all moreover, contradictory to life" (WTP 617).

In this way, Nietzsche's aggressive removal of otherworldly ideals provides the basis for a countermovement to nihilism. Nietzsche's **active nihilism** effectively puts an end to the Negatory principle thriving in the naiveté and credulity of man's *need* for "something beyond becoming." Because Nietzsche's nihilism actively sets out to destroy the otherworldly realm of moral-metaphysical ideals, it is a **complete nihilism** insofar as it is finished of the Negatory logic of Denial it recognizes as the cause, origin, of nihilism. For Heidegger, Nietzsche's "*explicit* reflection on the provenance of values, about the fact that they are conditions of will to power, posited by the will to power" (N4 p. 79) amounts to the discovery of a principle for a new valuation in terms of which the countermovement to the nihilistic tradition founded on the principle of the suprasensory is to be realized. According to Heidegger, Nietzsche's "new path to a Yes" mapped out by the **ecstatic** No-saying "to everything to which one has hitherto said Yes" (EH X 6), the "transition to new conditions of existence" (WTP 112) which "breaks and removes degenerate and decaying

races to make way for a new order of life" (WTP 1055), embodies as its guiding principle the will to power as that which establishes a "basis for defining beings as a whole in a new, authoritative, way" (N4 p. 6). Nietzsche's countermovement to nihilism--the liberation from the otherworldly condemnatory restraint of moral-metaphysics the revaluation aims for in the aggressive removal of the "Spirit of Gravity" and the rebaptizing of the earth as the "weightless" (Z "Of the Spirit of Gravity" 2)--is to be understood as being directed by the pressing *need* to articulate new voices of authority following the death of God. From this *need* issues the symbol of the Overman as a counter ideal to the Ultimate man of the "machine economy" Nietzsche anticipated as the culminating point of nihilism's historical development. The Overman is the definitive spokesman for the new voices of authority Nietzsche's revaluation gestures as the "gospel of the future" in its bid to avert the spread of nihilism. But Nietzsche's attempt to "win results"<sup>14</sup> from the nihilistic tradition ushering in the modern age of the "machine economy" fates him to be an **incomplete** nihilist, unable to detach himself from the soil of nihilism's fruition. For Heidegger, Nietzsche's new voices of authority are the unbridled expression of nihilism now heard as the "metaphysics of the will to power."

#### IV. Nihilism's Metaphysical Triumph

Heidegger argues that because "Nietzsche's 'revaluation' is at bottom the rethinking of all the determinations of the being on the basis of values" (N4 p. 70), the **active** nihilism it advances cannot transcend the historical framework of moral-metaphysics. The will to power has its origin in the self-same realm of the Cartesian principle of the *cogito sum*. Nietzsche's countermovement to nihilism moves in the same direction of an historical thinking propelled by a search for grounds, foundations, upon which to rest all being. Heidegger interprets Nietzsche's **active** nihilism as setting out "to define truth in its essence on the basis of that which lends all things their determinability and definition" (N4 p. 55). Nietzsche's ecstatic No-saying is heard as a making "possible for a basic position

to assert itself over against others" (N1 p. 28) in such a way that "Nietzsche's philosophy executes the fulfillment of Western metaphysics" (N4 p. 60). The "basic position" which Nietzsche's polemical dialogue with moral-metaphysics procures is designated by the meaning of the will to power as the motor of a subjectivist doctrine which "thrusts man as no metaphysics before it into the role of the absolute and unique measure of all things" (N4 p. 84).

In spite of the heated dialogue Nietzsche develops in his polemical exchange with epistemologically centred philosophy, his enraged critique of the modernistic view which posits consciousness as the "supreme court" of truth, Heidegger, paradoxically, finds that behind Nietzsche's "exceedingly sharp rejection of the Cartesian *cogito* stands an *even more rigorous commitment* to the subjectivity posited by Descartes" (N4 p. 123). The basis of this Heideggerian insight is a compelling interpretation of how Nietzsche's aggressive removal of otherworldly values, his radical silencing of transcendent voices of authority, is guided by an anthropological mode of thinking (N4 p. 149) expressive of the same modern, i.e., metaphysical, spirit of control and dominance over Nature, earth, indeterminate being. According to Heidegger, Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power--the will to power as the principle for a new valuation--echoes the essence of the modern technological age--the age of *Gestell*--of absolute and unrestrained maximization of power over all being that the Cartesian quest for certainty pre-grounded through the positing of man as the ground of truth and the corresponding delineation of Nature as "lifeless" *res extensa*. The Cartesian liberation of thought from the bonds of "biblical Christian revealed truth and church doctrine" (N4 p. 97), is the "first resolute step through which modern machine technology, and along with it the modern world and modern mankind, become metaphysically possible for the first time" (N4 p. 116). And for Heidegger, Nietzsche's liberation of life from the otherworldly condemnatory restraint of moral-metaphysics, his lifting of the "Spirit of Gravity," represents the decisive step through which this possibility attains its highest level

of realization in the new "metaphysics of the will to power" and the "doctrine of the Overman."<sup>15</sup>

Nietzsche's employment of the will to power, thinks Heidegger, as the standard for new and better values has the earmark of the most purest form of Cartesianism when one considers the meaning of the "*essence of power*" contained in the concept of the will to power. In this concept, Heidegger finds the following:

Every power is a power only so long as it is more power; that is to say, an increase in power. Power can maintain itself in itself, that is, in its essence, only if it overtakes and overcomes the power level it has already attained--*overpowering* is the expression we use. (N4 p. 7; see also WN p. 78.)

Nietzsche's formulation of the will to power as the principle for a new valuation therefore means that the whole of reality is to be reduced to the value things have for the furtherance and enhancement of man's power. Insofar as Nietzsche considers values to be constructs of domination resulting from the purview of power<sup>16</sup>, the determination of all being solely in terms of values is to be seen as the outcome of a "representing urge" which presses for the "*absolute humanization* of all being" (N4 p. 83) by turning to man as "the self-positing ground and measure for all certitude and truth" (N4 p. 90). The subjugation of reality to the laws of the subject and the methodological procurement of a ground "for defining what everything determinable is referred back to" (N4 p. 133) are the keystones of the Cartesian representational theory of reality which Heidegger understands Nietzsche's perspectival theory of truth to be a reformulation of.

When Nietzsche tells us that "the value of the world lies in our interpretation" (WTP 616) and questions "whether existence without interpretation, without 'sense,' does not become 'nonsense'" (GS 374), Heidegger hears the language of an unconditioned, absolute subjectivity spoken here. In Nietzsche's rejection of the concept of a transcendent reality of "facts" existing independent of and prior to interpretation, perspective valuation, "Descartes celebrates his supreme triumph" (N4 p. 28). Nietzsche's rejection is really a Cartesian triumph because now "man becomes the measure and center

of beings" (N4 p. 28) in such a complete and decisive way that the whole modern philosophical enterprise born in the seventeenth century is put to shame as an half-hearted attempt to arrive at the truth of man's position of ontological centrality. For as Heidegger understands it, Nietzsche replaces a decrepit form of subjectivity--held in check, as it were, with its giving "excessive weight to fictions of the 'beyond'" (WTP 1020), unable to recognize that there is no meaning apart from *human* meaning--with a salutary one that ecstatically affirms the preeminence of man "in every interpretation of the world" (N4 p. 85). On what Heidegger considers to be a superficial level of understanding, Nietzsche can, indeed, be seen to transcend the subject/object paradigm of reality and truth with which modern philosophy operates. The Nietzschean recourse to the body as the "much richer phenomenon, which allows of clearer observation" (WTP 532) than does the belief in the unity of consciousness, spirit or mind, would seem to suggest a parting from the ways of epistemologically centred philosophy. However, Heidegger holds that Nietzsche's turning to the body as a "tremendous multiplicity" of drives and affects in order to silence the metaphysical claims of an Ego as some-thing that "does not vanish in the multiplicity of change" (WTP 489), "alters nothing in the fundamental metaphysical position which is determined by Descartes" (N4 p. 133). Nietzsche merely opts for one side of a metaphysical coin from the vault of Cartesianism and, hence, does not recognize the "intrinsic presuppositions" involved in substituting the body for spirit. It is still the "priority of man as subject" (N4 p. 130), now "body subject", that figures in Nietzsche's ostensibly un-metaphysical sounding dialogue with Cartesianism. Consequently, without even recognizing it, "Nietzsche agrees with Descartes that Being means 'representedness,' a being established in thinking, and that truth means 'certitude'" (N4 p. 129).

Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche's thought as dwelling well within the metaphysical parameters of modern philosophy involves, to be sure, a great deal of subtlety. Heidegger finds that it is not in a literal fashion that Nietzsche proceeds to advocate the

Cartesian picture of the truth of beings as commensurate with thought--"that thought as thought possesses or formally contains truth (innateness of the idea, *a priori* nature of concepts); that thinking is the natural exercise of a faculty; that it is therefore sufficient to think 'truly' or 'really' in order to think with truth."<sup>17</sup> He finds, instead, that the same *essential* claims of this view are at work in the 'revamped' subjectivity Nietzsche advances under the banner of the will to power. What started out as the quest for absolute certitude in the language of the *cogito sum* and clear and distinct ideas is now voiced in the fervent claim that whatever is true, whatever is real, *is* only as reckoned or calculated by what serves the enhancement of man's power. Descartes' delineation of Nature in the shape of man's self-image as rational being--the scientific picture of material objects existing, really and truthfully, when "considered as the objects of pure mathematics, since in this aspect I perceive them clearly and distinctly"<sup>18</sup>--is, Heidegger thinks, the same light recast under the Nietzschean optics of power and values. Insofar as it is the absolute certitude of man's power over all being that is to decide about what is to count as true and real, Heidegger sees Nietzsche's employment of the will to power (as the basis for new values) to be guided by the same anthropological aims found to subtend the whole modern edifice of metaphysics constructed by Descartes. The making of Nature "predictable and controllable" by the subject, "the securing, conquering against beings, in order to capture them" (N4 p. 120) as products of man's reckoning power to enjoin unity and order over indeterminate being, speaks as the guiding concern of the new "*metaphysics of the absolute subjectivity of will to power*" (N4 p. 147).

What Heidegger wishes us to see is that Nietzsche becomes entrapped in the very metaphysics he nonetheless thought he was overcoming with the notion of the will to power. Because Nietzsche was unable to see that that with which he directed his scathing criticisms against moral-metaphysics is itself firmly rooted in the same poisonous soil from out of which nihilism grows as the deadly fruit of thoughtlessness, he bites hard into this



fruit and defeats his own purposes. For Heidegger, Nietzsche signifies an half finished journey out of the region of nihilism that, owing to its incompleteness, comes to an end at a place from which it ought to have gone well beyond.

According to Heidegger, Nietzsche's uncovering of anthropomorphism at the bottom of moral-metaphysics is an essential insight or discovery that is exploited for the wrong reasons. That is to say, Nietzsche was quite correct in finding a certain naiveté in the *need* for transcendent voices of authority, but fatally wrong in what he does with this knowledge. For Heidegger, Nietzsche's radical undermining of moral-metaphysics announces that "man remains mired in naiveté so long as he does not really act on the knowledge that he alone is the one who posits values" (N4 p. 80). "The fault in naiveté," Heidegger writes, "is not the humanization of things, but the fact that the humanization is not *consciously* carried out." Heidegger thus understands Nietzsche's aggressive removal of otherworldly values to embody a certain *imperative for action* as the way in which nihilism is to be overcome. And what is to be understood here is that since the supreme values are found to be human constructs of domination, it is therefore necessary to develop *stronger* constructs, "*more robust* ideals" (WTP 361) no longer influenced by the naiveté of the moral-metaphysical standpoint of weakness, in order to effectively put an end to the reign of nihilism. According to Heidegger, Nietzsche thinks that nihilism can be overcome by simply asseverating the anthropomorphism hitherto hidden in moral-metaphysics. Since it is precisely because of this lack of knowledge that man has allowed himself to be duped for so long, it seems that Nietzsche is advising a recovery from this *dangerous* realm of thoughtlessness through an anthropological route of thinking that will no longer acknowledge and, hence, free itself from transcendent voices of authority. Of course, the anthropological direction of Nietzsche's response to the nihilistic tradition of moral-metaphysics is something of which Heidegger assures us we can be certain and, indeed, *must* be certain if at all we are to understand the meaning of the will to power. We *must*,

Heidegger tells us, see that Nietzsche's confrontation with moral-metaphysics on the issue of anthropomorphism entertains the following question:

Why shouldn't metaphysics affirm once and for all, without reservation, man's unconditional role of dominance, make him the definitive principle of every interpretation of the world, and put an end to all relapses into naive views of the world? (N4 p. 87.)

