THE TRANSMUTATION OF NIHILISM

THE TRANSMUTATION OF NIHILISM: NIETZSCHE'S DOCTRINE OF ETERNAL RECURRENCE

PETER STEWART-KROEKER, B.A. (HONS.)

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AUTHOR: Peter Stewart-Kroeker, B.A., Hons. (McMaster University)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the problem of nihilism as Nietzsche diagnoses it, and delves into the significance of eternal recurrence as a doctrine that indicates the possibility of its overcoming. I delineate the interpretations of his thought by Heidegger, Deleuze, and Klossowski, outlining their differences. In Chapter 1, I consider Nietzsche's early work on the Pre-Socratic philosophers, and analyze how his characterizations of certain key thinkers resonate throughout his oeuvre. I demonstrate how the dispute between the Pre-Socratics concerning the relationship between being and becoming illuminates what Nietzsche later identifies as nihilism, as well as its opposite: the affirmation of appearances, which characterizes the pathos of the tragic philosopher. In Chapter 2, I discuss Nietzsche's critique of Judeo-Christian morality and the pathology of *ressentiment* that results in the death of God. In this psychological analysis, I compare Freud and Nietzsche's understanding of consciousness and the unconscious. In Chapter 3, I consider the future overcoming of nihilism embodied in the overman, who is cultivated by a noble class of creators who legislate new values. I argue that the tragic philosopher is responsible for the transmutation of nihilism, embodied by Zarathustra, who dies in delivering the doctrine of eternal recurrence to humanity. In conclusion, I discuss the political consequences of Nietzsche's thought, which relate to his critique of Darwinism and to his own understanding of the evolutionary process.

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— Baudelaire, *Le Voyage*

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— Heraclitus, CXIV

INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the problem of nihilism as it resonates throughout Nietzsche's work, and elucidates how the thought of eternal recurrence serves as a signpost to its overcoming. Nietzsche's parabolic introduction to this thought is found in the famous passage from *The Gay Science* §341.[1] Here he asks you to imagine a scene in which a demon comes to visit you in your loneliest hour, at the lowest point in life, and tells you that this life will be relived, replicated in every precise detail, for all eternity. The parable presents us with an imaginative reformulation of the cosmological theory of metempsychosis in purely existential terms, wherein one is reborn not into a different body and under new phenomenal conditions, but rather, under identical ones. The cosmic scheme of reality is an endless cycle of self-repetition, my self being repeated along with it. Presumably, this uncanny news would be met with horror, forcing one to despair in the face of life's meaninglessness. However, Nietzsche asks us what kind of *disposition* towards existence would be necessary in order to affirm this tragic predicament with joy, desiring this life alone and hailing the demon as a god.

The thought of eternal recurrence denies the metaphysical distinction between the illusory realm of phenomenal appearances and the supersensible reality beyond appearances, a distinction posited by philosophers from Plato to Schopenhauer. In order to affirm this thought, one must embrace the eternally recurring reality of sensible appearances, without recourse to any metaphysical beyond, be it in the form of an afterlife or in the return of phenomenal existence to a state of primordial nothingness. Nietzsche diagnoses the desire to get beyond appearances, which devalues the world of temporal becoming as a mere illusion in valuing the true realm of

[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Ronald Speirs (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), §341.

changeless being, as fundamentally nihilistic. As a thought that expresses an anti-metaphysical world-view, eternal recurrence functions as a selective doctrine that separates the nihilists, who fail to affirm life as a process of becoming and who would thereby be crushed by the existential weight of this doctrine, from those healthy and strong enough to affirm it.

Nietzsche diagnoses the vitality of any given philosophy—its affirmative or nihilistic qualities—according to his concept of the will to power as the value-positing principle of life. Philosophical valuations of existence are characterized either by life-affirming instincts, i.e., those that are strong and healthy enough to expend themselves in the proliferation of life, which express an ascending will to power, or life-denying instincts, i.e., those that are weak and primarily serve the function of self-preservation, which express a declining will to power. While Heidegger denies that Nietzsche is able to extricate himself from the nihilistic tradition of Western metaphysics, in particular the "metaphysics of the will" that thinks the Being of beings as will, Deleuze interprets the will to power as an empirical principle inseparable from the body. Deleuze contends that Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence, which affirms the will to power as a principle of corporeal becoming, points the way to the overcoming of nihilism rather than signifying the consummation of metaphysics.

Within the context of Deleuze's interpretation of Nietzsche, I trace the development of Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence, alongside his critical engagement with the problem of nihilism, from his early unpublished work to his final histrionic letters. In my investigation of the interpretations of Nietzsche by three of his foremost twentieth century interpreters—Heidegger, Deleuze, and Klossowski—I analyze the exegetical fault lines that emerge between them. The thematic arc of this thesis, which begins by demonstrating the continuity of Nietzsche's early

analysis of the Pre-Socratics with his mid to late writings, and which ends by taking up Klossowski's analysis of the philosophical significance of Nietzsche's delirium in Turin before his mental collapse, is at once biographical. The fluctuations of Nietzsche's health are inseparable from his philosophical development, which is pushed further and further to the point of madness. There nonetheless remains a continuity throughout his writings that is not easily categorized into chronological periods. I contend that it is a mistake to classify his early philosophy as Schopenhauerian, which many scholars do in asserting its incongruity with his mature work. In outlining specific points of thematic continuity throughout his work, I illuminate the agonistic character of his philosophy as a whole, which is grounded in a principle of *self-overcoming*. Nietzsche experiences his suffering as a symptom of philosophical growth and transformation, conveyed in his famous epigram *From Life's School of War*: "what doesn't kill me makes me stronger."[2] This reflects his belief that one must undergo pain in order to overcome oneself, in order to behold the world anew from an array of different perspectives, rather than being confined by a single, static world-view.