For it is only in the context of this line of questioning that Nietzsche's response to the nihilistic tradition with the will to power as the principle for a new valuation and the Overman as a counter ideal to mankind hitherto can be seen to make sense. And in this context, Heidegger presents us with a striking, to say the least, image of what the elusive metaphor of the Overman as the *new* "meaning of the earth" (Z "Prologue" 3) is aiming for.

Heidegger's interpretation of the Overman as the "supreme configuration of purest will to power" (N4 p. 9) tells us that what Nietzsche was aiming for through his revaluation is none other than the "absolute domination of the globe" (N4 p. 9). The *imperative for action* which guides Nietzsche's aggressive removal of otherworldly values calls for a new "type" of man who "ought to claim everything for himself as his own, something he can do only if first of all he no longer regards himself as a wretch and slave before beings as a whole, but establishes and prepares himself for absolute dominance" (N4 p. 81). As the "absolute rule of power," the Overman represents this self-assured and self-reliant "type" of man who, no longer made weak by bowing to "commands from above" which sully and infect life with "thanatological" values, and no longer deceived about the *fact* that "man discovers in things only *that which he had put into them*" (ToI VI 3)<sup>19</sup>, with new found certainty posits himself as the Promethean pivot of all being. This anthropological Prometheanism whereby "man becomes the relational center of that which is as such" (QT p. 128) is, for Heidegger, what Nietzsche's Overman, as a symbol of potency and life affirmation, ultimately represents. To be strong and to restore to Nature its "innocence" by liberating life from the bonds of otherworldly condemnatory restraint is to affirm existence and "stay loyal to the earth" by exercising complete and absolute control

over all that is. The lifting of the "Spirit of Gravity" is a task expressive of power, strength and vitality; it is a task which sets out to counteract the force of the moral-metaphysical spirit of Denial and Negation that permeates the passivistic and weak standpoint following the death of God. Insofar as Nietzsche shows us that it is a sign of weakness and "life weariness" to *need* transcendent voices of authority, Heidegger shows us that as a counter ideal to the "type" of man dominated by such needs the Overman can only mean one thing: unadulterated concentration of strength, power, in the authority of man's newly forged position of dominance.

Heidegger explicates this meaning in the setting of Nietzsche's remarks on the state of affairs modern man, Ultimate man, finds himself in in the age of the "machine economy." As a response to the nihilistic image of the Ultimate man of herd modernism, the Overman, hears Heidegger, poses the following question: In what way or form must the *essence* of man be determined in order that he be "capable of receiving dominion over all that is" (WN p. 96)? The Overman is a Nietzschean symbol which issues from a *need* for,

a form of mankind that is from top to bottom equal to the unique essence of technology and its metaphysical truth; that is to say, that lets itself be entirely dominated by the essence of technology precisely in order to steer and deploy individual technological processes and possibilities. In the sense of Nietzsche's metaphysics, only the Overman is appropriate to an absolute "machine economy," and vice versa: he needs it for the institution of absolute dominion over the earth. (N4 p. 117.)

Put tersely, Nietzsche's response to the "machine economy" is conquer or be conquered (See WT pp. 57 & 65). *Who* can conquer? Is man *strong* enough to assume dominion? Not as long as his *essence* is fixed by the restraints of moral-metaphysical depictions of reality. Not as long as he sees himself in the light cast by God and in the shadow encroaching existence upon the eclipse of His authority. The new image of man Nietzsche's *active* nihilism forges with the hammer of the will to power issues forth as a challenge to take command of the modern technological process (through which man and man's earth is

continually reduced to a wasteland of vapid significations) before it is too late to do anything to prevent the poisonous spread of nihilism. Such a challenge is resounded against the backdrop of thoughtlessness set up by the passivistic and weak standpoints adopted by the Ultimate man of herd modernism. It is, according to Heidegger, the motor of Nietzsche's countermovement to nihilism, that which clears the path to "new dawns." But it is precisely because of this challenge to become the "advance guard" of the modern technological process that Nietzsche's countermovement to nihilism is seen to take a fatal swing in the opposite direction. The anthropological *imperative for action* found to underlie the formulation of the will to power and the "doctrine of the Overman" is the determinative factor which turns Nietzsche's thinking into the ultimate expression of the nihilism it could not overcome.

Expressed in Nietzsche's thought of the Overman and the will to power is what Heidegger understands to constitute the essence of the nihilistic modern age of *Technik* (*Gestell*) in which everything is increasingly revealed and ordered as standing reserve (*Bestand*). Through the challenge to assume dominion over all that is as the "master of the absolute administration of power with the fully developed power resources of the earth" (N4 p. 82), Heidegger hears Nietzsche to, in unmistakable terms, give voice to the manipulative, self-assertive thinking en-framing the modern outlook; an outlook en-framed in such a way where the elements of the deeply mysterious earth are, for instance, seen to stand-in-reserve as potential commodities to be brought forth and exploited by a technological power of the will. In Heidegger's estimation, the will to power is the principle for the calculation of values which determine the standing reserve through a "complete ordering of all beings, in the sense of a systematic securing of stockpiles" (N4 p.234; see also WN pp. 85, 91 & 107). The will to power is a name for the calculative, technological thinking which characterizes our troubled modern age; it names the essence of an age where the earth can show "itself only as an object of assault, an assault that, in

human willing, establishes itself as unconditional objectification" (WN p. 100). Accordingly, the "doctrine of the Overman"--insofar as it presents the new image of the powerful "type" of man who "exalts himself to the posture of lord of the earth" (QT p. 27)--is seen to represent the finishing touches on a picture of reality projected by the modernistic, i.e., subjectivistic, framework of Cartesianism. By drawing out such a picture of what, as outcomes of an anthropological *imperative for action*, the Overman and the will to power represent, Heidegger, at the same time, shows how Nietzsche's response to the nihilism he anticipated arising in the form of the "machine economy" has all the elements of a *dangerous* default in thinking regarding how nihilism really comes to pass. In the same way that Nietzsche cited the passivistic and weak standpoints as obfuscating the origin of nihilism, Heidegger finds in Nietzsche's anthropological standpoint a profound lack of vision that results of the most sophisticated display of nihilism in his thinking.

According to Heidegger, Nietzsche's active nihilism "gazes soberly at the forces and powers that betoken danger" (N4 p. 54) as it sets out to excise the cancerous *need* for transcendent voices of authority. But this Nietzschean gaze is only partial and not as thoughtful or sober as it should be. Due to the anthropological mode of his thinking, Nietzsche could not fully see how the nihilism which comes to pass as the "machine economy" is firmly rooted in the history of metaphysics as the history of the ascendancy of subjectivity. Nietzsche could not properly see that the modern age of the "machine economy" is the historical denouement of a "hastening towards beings" (N4 p. 173) which revolves in the ontological orbit of man as *subjectum* or *Grund*. This lack of insight is evidenced, of course, by the very nature of Nietzsche's critique of moral-metaphysics, a critique which Heidegger finds to be fuelled by the concern that it, metaphysics, "*still* does *not* posit man as *subjectum* in a way that is complete and decisive enough" (N4 p. 28). Moreover, it is precisely because of this fatal concern that Nietzsche was only able to identify the origin of nihilism as the logic of Negation responsible for the otherworldliness

of moral-metaphysics. What Heidegger wants us to see, however, is that such an identification is *dangerously* shortsighted insofar as it does not, and cannot, see that the *real* origin of nihilism is in the "metaphysics of subjectivity." Consequently, Nietzsche's fulfillment of the subjectivistic tendencies embedded in metaphysics with his asseveration of anthropomorphism is, at the same time, the fulfillment and advancement of nihilism. It is the sanctioning remarks on anthropomorphism as the "saving power" to avert the spread of nihilism that constitute the ground for Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzschean thinking as an **Incomplete** form of nihilism, a thinking that does not leave nihilism behind itself.

Just as Nietzsche raises the question of man's place in the modern age of the "machine economy," so too does Heidegger take heed of how an "uncanny change in the world moves upon us" (DoT p. 52) and lays waste to our nature, threatening the autochthony (*Bodenständigkeit*) of man at its very core with the presentation of the possibility of the total annihilation of his "rootedness" to the earth (DoT p. 48). But for Heidegger, Nietzsche's questioning and offering "solutions" to the "problem" of nihilism, his anthropological *imperative for action* which guides the formulation of the will to power as the principle for a new valuation, proceeds along the historical path charted out by the subjectivistic belief in man's position of ontological centrality. Nietzsche's thinking of the Overman and the will to power is firmly committed to this belief which underlies the advancement and dominion of the calculative, manipulative thinking en-framing the nihilistic modern age of *Technik*. As a result, Nietzsche is not able to transcend the subjectivist framework within which nihilism makes its uncanny appearance. And as a result of the push for "solutions" his thinking of the will to power and presentation of the symbol of the Overman entails, Nietzsche earns himself the Heideggerian distinction of most outstanding spokesman of the nihilism he could not overcome.

## V. End Results

For Heidegger, "everything depends on conceiving Nietzschean philosophy as metaphysics; that is, in the essential context of the history of metaphysics" (N4 p. 128). In other words, Heidegger tells us: "*We must grasp Nietzsche's philosophy as the metaphysics of subjectivity*" (N4 p. 147). It is this *hermeneutical imperative* that guides the Heideggerian reading of Nietzsche's polemical response to the nihilistic tradition as fatally misdirected. For as a (meta)physician, Nietzsche is shown to offer "cures" that contribute to the spread of the "disease"; his "solutions" are shown to make the "problem" more acute.

What Heidegger shows us, however, only makes sense within a metaphysical context of understanding Nietzsche's polemical project. That is to say, the Heideggerian interpretation of the meaning of the Overman as a counter ideal to mankind hitherto and the employment of the will to power in the revaluation, make perfect sense only if Nietzsche's response to the nihilistic tradition is indeed expressive of a metaphysical/subjectivistic *need* for "the absolute, unshakable ground of truth" (N4. p. 97) and being. This, however, is a "big if." Notwithstanding Heidegger's demonstrated ability to bring together essential Nietzschean motifs and terms--the body, affirmation, strength, weakness, nihilism--in a unified and consistent manner, a certain question stands out as a matter of serious hermeneutical consideration: *Should* Nietzsche, rather than *can* Nietzsche, be seen in a metaphysical light.

Why does such a question stand out? Because Heidegger shows us that the question of Nietzsche's inability to stray from the nihilistic path of metaphysics is really a question of *how* Nietzsche responds to *what* he finds at the bottom of metaphysics--namely, anthropomorphism. On the basis of his *hermeneutical imperative*, his "starting point" for making accessible the meaning of Nietzsche's polemical project, Heidegger shows us how to understand Nietzsche. What, however, Heidegger really shows us is that what he finds in

support of his metaphysical reading of Nietzsche is relative to what he is looking for. That is to say, Heidegger shows us that it is certainly possible, but not necessary, to understand Nietzsche in a metaphysical light. For from a different perspective, that which Heidegger cites as "evidence" and examples of Nietzsche's metaphysical thinking--for instance, the body--takes on a radically un-metaphysical meaning. What this relativity of results points to is the hermeneutical propriety of adopting a metaphysical starting point towards reaching an understanding of *who* Nietzsche really is. For in consideration of what follows from the Heideggerian starting point--Nietzsche's inability to stray from the nihilistic path of moral-metaphysics as evidenced through the will to power as a subjectivistic principle of action and the Overman as symbol for a form of life that will assume "absolute dominion over the earth"--we must seriously question the necessity of depending on his *hermeneutical imperative* as a means of arriving at a "fruitful" and expansive understanding of Nietzschean thought.

Of course, such questioning makes sense only in the context of an un-metaphysical perspective from which to view Nietzsche's thought and it begins by asking *how*, indeed, *should* Nietzsche be seen. Is Nietzsche a metaphysical thinker? Should Nietzsche's subversive putting to question the "*mythological*" distinction between "finding and inventing" (BGE 11), "interpretation and explanation" (BGE 14), be placed in the traditional philosophical context of a transcendental idealist response to the age-old problematic of the epistemic relation between "subjective" and "objective" world? Is this, as Heidegger insists it is, the proper context for understanding Nietzsche's thought? By "trying to take Nietzsche seriously as a thinker" (WN pp. 54 - 55), Heidegger labours to show how his polemical thinking is operating under the paradigm of the "Mind as the Mirror of Nature"<sup>20</sup>, a paradigm Nietzsche advances by way of perspectivism and the body. Should we, however, even be trying to take Nietzsche seriously in the first place if this means, as it does for Heidegger, placing his raging critique of metaphysics within the traditional



philosophical framework as a "serious" response to the patent "problems" therein? Is the will to power thought metaphysically and, hence, advanced as a competing theory of truth and doctrine of being? How is the will to power employed and in what context is it formulated? What, in short, are the reasons for seeing moral-metaphysics as a disguised power game?