A central paradox in Nietzsche's writings is concealed by the scholarly attempt to objectively periodize his philosophical development, which constantly threatens to throw his readers off balance as soon as the attempt is made to interpret his philosophy as a congruous whole. If we assert the law of self-overcoming as the fundamental character of Nietzsche's philosophy, that is, an evolving character that is in flux and which embodies the stream of becoming rather than a fixed identity, then how can we at the same time posit lines of

[2] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Arrows and Epigrams," *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecco Homo, Twilight of the Idols, And Other Writings*, eds. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), §8.

philosophical continuity connecting his early and late writings? Would this continuity not contradict the mutations of his thought, the sloughing off of his many skins, the process of his self-overcoming? In short, how can the principle of becoming at once express the continuity of the self? While this paradox is easily resolved by categorizing the periods of his thought, by asserting the discontinuity between his early and mature philosophy in delineating its progressive stages, such a resolution fails to grasp the Nietzschean self as the unity of multiplicity, an expression of the oneness of becoming, and the paradoxical character of its self-overcoming communicated by Zarathustra, who counsels himself to: "'Become what you are!'"[3]

Another side of this paradox is implicit in the parable of eternal recurrence: if this life that I am living is identical with an endless series of lives, is this not to deny change as the fundamental character of existence? Does the thought of eternal recurrence, which affirms the temporal flux of material reality, not at the same time permanently fix appearances so that they recur in an unalterable fashion? Is this not to impose an immutable character upon becoming? In order to solve this paradoxical dilemma, I turn to Deleuze's interpretation of eternal recurrence as a thought that expresses the return, not of the same, but of that which differs: the sensible play of corporeal forces that affirm the plurality of becoming as a plane of pure immanence. For Deleuze, eternal recurrence constitutes the passage of time as a synthesis of the past, present, and future, which coincide in the continuity of the moment that in passing away returns to itself as a temporal multiplicity. Each moment, carrying the past with it, is pregnant with newness and change. For Deleuze, only that which affirms the plurality of becoming returns, i.e., the affirmative forces of the will to power, for how can those nihilistic forces that fail to affirm

[3] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), "The Honey Sacrifice."

becoming, reducing it to an endless stream of passing away, return anew? In this way we can see certain essential aspects of Nietzsche's thought recur throughout his corpus from the beginning of his career, without in any way diminishing the evolving character of his philosophy, which reflects the law of life's self-overcoming. I argue that eternal recurrence expresses the essence of Nietzsche's thought, propelling it forward while carrying with it the affirmative traces of his past, and while precluding the return of certain nihilistic tendencies.

Thus, while Nietzsche's early work, particularly *The Birth of Tragedy*, is to a certain extent tainted by the nihilistic tendency of the Romantic artist, who creates a world of illusory appearances in order to *escape* from his suffering, rather than affirming it, this work also expresses the joy of the tragic philosopher who takes pleasure in the destruction of appearances —their dissolution into the void of metamorphic becoming. While the former tendency is one that Nietzsche painfully overcomes, the latter tendency affirms his self-overcoming, and underlies his doctrine of eternal recurrence. The Romantic artist can only affirm the *illusory* character of appearances, which contrast with his bitter despair in the face of suffering. The tragic philosopher, on the other hand, affirms the reality of appearances as a process of creation and destruction that is in no way illusory, for it constitutes the eternity of life itself. He does not, out of despair, seek to be liberated from suffering, but instead joyfully embraces its necessity. This contrast is the underlying theme of the first chapter, in which I identify Heraclitus as the prototype for Nietzsche's conception of the tragic philosopher later embodied by Zarathustra, whose suffering serves as the impetus for his continual self-overcoming.

While the first chapter contrasts the philosophy of Heraclitus, as Nietzsche interprets it, with the nihilistic tendencies of Anaximander and the Eleatics, the second chapter analyzes

nihilism in the form of Judeo-Christian morality. Schopenhauer's pessimistic morality of ascetic self-denial figures heavily in both chapters, communicating a world-weary nihilism which, for Nietzsche, is the first atheistic philosophy in the West to pose the question as to whether existence has any meaning. The pessimism that Nietzsche detects in Anaximander, coupled with the Christian morality of pity, in Schopenhauer culminates in the problem of meaninglessness. Rather than solving this problem the way that Schopenhauer does, in espousing the denial of the will, Nietzsche emphasizes its significance in heralding the death of God. This signals the devaluation of the metaphysical distinction between the sensible and supersensible realms, which consequently debases the authority of Judeo-Christian morality. In this chapter I focus on the psychological significance of the death of God for Nietzsche, which relates to his critique of the ego, free will, moral agency, and causality. I contextualize this analysis in light of Deleuze's discussion of the body as it is conditioned by either reactive, nihilistic forces or active, life-affirming forces.

The analysis of nihilism in the second chapter thematically leads into the third chapter, which takes as its topic the overcoming of nihilism, embodied in Nietzsche's idea of the overman. Here I distinguish the transmutation of nihilism, by which I interpret Deleuze to mean its defeat in the form of its self-destruction, from its overcoming, which I contend is realized by the overman. Zarathustra, as the teacher of eternal recurrence, embodies the transmutation of nihilism. In delivering the doctrine of eternal recurrence to humanity, Zarathustra experiences this transmutation as the affective metamorphosis of the soul (a body of affects). This experience transmutes pain into joy, contempt into love, self-destruction into creative affirmation. Insofar as nihilistic, life-denying values are negated by Zarathustra, he transmutes the value of values. He

experiences the overwhelming power of active forces that pave the way for a revaluation of values from the perspective of active rather than reactive forces. Finally, it is the overman who signifies the overcoming of nihilism, being the product of creators who legislate new, life-affirming values.

In this discussion I emphasize the importance of the transmutation of nihilism as an affective reality, which converts the heaviness of the soul weighed down with melancholy into the ethereal lightness of the soul that finds itself in flight. While this descriptive analysis conveys what I contend is the dramatic climax of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, it critically supports my argument that this transmutation is a visceral, revelatory experience, rather than an abstract, metaphysical hypothesis. Commentators Peter Hallward and Ashley Woodward deny this claim in asserting that Deleuze's work on Nietzsche—specifically his interpretation of the thought of eternal recurrence and how it signifies the transmutation of nihilism—dubiously espouses a philosophy grounded in an "*extra*-worldly" dimension of thought, one that fails to affirm the earthly reality of lived experience.[4] I reject this claim by demonstrating the corporeal significance of the will to power as an empirical principle, the negative quality of which is converted by Zarathustra into the positive quality of Dionysian affirmation. My argument merges one feature of Paul S. Loeb's innovative reading of *Zarathustra*, namely, that Zarathustra dies in giving birth to the doctrine of eternal recurrence, with Deleuze's account of the transmutation of nihilism.[5] I argue that Zarathustra's death, embodying the blessed self-destruction of the tragic philosopher, coincides with the third metamorphosis of the spirit into the child, produced by the

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[4] Ashley Woodward, "Deleuze, Nietzsche, and the overcoming of nihilism," *Continental Philosophy Review* 46 (2013), 115-147.

[5] Paul S. Loeb, *The Death of Nietzsche's Zarathustra* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

affective transmutation of nihilistic forces. This child symbolizes the immanent law of corporeal Becoming and mirrors Heraclitus's world-child divinity whose cosmic play, for Nietzsche, expresses Zarathustra's doctrine of eternal recurrence. This doctrine at once represents Nietzsche's theory of evolution grounded in the dice-throw of chance, which may be affirmed by future creators whose task is to cultivate the overman.

In conclusion, I discuss the significance of the political conspiracy that would produce the overman, who for Nietzsche signifies a new breed of human being that may be cultivated by an elite class of creators and experimenters, while contending with the scholarly objections to Deleuze's interpretation of eternal recurrence and its political consequences. Woodward sums up these objections in considering the potentially totalitarian implications of Deleuze's early thought, again grounded in what he contends is its *extra*-worldly dimension of pure difference. Having rebutted this extra-worldly interpretation of Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche, I reject the political consequences that would seem to follow from it. I contend that such objections misconstrue the political dimension of Nietzsche's thought, which is illuminated by Klossowski's analysis of Nietzsche's political conspiracy. This conspiracy concerns an elite rank of experimenters who exist in a sphere of their own, whose task is not to dominate the herd in the form of a totalitarian regime, driven by the need to accumulate political power. Instead, such creators cultivate higher instincts that serve the flourishing of culture, rather than an ideology that seeks unconditional control over a people.

This discussion also seeks to illuminate the significance of eternal recurrence as a theory of evolution opposed to Darwin's understanding of natural selection. Nietzsche contends that Darwin's theory of natural selection privileges the morality of the herd that preserves itself at the

expense of higher, singular individuals, who are eliminated. He denounces the scientific objectivity of Darwin's theory, not insofar as he denies the evolutionary process that gives rise to the human species, but insofar as he detects in Darwinism certain moral prejudices, which espouse the morality of the herd, and which help to translate the humanist values of altruism and neighbour love into a theory of evolutionary psychology. For Nietzsche, these values are symptomatic of a reactive consciousness that fails to register the vitality of the body as will to power, which does not serve the function of self-preservation (although this may be one of its results) but rather seeks to expend itself in the voluptuousness of self-overcoming, by which its vital activity is felt to increase. Nietzsche criticizes the virtue of altruism that diminishes the individual's will to power, the singularity of his creative, value-legislating drives.

Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence affirms the creative forces of the will to power, embodied in the singular individual whose abundant strength seeks to discharge itself in the production of a higher type of human being, rather than being assimilated by the herd which merely wishes to preserve itself and whose morality serves this function. The dominant moralities hitherto have, for Nietzsche, led to the problem of nihilism and the decadence of European culture. In diagnosing the sickness of European nihilism, Nietzsche feels the great tension of the human spirit, which continually seeks to overcome itself. The doctrine of eternal recurrence heralds the self-overcoming of humanity and the emergence of creative individuals capable of determining its future.

CHAPTER 1

THE ETERNAL FIRE

> *Fire and consummation, this is what our entire life must be, oh you windbags of truth! And the vapour and incense of the sacrifices will live longer than the victims!*[6]

Nietzsche's early work on the Pre-Socratic philosophers can be easily misinterpreted due to two common errors. The first is to assume that he remains steadfast to Schopenhauer's metaphysics, a pessimist yet to undergo a radical break with his predecessor. The second is to miss the already robust undercurrent of his thought, which treats philosophical knowledge as anthropomorphic. In a letter to Lou Salome, Nietzsche writes: "Your idea of reducing philosophical systems to personal records of their originators is truly an idea arising from a 'brother-sister' brain. In Basel I myself taught the history of ancient philosophy in just *this* sense. I liked to tell my listeners that such-and-such 'a system has been disproved and is dead, but the *person* behind the system cannot be disproved and that the person cannot be killed'—Plato, for instance."[7] The distinctive personality of each philosopher is inextricable from his philosophy. In *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, Nietzsche distinguishes three archetypal knowledge seekers, eminent among the Pre-Socratics: the pessimist (Anixamander), the intuitive soul (Heraclitus), and the abstract thinker (Parmenides). Each philosopher's thought contrasts with the others. Anixamander is associated with the pessimism of Schopenhauer. Heraclitus views the

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[6] Cited by Pierre Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 253.

[7] Lou Salome, *Nietzsche*, trans. Siegfried Mandel (University of Illinois Press, 2001), 3.

cosmos artistically as an "aesthetic phenomenon." Finally, Parmenides sees nature as a paradoxical riddle to be solved according to logic.[8]

Nietzsche emphasizes the significance of these contrasting perspectives at the end of his writing career, in *Twilight of the Idols* and *Ecce Homo*. Here he opposes his thought to the pessimism of Schopenhauer and the abstraction of the Eleatics, while positioning himself in line with the intuitive vision of Heraclitus. The latter is identified as a forerunner to his "Dionysian philosophy" of tragic wisdom, characterized by the idea of the eternal return. Nietzsche calls himself the "first *tragic philosopher*," while noting the possible anticipation of Heraclitus.[9] A tragic philosophy is one that affirms suffering and conflict as a necessary part of life. The Dionysian pathos of the tragic philosopher is characterized by joy that transmutes the pain of existence into a love of existence. It is related to the instinct expressed in Attic tragedy, which embraces the annihilation of the tragic hero without any need for its moral or rational, dialectal justification. Such annihilation reveals the overwhelming power of nature that surges continually, a strife of conflicting forces that are not reconciled in their satiated peace. The tragic philosopher affirms the moral ambiguity of existence without attempting to resolve this ambiguity by means of logic. He does not prescribe a way of life that would liberate one from suffering, for example, by extirpating the passions. Instead, his passions give rise to the tragic pathos that delights in creation as an endless process, involving destruction as well as regeneration. For Nietzsche, this tragic world-view is a sign of vitality, and every philosophical world-view signals either an ascent or a decline in vitality.

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[8] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, trans. Greg Whitlock (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 70.

[9] Nietzsche, *EH*, "The Birth of Tragedy," §3.

Philosophical activity is concerned with the creation of a radically distinct world-view, fashioned in the image of the philosopher. He praises Heraclitus for affirming an aesthetic vision of cosmic reality that stems from the most creative impulses. The strife of these impulses is immortalized as a kind of play. The artistic joy of creating, which for Nietzsche affirms eternal recurrence, is contrasted with more unhappy, less innocent impulses: those of moralizing and theorizing. In their ascendency, these tendencies give rise to more pessimistic, and ultimately nihilistic visions of reality. Given that all of these impulses vie with one another, the question as to their value must always be asked in relation to the *way* in which they affirm life or lead to its destruction. This chapter explores the implications of Nietzsche's fecund statement that "the doctrine of 'the eternal return,' which is to say the unconditional and infinitely repeated cycle of all things — this is Zarathustra's doctrine, but ultimately it is nothing Heraclitus couldn't have said too."[10] To understand this statement I will take up Nietzsche's early work on the Pre-Socratics, which I argue expresses the idea of eternal return in its germinal form.