Questions such as these have as their grounding point the issue of anthropomorphism in mind. As we have seen, this issue constitutes the basis of Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzschean thought as the ultimate expression of nihilism. However, what remains to be seen is that there are important qualifications of the meaning of the essential terms involved in Nietzsche's polemical dialogue with moral-metaphysics that remain unacknowledged in the Heideggerian reading of Nietzsche's response to nihilism. By bringing to light these neglected qualifications, we see that Nietzsche's response to nihilism cannot consist in offering (anthropological) "cures" or "solutions," in spite of what Heidegger insists. For in the context of these qualifications, we find that Nietzsche has something unmistakably negative to say about "solutions" of any sort and the *need* for grounds, certainties and verities.

Such a context within which to understand *how* Nietzsche responds to nihilism can be called a Dionysian one. In the next chapter, we shall elucidate the meaning of this Dionysian perspective, the perspective through which Nietzsche formulates the notion of the will to power and provides us with the metaphor of the Overman. By taking seriously the symbol of Dionysos, we can see how Heidegger falls drastically short of his aim to convey *the* meaning of Nietzsche's polemical project. More importantly, we see how Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche as fatally committed to metaphysics/nihilism is a reading that translates Nietzsche into a language too foreign and far removed from the *thrust* of Nietzschean thought. The Dionysian tone of Nietzsche's response to the nihilism metaphysics historically cultivates is of such a nature as to repel any attempt to situate

the meaning of Nietzschean thought in an anthropological plane. Heeding this tone is the decisive means by which we "show respect" for Nietzsche, remain loyal to the movement of his thought, and "follow his lead" as a thinker who moves along a polemical path that leads well beyond the metaphysical region of nihilism.

## NOTES

1. Moreover, such a view is, as we shall see, nihilistic. In her book *Beyond Nihilism: Nietzsche without Masks* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), Ofelia Schute expounds a similar view.

2. The very flavour of Nietzsche's self-characterizations as "antichrist" and "immoralist" would lend to this interpretation, but only superficially so. Nietzsche is not saying that God does not exist and that He never did exist, but that He has died and, moreover, that we have killed Him. Nietzsche is uttering much more than a statement of disbelief. As Karl Jaspers points out in his *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity*, trans. Charles F. Wallraff and Frederick J. Schmitz (South Bend: Regnery/Gateway Inc., 1965), p. 242, "Nietzsche does not say, 'There is no God' or 'I do not believe in God' but 'God is dead.' He believes that he is ascertaining a fact of present-day reality when he peers clairvoyantly into his age and his own nature." What Nietzsche ascertains is that man has "grown out" of the religious interpretation of reality and that the modern age cannot be called a Christian one. See WN pp. 105 - 107 where Heidegger argues that God has been killed through the last three centuries of thought.

3. See also WTP 55: "One interpretation has collapsed; but because it was considered *the* interpretation it now seems as if there were no meaning at all in existence, as if everything were in vain."

4. Michel Haar arrives at a similar understanding in his article "Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language," in *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, ed. David B. Allison (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1985), p. 13, where he writes: "Inasmuch as Nihilism presided over the original institution of those values currently tottering, and inasmuch as it directs their evolution and every possible mutation, Nihilism is in some fashion *always* present, *always* at work - before, during, and after the moment of its violent explosion."

5. See John D. Caputo, "Three Transgressions: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida," *Research In Phenomenology* Vol. XV (1985): p. 61. Caputo cites aphorism 6 of BGE where Nietzsche writes: "To explain how a philosopher's most remote metaphysical assertions have actually been arrived at, it is always well (and wise) to ask oneself first: what morality does this (does *he* - ) aim at?" See also N3 p. 202 and N4 p. 78. For a definitive statement consider WTP 382: "Fundamental instinctive principle of all philosophers and historians and psychologists: everything of value in man, art, history, science, religion, technology, must be proved to be of *moral value*, morally conditioned, in aim, means and outcome."

6. It remains to be seen what Nietzsche means by this "actual world of existence." Its meaning is to be found in what shall be called the "Dionysian world view." For organizational reasons, I shall reserve further explication of this world view for the second chapter.

7. Without engaging in a lengthy analysis of Nietzsche's reasons for holding that "nihilist and Christian: they rhyme, and do not merely rhyme" (A 58), the following ditty I happened upon can be seen to sum up most of those reasons:

### THE WORDS OF TRUTH

LIFE IS SHORT...James 4, 14

DEATH IS SURE...Hebrews 9, 27

SIN THE CAUSE...Romans 5, 12

CHRIST THE CURE...John 3, 16

For Nietzsche, this "message of truth" would issue from what he calls "an evil eye for all things"(A 25) through which chance is robbed of its innocence and misfortune is dirtied by the concept of sin. The existential *angst* with which we comport ourselves to the transitoriness of life and the impending certitude of death is here transformed into a matter of punishment, guilt and *bad conscience*. Instead of inducing one to attain the most of this life, the Christian "cause and cure" formula makes of our existential contingency something reprehensible and "joy-less." Nietzsche expresses this perverse Negative logic in the following way: "Indeed, what a dreadful place Christianity had already made of the earth when it everywhere erected the crucifix and thereby designated the earth as the place 'where the just man is *tortured* to death!' And when the powerful oratory of great Lenten preachers for once fetched into the light of publicity all the hidden suffering of the individual, the torments of the 'closet'. . . then the earth really did seem to want to transform itself into the 'vale of misery'" (D77)

8. See also WTP 383, 141, 397; ToI VII 8; GM II 24 and D 76. As we shall see, Nietzsche adopts a kind of "paganistic" standpoint in his critique of the moral-metaphysical extirpation of the senses and defilement of earthly existence. As the forum of the senses/passions, the body is the root of life and to attack them "means to attack life at its roots" (ToI V 1). Tersely put, this is why Nietzsche considers moral-metaphysics to be hostile to life and hence nihilistic.

9. For a definitive formulation of this Negatory logic consider the following: "This world is apparent: consequently there is a true world; - this world is conditional: consequently there is an unconditional world; - this world is full of contradiction: consequently there is a world free of contradiction; - this world is a world of becoming: consequently there is a world of being; - all false conclusions (blind trust in reason: if A exists, then the opposite concepts must also exist). It is suffering that inspires these conclusions: fundamentally they are *desires* that such a world should exist; in the same way, to imagine another, more valuable world is an expression of hatred for a world that makes one suffer: the *ressentiment* of metaphysicians against actuality is here creative" (WTP 579).

10. Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, European Perspectives: A Series of the Columbia University Press (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 147. "In the word nihilism *nihil* does not signify non-being but primarily a value of nil. Life takes on a value of nil insofar as it is denied and depreciated."

11. See Caputo, "Three Transgressions," p. 61.

12. "Truly, men have given themselves all their good and evil. Truly, they did not take it, they did not find it, it did not descend to them as a voice from heaven" (Z "Of the Thousand and One Goals"). What Nietzsche wants us to see, for example, is that "the hierarchy of the good, however, is not fixed and identical at all times. If someone prefers revenge to justice, he is moral by the standard of an earlier culture, yet by the standard of the present culture he is immoral" (HaH 42). Nietzsche's point is that the basis for moral judgments is cultural and established from the perspective of "social utility." This point, however, issues from an "extra moral" perspective which sees morality as a

"disguised power game" (Bernd Magnus, "Nietzsche and the Project of Bringing Philosophy to an End," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* Vol. 14, No. 3 (October 1983): p. 308). It sees that "a communal morality is enforced because it procures an advantage; and to make it victorious, war and force are practiced against immorality - with what right? With no right whatever: but in accordance with the instinct for self-preservation" (WTP 315). Moreover, by finding moral valuations to rest on a "proof of power," Nietzsche's purpose is to demonstrate how "morality always contradicts itself" (WTP 266), to "demonstrate how everything praised as moral is identical in essence with everything immoral and was made possible, as in every development of morality, with immoral means and for immoral ends" (WTP 272). His purpose as such is an appeal to honesty when it comes to understanding that life is not moral and questions of good and bad, right and wrong, are relative to power, the hidden criterion of moral valuations. See also WTP 134, 266, 306, 311, 353, 400; BGE 201, 259; HaH 2.

13. What follows from the Nietzschean insight that "in valuations are expressed conditions of preservation and growth," is the disclosure of how "we have projected the conditions of *our* preservation as predicates of being in general. Because we have to be stable in our beliefs if we are to prosper, we have made the 'real' world a world not of change and becoming, but one of being" (WTP 507).

14. See David Farrell Krell, "Results," *Monist* 64 (October 1981): p. 467.

15. "What begins metaphysically with Descartes initiates the history of its completion through Nietzsche's metaphysics" (N4 p. 103).

16. "The standpoint of 'value' is the standpoint of conditions of preservation and enhancement for complex forms of relative life-duration within the flux of becoming" (WTP 715). Values serve as conditions of existence for a group of beings and, as such, express the point of view necessary for the preservation/maintenance and growth/advancement of that certain group over a certain period of time. See Michel Haar, "Metaphysical Language," p. 19.

17. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 103.

18. Margaret D. Wilson, ed., *The Essential Descartes* (New York: The New American Library, 1969), p. 208.

19. See also WTP 606, 495 and N4 p. 81.

20. See Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

PART TWO  
DIMENSIONS OF DIONYSOS

I. Directions

Coming to an understanding of what exactly Nietzsche was aiming for through his destructive dialogue with morality and metaphysics is a task which carries certain demands. To begin with, answering the question of what his active nihilism could possibly be speaking *for* demands clarity on what exactly it was speaking *against*. In order to come to terms with what constitutes the "Yes-saying" element of his "No-doing" thinking, we must first of all be quite clear as to where Nietzsche's "Nos" are directed. As Deleuze succinctly puts it: "We will misunderstand the whole of Nietzsche's work if we do not see 'against whom' its principal concepts are directed."<sup>1</sup> A case in point is the elusive meaning of the Overman. Matters of interpretation can only be further complicated here if we do not first of all understand what this symbol for a new form of mankind and the affirmation of life is supposed to be a counter ideal to; we run the risk of interpreting the meaning of this metaphor in inappropriate terms. Clear enough. But further clarity is demanded if we are to eliminate risks. For that to which Nietzsche is opposed is not as straightforward as it may seem to be; understanding what Nietzsche was speaking against is also subject to certain risks (of misinterpretation).

To be sure, morality and metaphysics are both opposed, the latter on the basis of its nihilistic yearning for otherworldly fictions and the former for its herd, slave impulse. However, what remains questionable and invites a variety of responses is *how far* this opposition goes. Clearly, morality and metaphysics, as instances of decadence and weakness, are definite targets for Nietzsche's hammer. But what is not so clear is the

*extent* of his No-saying and, therefore, the point at which it becomes a Yes-saying. Does, for instance, Nietzsche say Yes to a new morality, a new metaphysics to be constructed on the ground of the hitherto hidden power basis of all valuation that his No-saying, destructive thinking reveals: the will to power as a competing doctrine of being and theory of truth; the Overman as an ethical ideal for global domination; the affirmation of life as such? Would this constitute an appropriate interpretation of what Nietzsche's revaluation was aiming for? When dealing with the question of what to make of Nietzsche's active nihilism, we must, indeed, secure for ourselves an extensive understanding of the multiple targets of his destructive, hammer-swinging thinking. But to see, in an appropriate manner, what Nietzsche's thinking says Yes and No to is a task which demands a certain re-adjustment of sight. To be clear on *what* Nietzsche was speaking *for* and *against*, we must also be clear on *how* he speaks, on what *guides* his speaking. And to be clear here is to attain a perspective which makes manifest the less than obvious concerns and interests governing Nietzsche's polemics.

Every questioning is a questioning of something from a certain perspective. Coming to a proper understanding of where Nietzsche's line of radical questioning could possibly lead is, thus, a hermeneutical enterprise whose success is commensurate with the extent to which the constitutive elements of Nietzsche's perspective can be drawn out. Fixing our perspective on what Nietzsche's destructive insights reveal concerning the origins of morality and metaphysics is a straightforward and relatively uncomplicated task. Such a task requires for its successful execution only the ability to engage interpretation on the epidermal level of documenting arguments, the ability to glean and cite facts. But this, it seems, is as easy as matters get. For it is one thing to see *what* Nietzsche finds at the bottom of morality and metaphysics and quite another to understand the nature of his discovery, *how* he responds to *what* is found. In the latter case, interpretation is a much more complicated affair because it necessarily has to be carried out beyond the level of

what can be called straightforward textual analysis. That is to say, the perspective which is able to see where Nietzsche's line of polemical discourse leads, which is able to "trace it in its effective force" (N1 p. 5), is a perspective which has to take its bearings not so much from textual inscriptions as it does from the in-visible spirit of activity which shapes them. It is, so to speak, to find Nietzsche "behind the scenes" of the immediately palpable and observable.

In order to hear not only *what* Nietzsche says (about the highest values of morality and metaphysics) but, more importantly, *how* he says it (how, for instance, he responds to the revealed anthropomorphic basis of moral-metaphysical valuation--for or against, positively or negatively), it is to the at times hard to grasp *tone* of his voice that our hearing must respond. It is, in other words, to listen with great subtlety, with a qualified ear. For instance, it goes without much saying that to proceed through the sloganistic, highly emotive, hyperbolic, and uniquely metaphoric contents of Nietzsche's texts in a literal fashion will do little, if anything, towards reaching an enhanced understanding of the philosophical activity transpiring within those texts. Generally speaking, Nietzsche simply cannot be read in a straightforward way without, at the same time, running the risk of forsaking a proper understanding of his underlying philosophic aims. In order to counter this risk, something more is demanded of interpretation. Citing passages of Nietzsche's provocative sayings without situating the locus from where those sayings proceed is to deal only in foreground matters, matters disengaged from the intents, concerns, and aims that constitute their background. Tersely put, it is to read Nietzsche out of context and this is why the straightforward approach proves ineffective when it comes to articulating a genuine or contradiction-free understanding of Nietzschean thought. The general point to be made here is that we inevitably must be able to penetrate backgrounds, see the "whole," in order to get at Nietzsche and follow his lead as thinker through the seemingly volatile and chaotic landscape of his texts. This is the something more



demand of interpretation. And to speak more particularly now, it is precisely this demand that we *must* meet when it comes to making sense of Nietzsche's active nihilism in a manner that is to eliminate risks (of misinterpretation).

It is, perhaps, with the seemingly dissonant and erratic character of his discourse on nihilism that the demand to read Nietzsche in context is most felt. To give credit where it is due, Heidegger's *Nietzsche* is a viable and "thought provoking" testimony to this effect. Heidegger shows us, among other things, the necessity of attaining a perspective which peers into and takes its bearings from the background from which Nietzsche's active nihilism and its principal concepts--the will to power and the Overman--emerges. As a consequence of so doing, Heidegger contends that we can see, with propriety, what it was that Nietzsche *qua* nihilist, destroyer of ideals, was speaking *for* and *against*. He shows that unless the demand to penetrate backgrounds is adequately met, insights into the meaning of Nietzsche's disruptive activity are fated to skim surfaces. With what result? That the contradictions and incongruities transpiring on these surfaces serve as formidable obstacles to any attempt which seeks to take seriously Nietzsche's position in the history of philosophy. But Heidegger shows us something far more telling. He shows us that the demand to first of all see where Nietzsche is coming from in order to then begin to see where he is going, to articulate an appropriate path to take for coming to a genuine understanding of where Nietzsche's active nihilism could possibly lead, is a demand that "serious" seeing is unable to meet sufficiently. Heidegger, in effect, demonstrates his own undoing. He demonstrates that Nietzsche can be taken very seriously as a philosopher without an adequate response to the demand to penetrate backgrounds. We have only to take a critical look at how Heidegger's "serious hermeneutic" goes about meeting this demand.

Heidegger finds that the behind-the-scenes whole of which Nietzsche's scattered and fragmented passages on nihilism, the will to power, and the Overman are a part is

unmistakably metaphysical in nature. Heidegger draws our attention to how Nietzsche's thinking is, in essence, the thinking of being (*das Seiende*) in its most dangerous and nihilistic form. If, however, we attend more carefully to "Heidegger's metaphysicalization of Nietzsche,"<sup>2</sup> we find that it comes about only at the expense of doing away with a great deal of the background against which Nietzsche's polemical discourse moves. As it turns out, Heidegger's rigorous hermeneutic proceeds with a considerable degree of closure to what proves to be the basic element of the Nietzschean background. So when it comes to reaching an appropriate understanding of what Nietzsche's active nihilism was aiming for, Heidegger's hermeneutical enterprise falls noticeably short. But to take critical notice of this shortcoming is to notice that Heidegger's closure and mis-appropriation, risk-running and forfeiture, is not so much the hermeneutical milestone of an inability to see or hear as it is of an unwillingness to take seriously *who* is seen and heard. It is to notice that in his thorough taking account of Nietzsche's "metaphysical activity," the same degree of thoroughness remains out-standing with regard to Nietzsche's *Dionysian* activity. In Heidegger's *Nietzsche*, "Dionysos" stands out as someone in need of serious consideration. And there are definite reasons as to why this proves to be so.

Heidegger's hermeneutic draws its force from the imperative to treat Nietzsche seriously. In other words, Heidegger chooses to,

proceed in an orderly fashion through the entire labyrinth of Nietzsche's thoughts . . . in the way that is prescribed by the inner lawfulness of the guiding question of philosophy, the question of being as such. (N2 p. 97.)

In so choosing, Heidegger decides to question and make sense of this "labyrinth" in a way that sounds out the voice of domination heard in Nietzsche's polemical exchange with moral-metaphysics as issuing from an ongoing concern with the question of being; he considers Nietzsche's response to this question to be spoken in terms of the will to power and the "new need for values" (N4 p. 6) it grounds. At the same time, Heidegger is also deciding the hermeneutical fate of Dionysos. The currency of this pagan god in

Nietzsche's texts is relegated to a foreground matter of importance, an alluring sensual image whose meaning is to be qualified only in consideration of the metaphysical panorama of activity that serves as its substantive background. In short, Heidegger opts for "thinking 'the Dionysian' metaphysically" (N3 p. 208). By "thinking 'the Dionysian' metaphysically," Heidegger finds that Nietzsche's labyrinthic thoughts on nihilism, the will to power, Overman, affirmation of life and body, are situated in an extensive historical landscape the philosophic geography of which is provided by the "metaphysics of subjectivity." Identifying such a locus for understanding from whence Nietzsche comes in his bid to uproot the *need* for transcendent voices of authority, Heidegger finds in Nietzsche's destructive dialogue a distinct anthropological tone of superascendancy, a tone set by the modern, technological spirit of domination. Such is the tone, Heidegger assures us, with which Nietzsche's revaluation speaks when speaking of the will to power, the Overman, and the overcoming of nihilism. However, finding Nietzsche's polemics to be guided by the self-same subjectivistic/anthropological impulse lying at the foundation of the moral-metaphysical edifice he so violently sought to undo is an hermeneutical feat made possible only by a fatal lack of the kind of subtle listening and seeing that is required of any attempt which is to bring out a contradiction-free Nietzsche. The Heideggerian instance of this contradiction-generating lack is deliberately determined by a decision to treat Dionysos as a metaphysical trope, a metaphor to be interpreted in terms set by the historical language of mastery and control over the chaos and indeterminacy that is Nature and earth.

Tuning his hearing to the, to be sure, metaphysical language of values--the language of subjectivistic measures of being--in Nietzsche's texts, Heidegger deliberately remains deaf to *who* is speaking this language when he hears what exactly active nihilism was speaking *for* and *against*. Hidden behind the voice of domination Heidegger's hearing makes so much of is the voice of Dionysos, a voice that he effectively silences in his rigorous

attempt to follow Nietzsche's lead as thinker from the direction of metaphysics. Heidegger is immovably misled; he is completely unresponsive to the meaning of Dionysos when he "thinks the Dionysian metaphysically." Why is this? Who is Dionysos? Dionysos, "that great and ambiguous temptor god" (BGE 295)--a chthonic god of contradictions who "shows the double nature of a cruel, savage daemon and a mild, gentle ruler" (BT X), a god of earth, wine, music and dance, of "glorious transfiguration" and intoxicated excess, "animal plentitude," "bodily vigor," "a passionate-painful overflowing into darker, fuller, more floating states" (WTP 1050)--is a philosopher. Nietzsche writes:

The very fact that Dionysos is a philosopher, and that gods too therefore philosophize, seems a by no means harmless novelty and one calculated to excite the suspicion precisely among philosophers - among you, my friends, it will come too late and not at the right time: for, as I have discovered, you no longer like to believe in God and gods now. (BGE 295.)

*Dionysos philosophos*: a statement, it seems, Nietzsche puts forth with the intent to arouse suspicion and invite discredit. But it is also a statement that is intended to draw our attention to the fact that the epiphany of Dionysos in Nietzsche's texts embodies specific philosophical principles and themes the significance of which ought not to be overlooked.

Towards the end of his philosophical career, Nietzsche informs us that since the inception of his "first born," *The Birth of Tragedy*, "I have learned much, all too much more about the philosophy of this god and, as I have said, from mouth to mouth - I, the last disciple and initiate of the god Dionysos" (BGE 295). He is telling us in this declaration that the meaning of his statement *Dionysos philosophos* must be taken seriously. The statement cannot be reduced to some maudlin gesture of idle direction without, at the same time, reducing to nil the possibility of attaining a genuine understanding of the nature of Nietzsche's task as thinker. Nietzsche's preoccupation with Dionysos is of no small consequence as it affords us the view of an unswerving philosophical vision of existence that unfolds through his ongoing celebration of the symbols associated with this

god: a philosophic celebration of chaos and disorder, joy in "the absence of predetermined organization"<sup>3</sup>; an affirmation, as such, of the "pure innocence of becoming," the "rich ambiguity" and enigmatic depths of existence, of *lived* experience; an attempt to reanimate the pre-logical meaning of man's rootedness to the earth. An attempt to expose the "Dionysian basic ground" of experience as *bodily* and to present a "Dionysian world view": This, in short, is what Nietzsche's preoccupation with the god Dionysos amounts to.

We would do well to consider carefully the philosophical dimensions of this attempt. Such an attempt sets the course of Nietzsche's polemical project and establishes, in no uncertain terms, the multiple targets against which his active nihilism *must* discharge its destructive force. We must also take note that this attempt involves a "transposition of the dionysian into a philosophical pathos" (EH V 3), a transposition which serves as the defining stroke of Nietzsche's destructive mien. What happens when we take seriously the meaning of Nietzsche's preoccupation with Dionysos is that we are able to see, quite clearly, how his destructive dialogue with morality and metaphysics is in no shape or form driven by the modern spirit of domination that Heidegger's hermeneutic draws out in its bid to demonstrate the culmination of a nihilistic tradition in the thought of the will to power and the Overman.

From *The Birth of Tragedy*--identified as "my first revaluation of all values" and referred to as the "soil from out of which I draw all that I will and can - I, the last disciple of the philosopher Dionysos" (ToI X 5)--to *The Will to Power*, the epiphany of Dionysos provides us with the opportunity to identify a continuous background against which to see the principal concepts of Nietzsche's polemics. What we see is that Dionysos makes his indelible mark in Nietzsche's thought as an exhorter of the explicit rejection of any form of metaphysical dualism. Dionysos is an avatar of the principle for the "dynamic continuity of life"<sup>4</sup>, for the unfolding of appearance along a single ontological continuum. As such, it is also a principle for the destruction of conceptual orders of being that break

up the dynamic flow of life according to the restrictive demands of reason and logic. Dionysos is a principle for the destruction of the metaphysical subject, of the demarcation of an ontological domain of truth in which man is supposed dwell, outside the totality of existence (becoming) of which he is, in actuality, but a small part and not its detached ground. Dionysos speaks out for a reintegration of man into Nature and the "whole" from which he has become ontologically separated; he speaks for a "naturalization of man" (See GS 109), a translation of "man back into nature" (BGE 230), and, thus, a "restored humanity." What the realization of this "*homo natura*" goal necessarily entails is a shattering of the limits of individuated existence that conceal and disrupt man's essential "belongingness" to the dynamic world of flux and change; it entails the dissolution of the substantive subject. More generally, Dionysos speaks for a lifting of the veils of created form and order, the obliteration of the "metaphysical comforts" and cultural conventions with which man endures life. And in so speaking, it is the voice of "*tragic wisdom*" that resounds from the mouth of Dionysos: the realization that the nature of the world in which we live is indifferent to the imperatives of reason, that it expresses no rational-moral order or teleology. Dionysos communicates the incommensurable insight that existence, ultimately, proves to be meaningless and worthless (from a moral-metaphysical standpoint) when the veils are withdrawn, when the "Apollonian illusion has been broken through and destroyed" (BoT XXI) through the revelation of the "Dionysian basic ground" of being as chaos, as *Abgrund*. Moreover, Dionysos speaks derisively of the *need* for comforts and *Grunden* as issuing from fear, weakness, and cowardice. And at the same time, he speaks against the anthropological posture of Man vs. World, against the reduction of Nature to the image of man that this dualism entails, precisely because it is found to be based on the very same *need* that accounts for the historical currency of transcendent voices of authority. Succinctly put, Dionysos speaks *against* everything that (Heidegger's) Nietzsche speaks *for* in his attempt to overcome nihilism: anthropological super-ascendency among

Nature, the hyper-humanistic power posture of utilitarian control and manipulation. This is because (Heidegger's) Nietzsche is concerned with presenting a metaphysical rather than Dionysian world view, and this is precisely why (Heidegger's) Nietzsche stands for something that ("Dionysos's") Nietzsche would *have* to overcome.