Much of the obscurity surrounding the thought of eternal recurrence is dispelled by tracing its development from this germinal stage to its expression in Nietzshe's final work. This development coincides with Nietzsche's critique of what he later identifies as nihilism. The Heraclitean undertones of eternal recurrence are consistently counterposed to both pessimistic and idealistic philosophical attitudes. In tracing several converging lines of thematic continuity throughout Nietzsche's oeuvre, I dispel the common misconception that his early work remains naively entangled in the metaphysical artifice of Schopenhauer's pessimism, and therefore

[10] Ibid.

incompatible with his mature philosophy.[11] These thematic lines of continuity include: i) the idea of eternal recurrence as a conception of the passage of time that affirms the innocence of becoming; ii) the *agon* at the heart of philosophical valuations of existence, intrinsic to the will to power and the perspectivism that attends it; iii) the significance of eternal recurrence as a doctrine that signifies the transition from nihilism to creative affirmation. I argue that Heraclitus's philosophy, as Nietzsche interprets and transposes it, can serve as a hermeneutical hub from which these crucial lines radiate like spokes on the burning wheel of becoming.

I conclude this chapter by comparing the fire spoken of by Heraclitus, which embodies the *logos* of cosmic becoming, with the one spoken of by Zarathustra, which embodies the principle of life as that of self-overcoming: the process of natural regeneration and evolution. This fire symbolizes both the creative passion of the tragic philosopher, which affirms the whole of life in willing its eternal return, as well as the process of life itself, which destroys and creates in equal measure. In willing eternal recurrence, the tragic philosopher does not deny or negate suffering, seeking to justify it by means of any moral or rational ideal, but instead embraces its unconditional necessity.

I. PRE-SOCRATIC ORIGINS

In *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, Nietzsche characterizes philosophical thinking as a creative, imaginative, and intuitive activity. At least, this is how it began, with Thales being the first to posit a primal essence of the universe: water. Such a conception

[11] Lou Salome, for instance, holds the enduringly popular opinion among scholars that the optimism of Nietzsche's "last philosophy is the complete opposite of his first philosophical world view, or of the Schopenhauerian metaphysics . . ." *Nietzsche*, 135. Such a chronology obscures both the meaning of Nietzsche's early work as well as its resonance with his later "optimism." See James I. Porter, *The Invention of Dionysus* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

communicates that 'all is one,' without recourse to mythology.[12] Philosophy is concerned with giving an explanation of nature, but rational calculation and dialectical abstraction only follow in the wake of a single original idea that is arrived at intuitively, whose greatness is neither strengthened nor diminished by logical proofs. Perhaps 'water' is a poor metaphor for primal oneness, but the leap of the intellect towards its desired goal distinguishes the arrival of philosophical truth that is neither mythic nor scientific. "Thus Thales had seen the unity of all that is, but when he went to communicate it, he found himself talking about water!"[13] Thales's proposal that water is the essence of all that is, the immanent substance permeating all being, is not rendered absurd because of its naive presentation. His idea cannot be gauged by its usefulness or accuracy as a scientific explanation of reality. Instead, what Nietzsche stresses is the creative impulse in philosophical thinking that defines and justifies its activity, which is engaged in nothing other than the creation of a radically distinct world-view. The philosopher is measured by his discriminating *taste* for reality, an art developed in contrast to that of the poet, and camouflaged with the deceptive appearance of natural science.[14]

Following Thales, the figure of Anixamander rises on the horizon as a sorrowful, brooding philosopher, who sees all finite beings emerging from and returning to the indefinite source of existence. Nietzsche interprets the law of Anixamander's philosophy as that of moral pessimism projected into the cosmic scheme of reality. Paraphrasing the famous sentence of Anixamander, he says: "Where the source of things is, to that place they must also pass away,

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[12] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. Marianne Cowan (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 1998), 39.

[13] Ibid, 45.

[14] Ibid, 43.

according to necessity, for they must pay penance and be judged for their injustices, in accordance with time."[15] Nietzsche stresses the anthropomorphic essence of such a world-view and associates it with Schopenhauer, whose pessimism results from the will's inability to affirm life and its own creative activity, held in bondage by the continual passing-away of time. Schopenhauer seemingly takes Anixamander's logic of expiation to its nihilistic conclusion, wherein one is freed from the vengeance of time only through the ascetic denial of the will altogether, as a return to nothingness.[16] The connection between universal human guilt and the penance of suffering is for Schopenhauer a metaphysical one. He recommends that one regard the world as a penal colony, and "every man first and foremost as a being who exists only as a consequence of his culpability and whose life is an expiation of the crime of being born."[17] Similarly, for Nietzsche, Anixamander's conception of justice as the punishment of hubris, and time itself as the means of punishment, presents existence as eternally guilty. Existence as such continues on in an endless cycle of revenge: the self-devouring of time that mirrors the collective guilt of living beings.

The question remains how the process of coming-to-be arises in the first place. How does the indefinite engender beings with definite qualities? The relationship between eternity and temporality emerges as a problem in Anixamander's philosophy. Heraclitus attempts to resolve this problem by embracing the paradoxical nature of phenomenal becoming, manifesting a play

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[15] Ibid, 45.

[16] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), §71.

[17] Arthur Schopenhauer, *On the Suffering of the World*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1970), §9.

of opposites unified in the *logos*, which demonstrates that "all things are one."[18] Nietzsche does not interpret Heraclitus pessimistically, as Schopenhauer does when he describes him as one who "laments the eternal flux of things."[19] In Anixamander, all finite beings that come into existence are judged by time for their hubristic separation from the indefinite. The rupture between the definite world and the indefinite is not rationally explainable, except with recourse to a system of justice. The contradiction is resolved by the return of ephemeral entities to the primal womb of being; finite existence is expiated in this process.[20] Conversely, Heraclitus renounces any moral judgement concerning hubris altogether, envisioning the cosmic innocence of all becoming.

Heraclitus's understanding of justice is the opposite of Anixamander's. This is due to the fundamental differences in their metaphysics. First of all, Heraclitus does not distinguish the two separate realms of definite qualities and indefinite *arche*. Furthermore, he rejects the reality of 'being.'[21] Temporal change is the ceaseless and eternal manifestation of lawful order. The order of reality is found in a law of becoming rather than permanent being. The contradiction between what is and what is not, what comes to be and passes away, expresses the harmony of opposites in nature, which "rests by changing."[22] Anixamander's judgement that what passes away is somehow deficient is relative to a moral perspective, which sees everywhere the punishment of hubris. For Heraclitus, creation and destruction are part of a divine game that time plays with itself. "The eternally living fire, Aeon [boy-god of the Zodiac], plays, builds, and

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[18] Heraclitus, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, trans. Charles H. Kahn (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), XXXVI, 45.