From a Dionysian standpoint, we see that the Overman is a metaphor which simply cannot be interpreted as representing the ultimate expression of metaphysics' dangerous subjectivistic tendencies. The philosophical pathos which yields this elusive metaphor and symbol for the affirmation of life is definitely not one of domination. In a Dionysian light, the Overman is a counter-ideal to a type of mankind that is found to be weak and nihilistic, in the **passive** and **incomplete** sense, precisely because this type of mankind represents the *ultimate* evolution of the moral-metaphysical *need* to measure the worth of existence according to anthropomorphic standards. It is, at bottom, this *need* (and the *ressentiment* against actuality that it fosters) that a Dionysian revaluation of morality and metaphysics seeks to extirpate in its attempt to liberate life from the nihilistic bonds of Negation and Denial and "restore innocence to becoming" by way of a thorough "clearing up" of all metaphysical/subjectivistic prejudices. By turning our attention to the Dionysian background from which his attempt to overcome nihilism emerges, we find that Nietzsche would, in effect, respond to Heidegger's Nietzsche as an **incomplete** nihilist. In his own Dionysian way, Nietzsche would concur with Heidegger's view that the provenance of nihilism lies in the historical framework set up by the "metaphysics of subjectivity." Nietzsche realized that nihilism cannot be overcome and will continue to make its uncanny presence felt so long as the subjectivistic framework of metaphysics is sustained. When it comes, therefore, to reaching a genuine understanding of what his **active** nihilism was aiming for, we realize that it cannot be had when Nietzsche is approached from the subjectivistic direction of metaphysics. We realize that it is inappropriate to place the meaning of his remarks on the will to power as clearing the way for new values within a

metaphysical context, a context that Nietzsche, disciple of Dionysos, completely transcends. Although Nietzsche may indeed be speaking *in* the language of metaphysics, what he means and intends by new values cannot be heard to echo an outspoken form of subjectivism. When we realize that, for Nietzsche, "the pathos that impels us to seek *new values*" (WTP 32) following the "death of God" is Dionysian, we realize that Nietzsche's attempt to overcome metaphysics/nihilism is not defeated by the ostensible metaphysical language that it employs.<sup>5</sup> In a Dionysian context of meaning, the pathos for new values is a pathos for new forms, new possibilities, of life. Nietzsche's task as active nihilist is to clear the path for these new forms and possibilities, to break open a "new dawn," "a whole world of new days" (EH VIII 1)! Nietzsche communicates to us the meaning of his active nihilism as marking a "transition to new conditions of existence" (WTP 112); but where this "transition" is supposed to lead is not spelled out. Nietzsche leaves us, so to speak, standing in the lurch and challenges us to seek the "whereto." This is why it is essential for us (presupposing, of course, that Nietzsche's identification of the "disease" nihilism warrants serious consideration) to see exactly that to which these Nietzschean/Dionysian possibilities for new ways of being are contrasted. And this is why, in doing so, we can see that Heidegger's meeting of the hermeneutical challenge of the "whereto" is a meeting of Nietzsche on a foreign ground--a ground effectively detached from the Dionysian dimensions of Nietzsche's thought-project.

## II. The Tragic Age

As an attempt to present a Dionysian world view, Nietzsche's active nihilism is to be understood as moving along a plane of meaning that could be called tragic. It is in the thematic setting of tragedy that Nietzsche situates the manifestation of nihilism, the nihilism his Dionysian thinking seeks to understand and overcome. Nietzsche considers the eruption of nihilism--as the pervading and intrusive sense of meaninglessness and futility attending the "death of God," the untenability of otherworldly values in the face of *this*



"world of existence," the collapse of the "artificially built" "true world" within which we have lived and sought meaning--to represent broadly and open up a "tragic age" wherein questions of weakness and strength come to the fore (WTP 37). These questions play a central role in Nietzsche's understanding of the meaning of nihilism and allow us to see what he had in mind in his attempt to overcome it. But to see this we must see that the model of tragedy Nietzsche employs for delineating the meaning of nihilism is, for all intents and purposes, Dionysian.

In Nietzsche's estimation, tragedy communicates the unsettling message that the cultural domain of form and created order is but an illusory projection over an essentially chaotic and perplexing world. It, thus, puts to question the belief in the omnipotence of man's logical and conceptual powers and, in so doing, challenges the Western cultural force of "Socratic optimism" which "believes that the world can be corrected through knowledge and that life should be guided by science" (BoT XVII). Indeed, tragedy registers the painful realization that our life-sustaining scientific, moral-metaphysical beliefs are, at bottom, delusions and, however necessary from the standpoint of the "preservation and advancement" of a certain form of cultural life, divorced from actuality.<sup>6</sup> According to Nietzsche, the purpose of tragedy is to bring to light this delusory state of affairs by releasing the destructive forces exemplified by the Dionysian and held in check by the measured restraint of the Apollonian. "In the final effect of tragedy," Nietzsche writes, "the Dionysiac element triumphs once again" (BoT XXII), shattering the Apollonian realm of illusion and lie, order and convention. Tragic wisdom has as its source the Dionysian and is, accordingly, characterized as a peering under and lifting of the veils of Apollo to find there and expose the "Dionysian basic ground" of being as chaos or perpetual becoming. Celebrated as a "divine way of thinking," Nietzsche's active nihilism is a celebration of the tragic: "Affirmation of transitoriness *and destruction*, the decisive element in a dionysian philosophy, affirmation of . . . *becoming* with a radical rejection even of the concept

'being" (EH V 3). Insofar as it actively sets out to shatter and destroy the, as it were, moral-metaphysical realm of illusion and lie, fiction and error, Nietzsche's brand of nihilism is therefore to be understood to impart tragic wisdom. It is in this general sense that Nietzsche's protracted attempt to dispose of the moral-metaphysical values and ideals he finds to be poisonous and hostile to life can be called a tragic one. And in the sphere of what Nietzsche understands to constitute the tragic, the disjuncts of strength and weakness at his disposal for this attempt come into play in a very unique way regarding the moral-metaphysical lies and errors that were necessary for a certain form of mankind to live.

With his subversive notion of the will to power, Nietzsche's purpose is to show that the whole "modern world" of science and metaphysics, the world wherein the theory of truth as a correspondence to "facts" holds sway, is established on the basis of utilitarian/pragmatic motives and that it is only a naive and errant view which thinks otherwise. It is in this general sense that Nietzsche considers the metaphysical coinage "truth" to be "the kind of error without which a certain species of life could not live" (WTP 493). "Truth," Nietzsche contends, is an "error" because the notion is found to mirror course utilitarian *needs* rather than the "real nature of things" as the unchangeable behind all change.<sup>7</sup> In a further and more important sense, we find, however, that Nietzsche's subversive considerations of the nature of the "modern world" qualify the meaning of "error" in terms of cowardice. "Error (-belief in the ideal-) is not blindness, error is cowardice" (EH Forward 3). Nietzsche informs us that it is "cowardice and *flight* in the face of reality" (EH V 2), reality as a "turbulent flux of appearances" (BoT XVI), which, among other things, accounts for the metaphysical fiction of the ideal world of being. In addition, Nietzsche identifies the *need* for secure and calculable grounds, the "desire to deprive the world of its disturbing and enigmatic character" (WTP 600) by laying out a firm foundation--otherworldly, as in God, or "this-worldly," as in man--in terms of which to explain and rationally justify multiplicity and change, as an expression of weak-

ness. This is why Nietzsche sees his subversive questioning to proceed with the kind of courage, honesty, and strength which he deems necessary to bring to light, unveil and uproot, the coarse and unsettling hidden origins of moral-metaphysical values and ideals. And it is thus that Nietzsche would place himself in the company of the "men of tragic knowledge": "those who see the terrifying and questionable character of existence, who want to see it" (WTP 853) as a "consequence of courage, of severity toward oneself, of [intellectual] cleanliness toward oneself" (WTP 1041) and, ultimately, as the outgrowth of kind of "strength which prefers questions for which no one today is sufficiently daring" (A Forward).

Nietzsche extols himself as an "investigator and discoverer" who possesses a preference for the kind of questions which the "men of the present" are unwilling to venture, lest they venture beyond the security and comfort provided by the historical edifice of morality and metaphysics. Speaking with such ardency to so venture, Nietzsche tells us that it is "nothing but questions of strength" that will inevitably determine the outcome of his attempt to destroy or deconstruct this historical edifice which has given us meaning, aim, and purpose.

Nothing but questions of strength: how far to prevail against the conditions that preserve society and against its prejudices? - how far to unchain one's terrible qualities through which most people perish? - how far to oppose truth and reflect on its most questionable sides? (WTP 934.)

Nietzsche's **active** nihilism is, thus, to be conceived as an attempt to do without metaphysical palliatives or props of any kind. Such an attempt has certain basic requirements for its successful realization: to cultivate and unleash an acutely suspicious and unreservedly malicious brand of thinking and questioning whose sole purpose is to subvert and undermine; to intrepidly put to question the previously unquestioned and thereby engineer the untenability of the most trusted articles of belief; and to bring about a radical displacement from the habitual moral-metaphysical soil on which we tread, hoping to instill in us an intrusive sense of *aporia*, not knowing "the 'wither' toward which we are

driven once we have detached ourselves from our old soil" (WTP 405) so that we "become completely obscure to ourselves" (WTP 594) once our old sources of light are effectively extinguished. It is along these lines of concerns and interests that Nietzsche approaches morality and metaphysics with his destructive insights, insights delivered from a "tragic perspective" which finds that it is symptomatic of strength, power, and well-being the extent to which "one can acknowledge the terrifying and questionable character of things; and *whether* one needs some sort of 'solution' at the end" (WTP 852). To "open up gulfs such as have never existed before" (WTP 988), to tear asunder the moral-metaphysical fabric of belief and value and to vanquish the *need* for new "visions," new fictions by means of which to endure the chaotic world of becoming: This, in short, constitutes the tragic.

Echoing the sense of the tragic as such, Nietzsche tells us of his polemical task as philosophic celebrant of the god Dionysos that:

The last thing I would promise would be to 'improve' mankind. I erect no new idols; let the old idols learn what it means to have legs of clay. *To overthrow idols* (my word for 'ideals') - that rather is my business. (EH Forward 2.)

Nietzsche's Dionysian "business" is purely subversive. Indeed, he not only finds no room on his agenda to provide any soluble path to recovery from the damage he inflicts on the body of morality and metaphysics, but takes delight for not doing so. This is because the "anti-physician" *motif* of his Dionysian philosophy is such that Nietzsche can find room only for the affirmation of the "innocence of becoming" which calls for "the absolute necessity of a *total* [italics mine] liberation from ends" (WTP 787). Such a call ought not, however, to be heard as sounding out an unsubdued form of pessimism which resigns itself to the utter "meaninglessness of events" and the "ghastly absurdity" of existence when all the comforting veils are lifted. Tragic wisdom must not be confused with the woeful wisdom which wearily sighs, "It is all one, nothing is worth while, the world is without meaning, knowledge chokes" (Z "The Cry of Distress"). "Yearning for nothingness,"

Nietzsche explains, "is a *denial* of tragic wisdom, its opposite" (WTP 1029)! It is not from the passive and weak standpoint--the standpoint adopted when the untenability and collapse of the "true world" makes its mark in thought and a "horror vacui" seizes man as he faces the de-valued and repudiated world of becoming--that tragic wisdom communicates its insights. That is to say, tragic wisdom communicates its insights from an affirmative standpoint when it brings to light the "Dionysian basic ground" of being. The Dionysian world view Nietzsche's active nihilism attempts to articulate--in terms of the "affirmation of becoming," the glorification of "animal plentitude," enigmatic and deeply mysterious flesh, sensuality--is not presented across the same horizon of meaning wherein nihilism, passive and weak, flourishes. As it turns out, a Dionysian affirmation of the chaotic life of the senses is an affirmation of something meaningful, something that is simply overlooked because of a pernicious "immodesty of man: to deny meaning where he sees none" (WTP 599). We may say that Nietzsche's active nihilism, moving along a plane of meaning demarcated by the tragic, is driven by a certain kind of modesty in its attempt to present a Dionysian world view. According to Nietzsche, the belief in "the 'meaninglessness of events' . . . is the consequence of an insight into the falsity of previous interpretations, a generalization of discouragement and weakness - not a *necessary* belief" (WTP 599). It is not a necessary belief, not a warranted conviction, because there is meaning to be "found," so long as we are able to see beyond the immodesty of our habitual philosophic standpoints. And it is precisely beyond this immodesty that the meaning of a Dionysian world view is to be found.