[19] Schopenhauer, *WWR*, §3.

[20] Nietzsche, *PTG*, 46.

[21] Ibid, 51.

[22] Heraclitus, *ATH*, LII, 53.

knocks down: strife, this opposition of different characteristics, directed by justice, may be grasped only as an aesthetic phenomenon."[23] All becoming is *necessary* and unalterable and for this very reason justified and blameless. The Aeon cannot *create otherwise*—nor does he create for any human moral purpose.

While Anixamander expresses a morally pessimistic world view, and Heraclitus affirms the eternal justice of Becoming, Parmenides breaks with both of these thinkers, asserting that there is only unchanging Being and nothing else. The empirical evidence of sensory experience that presents a world of change is illusory and not to be trusted. The material reality of sense experience presents continual motion within a cycle of natural change. The process of organic matter is one of dissolution and regeneration, passing away and coming into being—what *is* ceases to exist, and what *is not* comes into existence. However, non-being cannot be. If non-being existed, there would *be* nothing. In the same way, being cannot come from non-being. This logical contradiction produces an inconceivable and impossible state of reality. Therefore, all phenomenal change, for Parmenides, must merely be a deception of the senses. All that exists is motionless Being. For Nietzsche, this idea is remarkable as a pure abstraction, opposed to life as it is naturally experienced. The Eleatics who follow Parmenides attempt to prove this idea by applying abstract logic to natural change, absurdly demonstrating the impossibility of temporality.

> All our conceptions lead to contradictions as soon as their empirically given content, drawn from our perceivable world, is taken as an eternal verity. If absolute motion exists, then space does not; if absolute space exists, then motion does not; if absolute being exists, then the many does not. Would one think that confronted with such logic a man

[23] Nietzsche, *PPP*, 70.

> would attain the insight that such concepts do not touch the heart of things, do not undo the tangle of reality?[24]

For the Eleatics, logic applied in this fashion creates a series of paradoxes proving that nature is unreal. But it is perhaps more sensible to arrive at the conclusion that the concept of pure Being is itself irrational. Philosophical truth is in this instance a denial of nature altogether, an escape into the ether of abstraction.

This interpretation reveals much about Nietzsche's own views on the nature of philosophical activity, which *transforms* reality through the imagination in a distinctive way that nonetheless affirms the appearance of its objective verity. At the root of philosophy lies the seduction of knowledge and the art of truth, that is, the power of deception, stripped of poetic artifice. As Nietzsche writes in an early note entitled *About the lie*: "We . . . return to culture in the fashion of sects; we try to roll back the immeasurable knowledge in the philosopher and to convince him again of the anthropomorphic nature of all knowledge."[25] This is precisely what Nietzsche does in his essay *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*, which ends with a contrast between the intuitive, artistic thinker and the thinker guided by rational principles. "While man guided by concepts and abstractions can only ward off unhappiness and strive for the greatest possible freedom from pain without wresting any happiness for himself from these abstractions, intuitive man, rooted in the middle of a culture, apart from warding off evil, reaps from his intuitions a continuous flow of illumination, comfort, and redemption."[26] Each of these types of thinkers performs an act of self-deception. One is deceived by the ephemeral bliss of

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[24] Nietzsche, *PTG*, 86.

[25] Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, eds. Raymond Guess and Alexander Nehemas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 144.

[26] Ibid, 264.

happiness, experienced intuitively as the redemption of reality through beautiful appearance. The other is deceived by the objective quality of abstract concepts, which nonetheless liberate him from suffering at the price of remaining indifferent to the world. Each type overcomes suffering according to his character. While the theoretical man diminishes suffering at the expense of joy, the artistic type increases it with his delight in rapture. The question as to whether one philosophy is more truthful than another, whether one correctly judges the reality of being while the other misjudges it, already eclipses the personality behind each philosophy, the particular character that determines it. Every philosophy must be measured in accordance with the person who lives it, for it is a type of knowledge that serves personal needs.

Deleuze characterizes the position of Heraclitus in Nietzsche's thought as the tragic, intuitive thinker.[27] Nietzsche writes of Heraclitus: "At his core he is the opposite of a pessimist because he does not deny away sorrows and irrationality: for him, war reveals itself as the eternal process of the world. Yet he contents himself with an eternal universal law and, because it oversees all things, calls it Logos, intelligence."[28] Heraclitus affirms strife and denies the abstraction of static being. Such is the position Nietzsche calls tragic. The tragic thinker is opposed to the pessimist, who sees only meaningless suffering in a world that is indifferent, whereas the former creates and enjoys beauty in the midst of dissonance, which paradoxically manifests the self-attunement of the Logos, for: "from tones at variance comes perfect attunement."[29] The Logos is what Deleuze calls, in relation to Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal

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[27] Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 23.

[28] Nietzsche, *PPP*, 74.

[29] Heraclitus, *ATH*, LXXV, 63.

return, the "being of becoming": the immanent law of its eternal necessity.[30] Heraclitus's description of time, through which we begin to understand his relationship to Nietzsche's eternal return, emphasizes the circular overlapping of opposite states: "The beginning and the end are shared in the circumference of a circle."[31] In our attempt to grasp time, seeking the essence of temporal existence, we find that its self-generation is a continuous cycle of change. Deleuze writes:

> The present must coexist with itself as past and yet to come. The synthetic relation of the moment to itself as present, past and future grounds its relation to other moments. The eternal return is thus an answer to the problem of passage. . . . It is not being that returns but rather the returning itself that constitutes being insofar as it is affirmed of becoming and of that which passes. It is not some one thing which returns but rather returning itself is the one thing which is affirmed of diversity and multiplicity.[32]

When we divide time into past, present and future, we discover that each moment is pregnant with this plurality, as in a circle returning upon itself. The present moment ends and begins again in an instant of becoming; its movement transcends the ratiocinative, discursive intellect that cannot grasp the unity of plurality and must therefore be grasped by intuition.

We can consider the eternal return to be the ground of Heraclitus's philosophy, which affirms the strife of opposites as a Unity. Destruction and creation are continuous with one another, their contradiction is no less a harmony: "One must realize that war is shared and Conflict is Justice, and that all things come to pass (and are ordained?) in accordance with conflict."[33] The strife of opposites is no longer the contradiction between definite qualities and

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[30] Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 23.

[31] Heraclitus, *ATH*, XCIX, 75.

[32] Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 48.

[33] Heraclitus, *ATH*, LXXXII, 67.

indefinite substance, as in Anixamander, which judges the injustice of becoming, nor the abstract polarity of Being and Non-Being, as in Parmenides. Instead, the eternal exchange of opposites is the game that time plays with itself, ruled by necessity. “It is a wonderful idea, welling up from the purest strings of Hellenism, the idea that strife embodies the everlasting sovereignty of strict justice, bound to everlasting laws.”[34] Heraclitus’s understanding of justice is inextricable from his personality, expressing tragic joy, which for Nietzsche characterizes the height of Hellenic culture. Heraclitus’s “law” is thus an “ethical anthropomorphism” that is inseparable from the tragic age in which he lived.[35]

Justice, as the unifying law governing the cosmos, is present in the plurality of becoming. Fire is the element Heraclitus associates with the Logos. Nietzsche describes him as a “blissful spectator” beholding the play of fire and its cosmic strife, whose law is immanent in its self-consuming perpetuity.[36] This vision is tragic, for the cycle of fire that is “kindled in measures and in measures going out” repeats itself eternally.[37] Human beings are bound by the violent necessity of nature, forever unfree, yet afforded bliss in the intuition of its divine harmony. If the tragic character of this philosophy remains obscure, it is because the anthropomorphic element of thinking has been concealed: “The total character of the world, however, 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.”[38] This

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[34] Nietzsche, *PTG*, 55

[35] Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, 127.

[36] Nietzsche, *PTG*, 57.

[37] Heraclitus, *ATH*, XXXVII, 45.

[38] Nietzsche, *GS*, §109.

passage from *The Gay Science*, in which the thought of eternal recurrence is first espoused, does not contradict Nietzsche's early philosophical outlook, which assumes the anthropomorphic character of human knowledge. The universe, whose "whole music box repeats eternally its tune which may never be called a melody," is for Nietzsche deprived of divine order.[39] Heraclitus perceives the chaotic surge of becoming, subsuming and propagating difference and multiplicity, yet he understands the dissonance of chaos to be harmonious: "The fairest order in the world is a heap of random sweepings."[40] The randomness of chance and play in universal Becoming is governed by the aesthetic harmony of opposites; chaos appears to conceal lawful order.

Heraclitus's enigmatic language itself reflects this play of opposites, disclosing the unity of life and death in universal Becoming. His discourse on the *logos* attempts, paradoxically, to speak of the unspeakable. Language contradicts itself in its description of Becoming because it can only describe things as they *are* or *are not*, i.e., it only refers to Being. "The same . . . : living and dead, and the waking and the sleeping, and young and old. For those transposed again are these."[41] The *logos* empties itself of linguistic meaning, it neither is nor is not, therefore it does not refer to a *being* beyond itself. There is only the river of Becoming. As Nietzsche observes: "If everything is in Becoming, then, accordingly, predicates cannot adhere to a thing but rather likewise must be in the flow of Becoming."[42]

The flow of Becoming, embodied in the living fire, is a river into which one cannot step twice, for it is never the same river. The identity of a finite object designated by a name is

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[39] Ibid.

[40] Heraclitus, *ATH*, CXXV, 85.

[41] Heraclitus, *ATH*, XCIII, 75.

[42] Nietzsche, *PPP*, 65.

fictitious, for "one [cannot] grasp any mortal substance in a stable condition, but it scatters and again gathers; it forms and dissolves, and approaches and departs."[43] If Parmenides were to observe this river, he would see only illusion—the precise inverse of Heraclitus's vision. For Heraclitus, the illusion is found in language that conceives natural objects conceptually as *beings*, when no 'being' exists. Conversely, Parmenides mentally transforms all of reality into the abstract concept of pure Being—he takes the stabilizing force of language to its theoretical limit. However, he cannot achieve this without negating non-being, or denying the validity of the senses. Parmenides bounds from one bank of the river to the other but cannot keep from getting wet. In his attempt to put all becoming *beneath him* he errs. Whence this concept of Non-being if there is only Being? Nietzsche asserts the coherence of Heraclitus's intuition in light of Parmenides' illogic: "if everything is only One, why appearance? Why delusion? Why the senses?"[44] The fact that we appear to be deceived at all proves the existence of the senses and their manifold impressions, which evince plurality and movement in time.[45]

Nietzsche addresses this ancient problem again at the end of his philosophical career in *Twilight of the Idols*. He attacks the narrow mindedness of philosophers who construct an idolatrous world of lifeless concepts that have no contact with reality. Such abstraction attempts to *sanitize* life of all empirical contradiction, denuding the body of its vital significance for philosophical activity. He once again praises Heraclitus, whom he argues criticizes the senses for the opposite reason: they show durable consistency in nature.[46] The common person does not

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[43] Heraclitus, *ATH*, LI, 53.

[44] Nietzsche, *PPP*, 87.

[45] Ibid, 88.

[46] Nietzsche, *TI*, "'Reason' in Philosophy," §2.

grasp the perpetual flux of nature, for this is not immediately evident in everyday experience: "Eyes and ears are poor witnesses for men if their souls do not understand the language."[47] The Eleatics, on the other hand, reject the senses precisely because they seem to evince diverse states of change. It is from their rational *interpretation* of sensory experience that they arrive at the theory of 'being,' which Nietzsche dismisses as nothing more than an idolatrous artifact of human knowledge—a dead concept. "'Reason' makes us falsify the testimony of the senses. The senses are not lying when they show becoming, passing away, and change. . . . But Heraclitus will always be right in thinking that being is an empty fiction. The 'apparent' world is the only world: the 'true world' is just a *lie added on to it*."[48] The lie that Nietzsche is referring to is an abstraction devoid of sense. The 'apparent' world is a mere mental contrivance insofar as it is understood to be unreal, a fiction generated alongside the idea of 'being.'

The problem of Becoming originates with Anaximander, whose dualism perceives the fickleness of definite finite qualities and from this establishes the indefinite ground of Being that he names *apeiron*.[49] While Parmenides' monism predicates substance of Being, Heraclitus's monism affirms Becoming, which can only be predicated through language in the form of contradiction. "Graspings: wholes and not wholes, convergent divergent, consonant dissonant, from all things one and from one thing all."[50] Oneness is immanent in all that exists; plurality manifests unity. The divergence of opposites in nature is held together by the congruity of the

[47] Heraclitus, *ATH*, XVI, 35.

[48] Ibid, 168.

[49] Nietzsche, *PPP*, 87.

[50] Heraclitus, *ATH*, CXXIV, 85.

Whole. In grasping flux intuitively, the soul rests in the eternal motion of the *logos*: a fire temporarily satiated and extinguished, only to be kindled again by the strife of desire.