### III. The Whole

The meaning of the Dionysian world view Nietzsche's active nihilism forges is, perhaps, best gleaned by way of heeding a warning. At the very outset of the subversive enterprise he embarks upon *qua* tragic thinker, Nietzsche can be heard to issue a warning

of sorts. He tells us to be wary of a certain faith with which metaphysics and science unquestionably operate, namely,

the faith in a world that is supposed to have its equivalent and its measure in human thought and human valuations - a "world of truth" that can be mastered completely and forever with the aid of our square little reason. (GS 373.)

Nietzsche challenges this faith for its naiveté and contends that the constructs this faith engenders--"true world," "real world," "modern world"--are no more than fanciful excogitations of weakness and cowardice, lacking any basis in and thus divorced from *actuality*. Nietzsche tells us to be wary of the view which strives to assign to the character of the world anthropological contours of meaning because such a view is, at bottom, unfounded and erroneous; it is drawn "in accordance with the wishes of our reverence . . . according to our *needs*" (GS 346) and, hence, not with the world "as it really is." Concomitant with this admonition, we hear Nietzsche to make the following claim:

To ascertain what is, as it is, seems something unspeakably higher and more serious than any "thus it ought to be," because the latter, as a piece of human critique and presumption, appears ludicrous from the start. It expresses a need that desires that the structure of the world should correspond with our human well-being; also the will to bring this about as far as possible. (WTP 333.)

It is, in the main, with this anthropomorphic *need* and will operative in the formulation of our comforting and "species-preserving" truths and valuations concerning world-being that Nietzsche's Dionysian thinking takes grave issue. Nietzsche's destruction of moral-metaphysics (and the Dionysian world view that it engenders) is essentially the outcome of an attempt to ascertain "what is, as it is," to bring to light and expose the *actual* character of the world. Nietzsche's attempt to "get at actuality"--his attempt to penetrate the world occluded by anthropological determinations of being--must, however, be qualified as Dionysian, as having its terminus in a "Dionysian affirmation of the world as it is, without subtraction, exception, or selection" (WTP 1041). When we see that for Nietzsche, what is, in actuality, is chaos, we see why such a qualification is necessary.

"The total character of the world," Nietzsche writes, "is in all eternity chaos - in the sense not of a lack of necessity, but of a lack of order, arrangement, form, beauty, wisdom, and whatever other names there are for our aesthetic anthropomorphisms" (GS 109). In so writing, Nietzsche insists that he is "far from claiming that the world is *worthless*" (GS 346) and meaningless. Nietzsche is indeed far from making any such claim because the concept of chaos he sees fit for characterizing the "actual world" is Dionysian and not metaphysical. Nietzsche is simply claiming that in the absence of our "aesthetic anthropomorphisms" the world indeed appears *to be* without meaning and without the slightest deference to "truth"; it appears as chaos. But more decisively, what Nietzsche is also claiming is that it is precisely without recourse to anthropomorphisms (and thus beyond the scope of our habitual philosophical standpoints) that the meaning of chaos must be sought.

From a metaphysical perspective--one that takes its bearings from within the framework of Platonic-Cartesian-Kantian thematics--chaos is seen disparagingly as an insignificant process of multiplicity and change. Identified as a medley of "absolute nonsense" that should be made to serve the sovereign realm of reason or mind, chaos is systematically *humanized*, is made "managable and calculable" through and held ontologically accountable to the formative powers of conceptualization in order for there to be such a thing as meaningful and truthful world occurrence. But from a radically different perspective--one not oriented by the historically sustained paradigm of the mind as a mirror of (objective) Nature--chaos is not seen negatively and devalued as a mere shadow world, as an asymmetrical constellation of ever divergent and perpetually indefinite appearances subordinate to an unchanging world of being. Such a perspective which is able to find "satisfaction in the turbulent flux of appearances" (BoT XVI) (and is able to find no reason, apart from a hybrid of weakness, cowardice, and fear for following metaphysics in its flight "from an over-abundant reality . . . into the rigor mortis of the coldest

emptiest concept of all, the concept of being"(PTG XI)) is Dionysian. From a Dionysian angle of vision, chaos is simply not found to be the invidious vacuity that is manifest to a metaphysical perspective. In a Dionysian understanding, chaos--a term denoting the "unconquerable plenitude" of world appearing as perpetual becoming--is denominative of the primordial nature of the "there is" of the world that man inhabits (and metaphysics as a whole holds in contempt) but is not a toponym for a prevaricative abode of utter nonsense. As it turns out, Nietzsche's attempt to "get at actuality" culminates in the telling discovery that becoming is an essentially meaningful and true occurrence of world. And in the final analysis, a "Dionysian affirmation of the world as it is"--i.e. *this* world of becoming, liberated from its metaphysical bondage to being and thereby "restored to its innocence," dehumanized--is an avid acknowledgement of the *only* world that man inhabits, inhabits yet, owing to an historically prescribed want of (self)vision, remains blind to and is unable to heed.

"*Man and things*. - Why does man not see things? He is himself standing in the way: he conceals things" (D 438). How so? In what decisive way does this closure come about? Firstly, with his metaphysical errors, fictions, and lies which designate a "true world" of being beyond becoming, an immutable sphere of essence behind appearance<sup>8</sup>; through his "expedient falsification" and simplification of the (actual) world of appearance and constant change for coarse "utilitarian ends"; through his importunate "transformation of nature into concepts for the purpose of mastering nature" (WTP 610); by, in sum, imposing "upon chaos as much regularity and form as our practical needs require" (WTP 515). In the way, finally, of "human vanity" or "anthropological immodesty" by positing himself "as the *measure of things*, as the rule for determining 'real' and 'unreal'" (WTP 584). For it is to this vanity that the whole modern epistemological/metaphysical edifice he constructs--on the ontological foundation laid out by the Cartesian principle of the *cogito sum*--is an historical testimony.



Reared in a tradition of thought whose historical evolution is found to hinge on vanity and concealment, "Man," Nietzsche informs us, "has been educated by his errors," the most fundamental and grounding of which is that "he always saw himself only incompletely" (GS 115). According to Nietzsche, man sees himself incompletely, in a very exclusive and selective manner, when he takes account of his "nature," his "essence," as consciousness, as rational thinking thing. This is because subtracted from the account as such is his animality and his carnality, that which consigns him to the exhaustless depths of the earth *from* and *in* which he emerges and essentially abides as a finite and contingent being. In short, that which is subtracted in metaphysical accounts of man's nature is the dynamic indeterminacy and "*rich ambiguity*" of the body, the very *humus* of man's humanity. According to Nietzsche then, it is ultimately on the basis of this subtraction--one effected through an historically cultivated enmity toward all that the body stands *for* and, indeed, stands *on*--that the systematic humanization and falsification of actuality becomes metaphysically possible. That is to say, as an highly sophisticated anthropological affair of "logicizing, rationalizing, systematizing" chaotic Nature "by means of a scheme of being posited by ourselves . . . to make it formulatable and calculable for us" (WTP 516), metaphysics begins at the decisive point marked out by the evisceration of the body.<sup>9</sup> This, in the end, is why Nietzsche's Dionysian diatribe against the fictionalizing activity of moral-metaphysics crystallizes into an emphatic rejection of the "soul hypothesis" as man's greatest error.<sup>10</sup> Direct and to the essential point, Nietzsche censures metaphysics for the "contempt for the earth" underlying its (subjectivistic) quest for true and certain knowledge thus: he entreats us to "*remain true to the earth,*" to vanquish the poisonous "superterrestrial hope" in the spirit "thought to escape from the body and from the earth" (Z Prologue 3). For Nietzsche, there is no such escape as his Dionysian thinking proceeds to convey "gratitude toward earth and life" (WTP 1033) by steadfastly turning to the "phenomenon of the body," to the fecundity of the flesh and the overflowing plentitude of

affectivity. Nietzsche turns to the body as "the richer, clearer, more tangible phenomenon" (WTP 489) than metaphysical consciousness and unreservedly uses it as a guide for understanding the nature of man's sojourn in the world. In so turning, what he turns up and brings into focus is a Dionysian world view, a view which turns against and shatters the model of reality founded on the metaphysical subject as the absolute ground and supreme measure for the truth of all being.

Nietzsche's Dionysian world view is, *au fond*, the world viewed from the standpoint of the body. As the cynosure of the Dionysian world view Nietzsche's active nihilism forges, what, in the end, does the body stand for and point to? Nothing less than the originary and founding meaning of man's opening unto the world. It points to man's pre-discursive or pre-objective situatedness in the world of his involvement, his *lived* involvement. It stands for the basic way in which man has his world, not as an object of thematic apprehension but as an "existential environment" of affectival acclimatization. By way of the surge and flow of his bodily states of being, man finds himself in the world and takes his bearings from its disclosed significance.<sup>11</sup> Insofar as it takes its bearings from the "lived body," Nietzsche's Dionysian world view merely maps out the patently obvious yet (under the aegis of vanity and error) metaphysically concealed fact of man's inherent belongingness to the world, the world from which he has become ontologically severed and estranged. In actuality, "one belongs to the whole, one *is* in the whole" and, quite simply, "*nothing exists apart from the whole*" (ToI VI 8)! There is really no-thing beyond becoming, the whole, which can measure and value the whole, becoming (WTP 708, 765). Man, "earth bound" as "body-subject," is in the world; he cannot extricate himself from the setting of the "earthly dance" of appearances, from the world of becoming to which he is *in aeternum* bonded as bodily being. The lived body or body subject moves in the world, does not soar above it. Hence, the world always has to be conceived from a particular point of view; it is known piecemeal, in accordance with the spatio-temporal

horizons of corporeal existence, and never "at once." There is no "bird's eye view" from which to survey and know protean Nature and, consequently, there is no "objective" truth and reality in relation to which perspectival seeing can be considered inadequate. "As if a world would still remain over after one deducted the perspective" (WTP 567)! Indeed, the essence of the world is to show itself, give itself, to an infinity of viewpoints or perspectives. In truth, reality is nothing but a myriad of perspectives, a concatenation of appearances stretching indefinitely. And in reality, truth is not found, is not a "becoming conscious of something that is in itself firm and determined" (WTP 552), but is forever in the making; it "happens" in the unfolding of appearance as a *processus in infinitum*. No final truth. No absolute knowledge. Rather, perspectivism: the world viewed from the standpoint of the body, the standpoint from which Nietzsche's Dionysian thinking expresses in definite terms its "profound aversion to reposing once and for all in any one total view of the world" (WTP 470).

Manifestly, Nietzsche's Dionysian recourse to the body marks a radical break with the anthropological framework of the Cartesian representational theory of reality. As we have seen, by supplanting the transphenomenal pose of the metaphysical subject with that of the earth bound body, Nietzsche at the same time shatters the subject/object paradigm of reality and truth. But what we must also see is that by turning to the body as "subject," Nietzsche does not embrace any kind of aim to formulate a new and authoritative definition or theory of truth and reality. In other words, Nietzsche's Dionysian thinking is not (as it has been made out to be) "that thinking which thinks in the direction of metaphysics . . . that is to say, which asks what the being is and in what the truth of beings is unshakably grounded" (N4 p. 110). The Dionysian world view Nietzsche's active nihilism forges is not so much a presentation of a new vision of reality as it is a resuscitation of an "old" or forgotten one. Nietzsche's Dionysian world view is the outcome of a phenomenological description of lived experience, a "finding" or "drawing out"

rather than an hypostatizing or ascribing. It is with the unmetaphysical or "modest" aim of revealing the "world of existence" *we are*, "the world that we have not reduced to our being, our logic and psychological prejudices" (WTP 568), that Nietzsche's bodily oriented thinking gets underway.<sup>12</sup> In consideration of its Dionysian bearing, Nietzsche's recourse to the lived body as a guide for understanding reality cannot be understood to bear *any* relation or commitment to the "metaphysics of subjectivity" initiated by Descartes, let alone the "fulfillment of its essence" (N4 p. 103). The body bears out the Dionysian realization that "whatever is real, whatever is true, is neither one nor even reducible to one" (WTP 536). Nietzsche's Dionysian thought turns to the body not as a way "for defining what everything determinable is referred back to" (N4 p. 133) but as an effective means of shattering that which "serves as the essential ground of the possibility of modern man's position of dominance" (N4 p. 134). The body is subject only in name and not in (metaphysical) effect.<sup>13</sup> It is hardly the "unshakable ground" of absolute certitude, capable of deciding "about the objectivity of objects" (N4 p. 95). The body is an *abgrund*, an anomalous and paroxysmal play of natural forces the abysmal richness of which quite irrefragably lacks the (Cartesian) support for such an ontological task. Taking its bearings from the lived body, it is from the "stimulus of the enigmatic" (WTP 470) and "into the chaos and labyrinth of existence" (GS 322) that Nietzsche's Dionysian thought proceeds and is led. In the final analysis, Nietzsche's recourse to the body as a guide for understanding reality is not guided by the modern metaphysical spirit of control and dominance over indeterminate being. Rather, it is guided by a kind of thinking whose spirit is tragic. And it is as an extension of this tragic spirit, this detachment from the subjectivistic soil of the *Seinsfrage*, that Nietzsche's Dionysian revaluation comes to pass and the notion of the will to power is formulated.