Nietzsche associates Heraclitus's conception of the universe, which affirms life as a war of opposites that destroys and creates in equal measure, with his own doctrine of the eternal return. This is a tragic vision of reality, in which justice is found in the joyful innocence of Becoming. Heraclitus is a dramatic and artistic thinker, who perceives "how the struggle of the many can yet carry rules and laws inherent in itself, how the artist stands contemplatively above and at the same time actively within his work, how necessity and random play, oppositional tension and harmony, must pair to create a work of art."[51] In this way we understand reality as an aesthetic phenomenon—the work of an artist that mirrors his intuitive vision of nature. The world exists within and emerges from the intuition of such a philosopher, who delights in the 'truth' of the dreams that surround him. "The truth! The rapturous delusion of a god! What business of men is truth? And what was the 'truth' of Heraclitus? And where has it gone? A vanished dream, wiped from the faces of mankind, together with other dreams!"[52] Truth is to be found in appearance, for this is finally where human knowledge begins and ends. The intuitive philosopher—unlike the pessimist who judges the world from a moral perspective, or the rationalist who flees into abstraction—gives aesthetic form to the chaos of the cosmos. Just like the other types, he creates the world in his own image.

In *The consciousness of appearance* (*GS* §54), Nietzsche describes the experience of the 'knower,' who attains the insight that the whole history of sentient being creatively speaks within

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[51] Nietzsche, *PTG*, 61.

[52] Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, "Pathos of Truth," 251.

him, in his passion and in his reason. The knower, as a part of nature, feels himself to be an expression of the Whole. He then intuits that this is an illusion, a day-dream: "In the midst of this dream, I suddenly awoke, but only to the consciousness that I merely dream and that I *must* continue dreaming so that I do not perish." The knower, as a dreamer, suddenly recognizes that his consciousness of being one with nature is only the appearance of such an awareness. Yet Nietzsche does not posit a reality behind appearances. The consciousness of appearance is yet another appearance. "What now is the meaning of 'appearance'? Certainly not the opposite of some kind of essence. What can I say about any kind of essence except merely to call it by the attributes of appearance! Truly it is not a dead mask that one can place upon or remove from an unknown quantity! To me, appearance is the effectuating and living thing itself, which goes so far in its self-mockery as to let me feel that here is appearance and will-o'-the-wisp and ghost dance, and nothing more." The tragic philosopher's knowledge about nature is an instinctual way of poeticizing it. By affirming the eternity of appearance (appearance as the "living thing itself"), the tragic philosopher embraces the destruction of appearances in their metamorphosis, rejoicing in the discovery that appearance is in fact indestructible, returning eternally. The self-mockery of appearance is manifested in the sudden conflation of waking and dreaming reality, wherein the dreamer is roused to the fact that he is dreaming, but that this dream constitutes the very nature of reality. The knower becomes conscious of knowledge as an appearance; knowledge is therefore realized as the *appearance of appearance*: the consciousness that appearance and reality are one and the same within the stream of becoming. The distinction between appearance and reality refers to a qualitative difference in the experience of appearances themselves, the difference perceived between waking and dreaming states. The philosopher dreams reality, his

knowledge is "the highest means for . . . preserving *the duration of the dream* intact."[53] The tragic philosopher does not deny or negate appearances, and if he does negate them it is only out of the joyful wisdom that they will endlessly recreate themselves, that the dream will remain intact.

The tragic philosopher is a dramatic thinker who *plays god* innocently and with laughter. "What [Heraclitus] saw, the teaching of *law in becoming* and of *play in necessity*, must be seen from now on in all eternity. He raised the curtain on this greatest of dramas."[54] This drama is "the play of the great world-child Zeus and the eternal joke of the destruction and creation of a world."[55] The tragic philosopher creates the world, which shatters like a dream as he is awakened by his own self-mockery, by his laughter at having created a world. Yet this awakening is itself an illusion. The process continues, the dream returns, as the philosopher sinks "even deeper" into a "magic slumber—perhaps dreaming of 'ideas' or of immortality."[56] He is thus involved in a cosmic drama, at once serious and playful. Tragedy overwhelms you, supersedes your finitude: "so that *you yourself may be* the eternal joy in becoming,—the joy that includes the eternal *joy in negating*."[57] The passage of time expresses the being of becoming that enjoys its own annihilation, returning anew to itself.

The foregoing analysis stresses the anthropomorphic nature of human knowledge for Nietzsche. This undercurrent of his thought envisions philosophy as a form of aesthetic play, whereby the tragic philosopher realizes his own creative activity, as metaphorically embodied in

[53] Nietzsche, *GS*, §54.

[54] Nietzsche, *PTG*, 68.

[55] Nietzsche, *Early Notebooks*, "Pathos of Truth," 251.

[56] Ibid, 252.

[57] Nietzsche, *TI*, "What I Owe to the Ancients," §5.

Heraclitus's world-child divinity. Nietzsche's early work on the Pre-Socratics sketches three main philosophical archetypes: the pessimist, the intuitive thinker, and the rational idealist. These archetypes recur in contention with one another throughout Nietzsche's oeuvre. He explicitly rejects Schopenhauer's pessimistic interpretation of Heraclitus. From the beginning of his career, it is clear that Heraclitus remains the most appealing of the Pre-Socratic philosophers for Nietzsche, whom he finally associates with his idea of eternal return—the doctrine of the tragic philosopher. What is fundamental to the relationship between Nietzsche and Heraclitus is the *dramatic character* of their writing, which is at once playful and solemn, youthful and immortal.

II. ZARATHUSTRA'S WORD

Nietzsche's analysis of the Pre-Socratics attains higher significance when contextualized in light of the later developments in his thought, namely, his introduction of the concept of will to power and the dynamics of perspectivism. These developments coincide with a genealogical critique of Western logic, which Nietzsche criticizes for its dialectical opposition, wherein the world of becoming, multiplicity, and change is opposed to the unity of unchanging being. The former is devalued in contrast to the latter. For Schopenhauer, the Will is the underlying unity that stands in eternal opposition to the plurality of phenomenal reality, as the noumenal essence that opposes phenomenal appearance. Through the practise of ascetic self-denial, which culminates in "perfect will-lessness," one is liberated from the suffering that this eternal contradiction at the basis of phenomenal existence imposes upon one, being released into the unknown and unknowable primordial nothingness.[58]

[58] Schopenhauer, *WWR*, §68.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche apparently avows the eternal contradiction between the primordial unity (the noumenal essence of the Will symbolized by Dionysus) and the world as representation (the individuation of phenomenal appearances symbolized by Apollo). However, he explicitly departs from Schopenhauer's metaphysics, exclaiming that "only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* is existence and the world eternally *justified*."[59] Schopenhauer espouses the morally pessimistic view that being alive is a kind of cosmic injustice, which we pay penance for by suffering. The aesthetic pleasure experienced by the recipient of art may temporarily relieve pain, like a brief sexual encounter, but it does not sanctify existence itself. Nietzsche announces the aesthetic affirmation of existence rather than its ascetic denial, an affirmation which, as we have seen, he associated with Heraclitus in his early unpublished writings.