#### IV. Of What Life?

Nietzsche's task as tragic thinker is, as we have noted, one of subversion. Under the tutelage of the god Dionysos, he dutifully labours to lift the comforting veils of morality and metaphysics in order to effect an arrant detachment from the safety and security of "our old soil." Labouring in this destructive direction, Nietzsche unveils the will to power as the concealed origin of moral-metaphysical valuation and lays bare the naiveté on which the *need* for transcendent voices of authority is founded. In this respect, the will to power is to be understood as the definitive fruit of Nietzsche's subversive labours as a "subterranean man," "one who tunnels and mines and undermines" (D Preface 1) the soil which yields to Western man meaning and constancy. The will to power is what Nietzsche comes up with after having laboriously "tunneled into the foundations" of the historical edifice of morality and metaphysics; it represents the crowning point of his protracted attempt to deconstruct man's Western heritage, to dislodge us from the soil on which we take our bearings and to thus free or break us from our cultural habituations, from "the sum of the imperious value judgements that have become part of our flesh and blood" (GS 380).

Nietzsche's attempt as such parallels the toils of Zarathustra, that "Dionysian monster" whose No-doing/Yes-saying mien typifies the spirit of the tragic. Zarathustra makes his polemical appearance at the "zenith of mankind," at the point attained at the "end of the longest error" (ToI IV)--namely, metaphysics. His descent to mankind marks the beginning of the "tragic age," the age of radical upheaval and "yearning for nothingness" in the wake of God's death, and signals "the time of the *great noon, of the most terrible clearing up*" (WTP 134). Zarathustra's "downgoing" (*untergang* is a going under to under-stand or, rather, stand-under the moral-metaphysical soil on which modern man stands and nihilism, passive and weak, flourishes; his "descent into the depths" is an attempt to get at and extirpate the roots of nihilism's fruition and, thus, clear the path

for a new form of life, one no longer laden by the "Spirit of Gravity" and shaped by the *need* for transcendent ideals. Zarathustra presses the point that in order to avert effectively the spread of nihilism, a thorough understanding of its origins is needed. It is from this pressing need for *original* reflection that his polemics--the polemics which yield the Overman as a counter ideal to the Ultimate man of herd modernism--draw their force; and it is precisely this kind of sober reflection that the "men of the present"--those "who are paintings of all that has ever been believed" (Z "Of the Land of Culture")!--he goes amongst are found to be in dire need of. "One forgets what one has learned about men when one lives among men: there is too much foreground in all men--what can far-seeing, far-seeking eyes do *there*" (Z "The Home-Coming")! Zarathustra's far-seeing, far-seeking eyes penetrate the foreground thinking with which modern man greets the arrival of the "uncanniest of all guests," nihilism, to the obfuscated ground or background of its manifestation as the Negatory principle of Denial operative in mankind's "species preserving" moral-metaphysical valuations and beliefs. Zarathustra's task is to stir us out of our moral-metaphysical *needs*, needs under whose auspices the reign of nihilism is secured. As a seeker of backgrounds, he finds that the ground on which mankind's highest ideals are based is the will to power and attains this subversive end. Zarathustra's Dionysian toils are, in this general sense, to be understood as a literary personification of Nietzsche's task as active nihilist.

However, it would be with a complete indifference to the Dionysian bearing of Nietzsche's **active** nihilism to surmise that "finding" the will to power is tantamount to the "discovery" of a principle for a new valuation. The Dionysian tone of Nietzsche's destructive dialogue with morality and metaphysics is set by a complete indifference to salvaging anything for a reconstruction. ("Zarathustra adopts a parodistic attitude toward all former values as a consequence of his abundance" (WTP 617) and is a "dancer," a spirit transported by play and full of malice, not a "physician.") Such is the tone with which

Nietzsche speaks when he tells us that "*there are no moral facts whatever*" (ToI VII 1), only interpretations drawn "in accordance with the instinct for self-preservation" (WTP 315) and he finds that when thought "through to the bottom," morality "is just as 'immoral' as any other thing on the earth; morality is itself a form of immorality" (WTP 308). The point of Nietzsche's Dionysian endeavours to unmask the "immoral" origins of morality, to show that morality, just as life, is "*essentially* appropriation, injury, overpowering of the strange and weaker, suppression, severity, imposition of one's own forms, incorporation and, at the least and mildest, exploitation" (BGE 259) is, in other words, purely subversive. What Nietzsche has in mind here is not a "straightforward reversal" such that his subversive labours could be seen to culminate in an unqualified endorsement or advocacy of the "immorality" on which morality is founded and conceals from itself.<sup>14</sup> As tragic thinker, Nietzsche is simply not concerned with or guided by the aim of fashioning a new morality, a new "system of rules and values according to which life is lived,"<sup>15</sup> in the wake of the old one he thoroughly razes.<sup>16</sup> And it is for the same malicious or *unpromising* ends that Nietzsche introduces the will to power to show that metaphysics as a whole represents an highly sophisticated anthropological art of mastery over Nature which steadfastly fails to acknowledge itself for what it is. That is to say, Nietzsche has absolutely no interest in or intention of establishing or developing a competing philosophical system on the basis of the anthropomorphism he uses to undermine the moral-metaphysical claims concerning "objective reality." For Nietzsche, the will to power does not, for instance, name a new theory of truth; rather, it merely re-names the old one in a new way, a way which ensures that an explicit knowledge of what it was really all about--a carefully crafted anthropomorphic camouflage or coping device--is afforded so that "we no longer believe that truth remains truth when the veils are withdrawn" (GS Preface 4). To this unveiling effect, the will to power is nothing more than Nietzsche's way of making man more self-conscious about the nature of his most trusted article of belief. Alter-

natively put, the will to power is a Nietzschean instrument designed for the subversive purpose of cultivating acute suspicion and extreme auto-criticality; it is an instrument whose meaning is uniquely Dionysian and completely unmetaphysical.

In a Dionysian context of meaning, the will to power is not something Nietzsche's **active nihilism** formulates as if in response to the metaphysical question of being. Nietzsche's **active nihilism** does not cradle metaphysical prospects, does not draw its destructive force from the aim to put in the place of the old a new foundation of being. That which gives shape to the meaning of the will to power and constitutes the guiding aim of the Nietzschean revaluation wherein it is employed, is an ongoing concern not with the question of being but with the Dionysian question of what constitutes a healthy life. It is, so to speak, from the perspective of life that Nietzsche approaches morality and metaphysics and asks, "Whatever men have so far viewed as the conditions of their existence - and all the reason, passion and superstition involved in such a view - has this been researched exhaustively" (GS 107)? Nietzsche's attempt to research this matter proceeds along a line of questioning which exhaustively asks of the values man imparts to existence:

Have they thus far benefited or retarded mankind? Do they betoken misery, curtailment, degeneracy or, on the contrary, power, fullness of being, energy, courage in the face of life, and confidence in the future? (GM Preface III.)

Are they, in short, "life-advancing, life-preserving" (BGE 4) or are they "contradictory to life." These are the sorts of "biological" questions the will to power serves the purpose of establishing for Nietzsche's Dionysian concern in his attempt to cauterize the elements that are revealed to make life sick, diseased, and unfruitful.

Nietzsche, as we have seen, employs the will to power as an effective means of shattering, beyond any hope of repair, the belief in the "objective" validity of transcendent voices of authority. But the will to power does more than experimentally put to question



the validity of mankind's highest values; more importantly, it puts forth the question of the value or worth of those values.

What are our evaluations and moral tables really worth? What is the outcome of their rule? For whom? in relation to what? - Answer: for life. But *what is life?* Here we need a new, more definite formulation of the concept "life." My formula for it is: Life is will to power. (WTP 254.)

Values are interpretations from the point of view of increase and strength or weakness and decline. Life, as will to power, is evaluating<sup>17</sup> and "evaluations, in essence, are . . . ways of being, modes of existence of those who judge and evaluate."<sup>18</sup> The will to power is thus a "formula" Nietzsche devises as a diagnostician, understanding and evaluating values as symptoms of life. "When we speak of values," Nietzsche contends, "we do so under the inspiration and from the perspective of life: life itself evaluates through us *when* we establish values" (ToI V 5). However, Nietzsche's contention that life is will to power remains in need of a certain qualification in order to draw out its appropriate Dionysian implication. For Nietzsche, the fundamental question is not just one of "life" but, rather, "of *what* life" (ToI V 5)?<sup>19</sup> When Nietzsche tells us that "the value of the world lies in our interpretation . . . that previous interpretations have been perspective valuations by virtue of which we can survive in life" (WTP 616), he is asking us to consider carefully what kind of surviving, what kind of values we have been living under. If it is all our creation, then what kind of creators are we and have we been? Nietzsche, in this subversive way, brings home the crushing question, "Of *what* kind of life" (ToI V 5) are mankind's highest and most vaunted creations expressive and emblematic? This is the central question on which Nietzsche's Dionysian revaluation focuses. Because the criteria for answering this question are Dionysian, we find that along with transcendent ideals Nietzsche explicitly rejects and emphatically censures their anthropomorphic, "human, all too human" basis. That is to say, Nietzsche considers moral-metaphysical ideals and concepts to be symptomatic of a "deeply impoverished life," to stem from resentment against actuality, because of the "coarse utility" he finds to constitute their source and

breeding ground, because they are found to be "results of certain perspectives of utility, designed to maintain human constructs of domination" (WTP 12B). Through the mouth of Dionysos, Nietzsche sings a malicious "mocking-song" on the "*hyperbolic naiveté* of man: positing himself as the meaning and measure of the value of things" (WTP 12B). As if life should be measured "by aspects of consciousness (pleasure and displeasure, good and evil)" (WTP 707), placed upon eudaemonistic scales. As if the world had to conform to our *needs* for comfort and security, accommodate and please the "prejudices of reason" and logic. In a tragic perspective, the anthropomorphic *need* for secure and calculable grounds--otherworldly or otherwise--on which to base an orderly existence is viewed derisively. It is found to issue from weakness, fear, and cowardice in the face of the elusive and enigmatic, multifarious and mysterious "world of existence" we *live* and *are*. Moreover, this *need*, "that impetuous *demand for certainty* . . . for a support, a prop" (GS 347), is identified as the breeding ground of the malignant and, under the aegis of thoughtlessness, ever spreading disease that infects the body of modern man, a disease, that is, which simply cannot be "blinked away"--namely, nihilism.

As it turns out, Nietzsche turns to the subjectivism he finds at the bottom of morality and metaphysics not as a saving but as a destructive power. He sees that the anthropological pose of "man *against* the world" is, at bottom, a "world negating principle" (GS 346). Why? Because, as we have seen, it conditions or brings about the nihilistic age of the "machine economy." Such a pose, perfected and polished by Descartes' *prima philosophia*, pre-grounds the modern age in which man and man's earth is systematized and regularized by an unearthly calculative technological process; an age in which man has become homogenized into a mass herd where "everyone wants the same thing, everyone is the same: whoever thinks differently goes voluntarily into the madhouse" (Z Prologue 5); an age that is demarcated by a rigorously structured economic systematics of workers, producers, and consumers; a systematics that comes out of an ontology of representational

thinking (which deals with things and persons only to the extent that it can objectify them, regulate and manipulate them in rational and systematic ways) and a systematics through which man is increasingly reduced to the role of an insignificant unit of "standing-reserve," a numbered unit who must yield the maximum output at the minimum expense and contend with the "hard work, low pay and embarrassing conditions" of a "dog eat dog" depthless and decadent consumer existence. Nietzsche's (Zarathustra's) "far-seeing, far-seeking" eyes clearly see that the modern technological desert of "decaying, unfruitful life" is the historical upshot of a Negatory logic of Denial that is rooted in the ulcerous and dangerously over-ripe soil of subjectivism. And it is from this poisonous soil on which modern man precariously treads (with the ever present possibility of the total annihilation of his being) that Nietzsche's Dionysian thinking cries out for an out-and-out detachment in its attempt to overcome nihilism. This Nietzschean cry issues forth the overman as a metaphor for a new type of man who will "preserve" himself on a different soil, "under different conditions from those of the average man" of herd modernism (WTP 866). He will have absolutely nothing to do with the herd (modernism), let alone act as its "advance guard" or shepherd. His being lies well beyond the horizon of modernism and the shadow of God's death.<sup>20</sup> The overman is a symbol of "distance" and "difference" from, not hyperbolization or increment of, modern man. The overman is a Nietzschean cry for a form of future life that will have left behind, gone beyond, the nihilism that is its subjectivistic past.

## NOTES

1. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 162.
2. See Alan D. Schrift, "Nietzsche's Psycho-Genealogy: A Lucid Alternative to Heidegger's Reading of Nietzsche," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* Vol. 4, No. 3 (October 1983): p. 284.
3. Paul Valadier, "Dionysos Versus The Crucified," in *The New Nietzsche*, p. 251. Valadier makes the important point that chaos, as we shall see, is a Nietzschean term that does not signify nothingness. What Nietzsche means by chaos is far more telling than some metaphysical *mêlée* of non-sense. In Nietzsche's Dionysian understanding, chaos is not without its own "logos" or intrinsic meaning.
4. Refer to Ofelia Schutte, *Beyond Nihilism*, chap. 1 *passim*.
5. In other words, we realize that Nietzsche's "entanglement" in metaphysics is only foreground or "apparent." Nietzsche speaks in the language of metaphysics, but what he is *saying* is in no shape or form metaphysical. Nietzsche explicitly rejects subjectivism. See Caputo, "Three Transgressions," pp. 67 - 68, who comments critically that "the very notion of value, belonging as it does to the metaphysics of modernity, ought to have no place in his thought." See also Magnus, "Nietzsche and the Project," *passim*, wherein he addresses the hermeneutical issue of how one ought to go about reading Nietzsche and advises us to be ever wary of the tendency to read Nietzsche according to a picture of philosophy which Nietzsche urges us to set aside.
6. For a more detailed account of the Nietzschean view of tragedy than the one I am outlining here, refer to Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche*, ed. Ted Honderich, *The Arguments of the Philosophers* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), chap. 7.
7. It would, as we shall see, be hasty to conclude from this that Nietzsche advances a pragmatic/utilitarian concept of truth, that truth, for Nietzsche, is whatever serves the enhancement of man's power.
8. "'Reason' is the cause of our falsification of the senses. In so far as the senses show becoming, passing away, change, they do not lie. . . . The 'apparent' world is the only one: the 'real' world has only been lyingly added" (*ToI III 2*). *It is in the light of this discovery that Nietzsche's active nihilism finds "the strength to reverse values and to deify becoming and the apparent world as the only world, and to call them good" (WTP 585A)*. For further reference to Nietzsche's contention that reality is (*the unfolding of*) *appearance, not something underlying it: ToI III, IV; GS 54; BGE 34; WTP 552, 567, 568*.
9. Made "managable and calculable" as an object for a (representing) subject, Nietzsche realizes (as does Heidegger, N4 pp. 86, 110 - 117) that the delineation of Nature as "lifeless *res extensa*" is the ontological counterpart of the delineation of man's nature as "thinking thing," *res cogitans* (WTP 485, 519, 552, 635; *ToI III 5, VI 3*). He sees how it is by way of accomodating the epistemic demands of the Cartesian subject, ontologically detached and divorced from the prodigality of body and earth, that Nature is effectively

transformed and regularized into a determinate landscape of all sorts of discrete entities and enduring objects.

10. Being too numerous to cite them all, I direct the reader to the following representative passages where Nietzsche sets out to challenge the tenability of the notion of "subject-substratum": WTP 477, 481, 488, 551; BGE 12, 16, 17; GM I 3. A thorough analysis of Nietzsche's "deconstruction" of the self can be found in Alexander Nehemas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), chap. 6, esp. pp. 176 - 183.

11. Interestingly enough, an exemplary analysis of this very basic existential-phenomenological notion of bodily being as ec-static being-in-the-world is to be found in Vol. 1 of Heidegger's *Nietzsche*, chap. 14 (esp. pp. 98 - 100). It is interesting to note how Heidegger's sympathetic reading in N1 turns to one of condemnation in N4 where Nietzsche's recourse to the body is interpreted to be no less than the "methodological procurement" of a Cartesian ground upon which to rest all being (N4 p. 133).

12. In other words, Nietzsche's attempt to present a Dionysian world view is an attempt to explicate a mode of existence that reason and rationality suppress. This is why Nietzsche's attack on metaphysics and its "errors," "lies," and "fictions" is not self-contradictory; he does not stay within the metaphysics he tries to overcome. In a Dionysian or tragic perspective, the soil from which metaphysics--a performance operating under the paradigm of the Mind as a Mirror of Nature and, hence, sustained by the belief that there can be a representation of the world, as it really is, beyond perspectival seeing--springs is one of fear, weakness, and cowardice. It is cowardice and fear in the face of the strange and the questionable, the mysterious and the enigmatic, not "blindness" or "misapprehension" (as if the "true" reality, the world as it is in itself, can be, but is not, revealed, mirrored or accurately represented) that explains metaphysical "error" and "fiction." Metaphysics is not attacked on the grounds of its resting on an "improper" view of reality because there is no Nietzschean appeal to a "proper" view (an appeal that would be deeply inconsistent with his perspectivism) in the destruction of metaphysics that active nihilism seeks. The Dionysian world view that comes out of this destruction is not Nietzsche's positive proposal for what constitutes the "true reality"--a contrasting theory by means of which metaphysical shortcomings are redressed and Nietzsche's commitment to the Platonic-Cartesian-Kantian enterprise and his acceptance of the picture of philosophy as a foundationalist discipline which decides about the way things really are is confirmed--but, rather, Nietzsche's description of a deep and inexhaustibly varied world that metaphysics transforms, oversimplifies and vulgarizes, into an absolutely determinable one.

13. It is in light of the Dionysian bearing of the body that Heidegger's contention that Nietzsche's recourse to the body "alters nothing in the fundamental metaphysical position which is determined by Descartes" (N4 p. 133) becomes difficult to accept. How Nietzsche's bodily oriented thinking "nonetheless accords with the absolute acceptance of subjectivity, in the metaphysical sense of *subjectum*" (N4 p. 133) is not fully spelled out; it is rather stated and is therefore to be viewed as a "half finished thought."

14. This view of Nietzsche's subversive mien is spelled out by Nehemas in *Life as Literature*. See chaps. 4 (esp. pp. 106 - 114) and 7 (esp. pp. 200 - 205, 221 - 225).

15. *ibid.*, p. 201. What Nietzsche means by morality, in the broad sense of the term, is "a system of evaluations that partially coincides with the conditions of a creature's life" (WTP 256). Elaborating on this meaning, Nietzsche writes: "Wherever we encounter a morality, we also encounter valuations and an order of rank of human impulses and actions. These

valuations and orders of rank are always expressions of the needs of a community and herd: whatever benefits it most-and second most, and third most - that is also considered the first standard for the value of all individuals" (GS 116). Morality is, for Nietzsche, essentially a "herd instinct." See also WTP 269, 276, 280, 353; BGE 201.

16. This is not to say that Nietzsche "remains totally silent on the question of how to act and live" (*ibid.*, p. 223). Indeed, Nietzsche's attempt to overcome nihilism can, at the same time, be seen as an attempt to answer this very question. However, in promoting or affirming a particular kind of life--one no longer patterned by moral-metaphysical needs and, hence, one that is no longer, in a Dionysian perspective, sick, diseased, nihilistic--Nietzsche does remain silent on the question of the kind of life that *everyone* ought to live. His view of what constitutes a healthy life makes no claim for unconditional acceptance or "objective validity" and does not mask its partiality. "Not good taste, not bad taste, but *my* taste, which I no longer conceal and of which I am no longer ashamed. 'This - is now *my* way: where is yours?' Thus I answered those who asked me 'the way'. For *the* way - does not exist!" (Z "Of the Spirit of Gravity" 2). The absolutism to which Nietzsche's "campaign against morality" is directed does not recoil upon himself, rendering his position self-contradictory. Nietzsche's position, like those of the philosophers of the future he describes and welcomes, is non-dogmatic. See BGE 43.

17. See Z "Of the Thousand and One Goals."

18. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 1. "This is why we always have the beliefs, feelings and thoughts that we deserve given our way of being or our style of life." The "crucial point," as Deleuze puts it, is "the differential element from which the value of values themselves derives." p. 2.

19. In her book, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), Tracy B. Strong puts the matter thus: "One may be tempted to assume that since Nietzsche appears to 'approve' of 'life,' and since the will to power is held to be coterminous with life ('all life is, and is only, will to power'), then the will to power is something on which Nietzsche places a single valuation. His position, in this perspective, would then be something like 'the more life the better, but life, nonetheless.' This is in part true, but such an interpretation neglects the basic point . . . that *the problem for Nietzsche is not just 'life,' but rather the nature of the particular life.*" p. 256.

20. Zarathustra's "far-seeing, far-seeking" eyes are unable to find the overman amongst modern mankind, the progeny of Descartes' Promethean aspirations for control and dominance over all that is. "There has never yet been a Superman. I have seen them both naked, the greatest and the smallest man. They are still all-too-similar to one another. Truly, I found even the greatest man - all-too-human" (Z "Of the Priests"). Strictly speaking, Nietzsche's presentation of the overman as a counter-ideal to mankind thus far is a hope or cry for something "non-human," no longer man, subject. (See Eric Blondel, "Nietzsche: Life as Metaphor," in *The New Nietzsche*, p. 153. See also Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 169.)

## CONCLUSION

Taking our hermeneutical bearings from the Dionysian orientation of Nietzsche's polemical thought, we find that Nietzsche's position in the history of philosophy lies well beyond the subjectivistic framework wherein Heidegger seeks to contain it. The Nietzschean cry which issues forth the symbol of the overman and communicates the subversive notion of the will to power cannot be heard as an *imperative for action*, a challenge to take control of the technological process that assails modern man. Nietzsche's cry expresses a much different *need* than the one for a form of mankind who will be able to assume, more fully and quite categorically, the posture of "lord of the earth." (Indeed, Nietzsche's cry expresses a *need* that Heidegger himself belabors to impress upon modern mankind). It is for the *need* for essential thinking or reflection that Nietzsche's destructive Dionysian labours cry out.

Nietzsche's cry is a (posthumous) call on modern man--the (post-modern) "men of the present" Zarathustra confronts at the *ultimate* stage of history's moral-metaphysical development--to take heed of the *danger* that lies hidden behind the veils of "blinking happiness" he dons in an age of growing wastelands. It is a call for modern man to confront his "inability to confront meditatively what is really dawning in this age" (DoT p. 52) and respond to the *need* for a critical awareness of an age that, ultimately, sees no danger, that sees, instead, the problems of the present resolved in the reliable and secure socio-economic future that better, more efficient, planning and systematizing will bring about. Nietzsche's overabundantly subversive and malicious Dionysian spirit makes its destructive impact on our modern (Cartesian) times--the apex of an historical line of thinking that orders and regulates man into a world wherein he becomes systematized by

the very systematics he believes to be under his power and, thus, becomes a "slave" or victim of his own "mastery"<sup>1</sup>--by challenging us with the task to shatter the faith in the legitimacy and inevitability of man's complete control over all that is through willful cognition. To remain loyal to the meaning project of Nietzsche's task as thinker is to respond to the *need* for a "step back" (*Schritt zurück*<sup>2</sup>) from the subjectivistic drive of dominance that characterizes our modern age. It is to adopt a "tragic standpoint," one of extreme auto-criticality, from which to see the uncanny appearance of nihilism--the vapid withdrawal of significance and aim, the passive resignation to an existence which continually takes on a value of nil, engulfed by emptiness and loss of worth, devastation, corruption and malaise--as a disease whose origin lies in the subjectivistic drive for certainty and mastery to which man turns, thoughtlessly and *dangerously*, as a saving power for his woes, repressing the "symptoms" or "consequences" while strengthening the "cause" of the disease.

As a consequence of his ability to see, in a **complete** and decisive way, from whence the "uncanniest of all guests," nihilism, comes, Nietzsche's Dionysian "advice" to us--those to whom his polemical thinking posthumously cries out--is to suppress the, as Heidegger puts it, "will to action" which "has overrun and crushed thought" (WT p. 25). Following this advice, responding faithfully to the imperative to think through what it means to be in a world beset by nihilistic phenomena, is how we become "a way to new dawns" (Z "Of the Old and New Law-Tables" 3), a "bridge" to a new form of life. We remain open to and free for a healthy and cleansed future. "We venture away, we venture *ourselves*" (WTP 405) in order to, as if in reward, confront "an as yet undiscovered country whose boundaries nobody has surveyed yet" (GS 382), whose boundaries demarcate an existence outside the metaphysical region of nihilism.



## NOTES

1. See Gary B. Madison, *The Logic of Liberty*, Contributions in Philosophy, No. 30 (Wesport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986), p. 19.
2. Refer to Martin Heidegger's "The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics," in *Identity and Difference*, trans. and intro. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), for the Heideggerian context of this term.

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