It becomes clear that the aforementioned eternal contradiction is for Nietzsche a matter of aesthetics, which revalues the metaphysical distinction between subject and object, noumenon and phenomenon: "the entire opposition between subjective and objective (which Schopenhauer, too, still uses to divide up the arts, as if it were some criterion of value) is absolutely inappropriate in aesthetics since the subject, the willing individual in pursuit of his own, egotistical goals, can be considered the opponent of art and not its origin."[60] The artist experiences himself not as a subject confronting an implacable object but rather as divine, as "a medium, the channel through which the one truly existing subject celebrates its release and redemption in semblance."[61] Nietzsche subtly *inverts* the Schopenhauerian logic of ascetic self-

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[59] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), §5.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

denial, whereby one is liberated from the illusory realm of phenomenal appearances in a return to primal nothingness; instead, existence is *only justified* as an aesthetic appearance. "This metaphysics of the artiste stands counter to the one-sided view held by Schopenhauer, who cannot appreciate art from the standpoint of the artist but only from that of the recipient, because it bestows liberation and redemption in the enjoyment of the not-real, in contrast to reality (the experience of someone suffering and despairing at himself and his reality)."[62] Schopenhauer despairs in the face of illusory appearances, which do not possess a redemptive quality. He fails to understand the aesthetic delight of the artist, who justifies his suffering in the creation of illusion.

This revaluation of metaphysical logic—from the perspective of aesthetics—in the form of its inversion paves the way for the later developments in Nietzsche's thought, which I will relate to his discussion of the Pre-Socratics. Before I draw out the continuity between his early and later writings, however, a pivotal problem must be remarked upon. Speaking through the mouth of his enigmatic dramatic persona, Nietzsche laments:

> At one time Zarathustra too cast his delusions beyond man, like all the afterworldly. The work of a suffering and tortured god, the world then seemed to me. A dream the world then seemed to me, and the fiction of a god: coloured smoke before the eyes of a dissatisfied deity. Good and evil and joy and pain and I and you—coloured smoke this seemed to me before creative eyes. The creator wanted to look away from himself; so he created the world.
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> Drunken joy it is for the sufferer to look away from his suffering and to lose himself. Drunken joy and loss of self the world once seemed to me. This world, eternally imperfect, the image of an eternal contradiction, an imperfect image—a drunken joy for its imperfect creator: thus the world once appeared to me. . . .

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[62] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, trans. Kate Sturg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 80.

> It was suffering and incapacity that created all afterworlds—this and that brief madness of bliss which is experienced only by those who suffer most deeply.[63]

The beginning of this passage "On the Afterworldly" appears to allude to Nietzsche's philosophical perspective in *Birth of Tragedy*, considering his emphasis on the "eternal contradiction," a central theme of this work. The artistic type described earlier, whose aesthetic vision inverts the Schopenhauerian picture of reality, to a degree remains caught in the throes of despair. This aesthetic inversion carries the residue of the afterworldly logic of metaphysical pessimism, and points *beyond* the body to the ecstasy of *eternal contradiction*: the imperfect image of phenomenal appearance that mirrors the primal unity.

Nietzsche acknowledges in his notebooks that *Birth of Tragedy* was, in part, the work of a young Romantic. He characterizes the Romantic artist as one who creates a world that he can escape into, thus being liberated from his suffering. "A Romantic is an artist made creative by his great displeasure with himself—who looks away, looks back from himself and the rest of his world."[64] The Romantic relies upon the illusion that he generates in order for suffering to be justifiable. Suffering is not justified *in itself*. Deprived of the aesthetic force of illusion, the artist remains in despair; life is again rendered meaningless. The realm of illusion serves a protective function as a supplement to reality. The aesthetic achievement that justifies existence serves to redeem a reality that would otherwise be too hard to bear. The artist is a god who must look away from himself, creating an eternally wounded world, a world in which he blissfuly loses himself through the transfiguration of his suffering. "Alas, my brothers, this god whom I created was man-made and madness, like all gods! Man he was, and only a poor specimen of man and ego:

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[63] Nietzsche, *Z*, "On the Afterworldly."

[64] Nietzsche, *Late Notebooks*, 80.

out of my own ashes and fire this ghost came to me, and verily, it did not come to me from beyond."[65] This otherworldly perspective follows from Nietzsche's early assertion, particularly evident in his work on the Pre-Socratics, that all philosophical knowledge is fundamentally anthropomorphic. Such a revelation leads one to a state of nihilism, resulting from the demystification of Schopenhauer's moral pessimism, wherein the knowledge that all truth is illusory does not dispel the *need* for it. The Romantic fails in his endeavour to create an aesthetic illusion that cures him of this need, because his suffering remains the reality that shatters this illusion. This conflict afflicts the artist whom Nietzsche describes and is reflected in his image of the world. His attempt to create a world (as a "man-made" god) is inspired by incurable despair, which continually threatens to impose creative impotence.

Insofar as Nietzsche, in the passage above, laments his position in *Birth of Tragedy*, we might conclude that no continuity remains between his early period and that of his *Zarathustra*. However, as in all of Nietzsche's work, there are many competing drives at play both in *Birth of Tragedy* and in his discussion of the Pre-Socratics, both in the intention of the author and the internal nuances of the text. In drawing out the continuity between Nietzsche's early and late writings, the perspectivism of his thinking is illuminated. The problem remarked upon above can be resolved by noting the difference between the anthropomorphism of human knowledge (a view that Nietzsche consistently confirms) and the *type* of knowledge that one embraces. One's inner disposition, although cultivated, is not arbitrarily chosen or invented, but manifests the dominance and subjugation of conflicting drives. Any particular ideal, world-view, or supposed 'truth' is anthropomorphic insofar as it is the expression of one dominant instinct and conceals

[65] Nietzsche, *Z*, "On the Afterworldly."

other, subjugated ones. “In so far as the word ‘knowledge’ has any meaning, the word is knowable; but it is *interpretable* otherwise, it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings. — ‘Perspectivism.’ It is our needs that interpret the world; our drives and their For and Against. Every drive is a kind of lust to rule; each one has its perspective that it would like all the other drives to accept as a norm.”[66] Knowledge about the world is perspectival in that it expresses a particular drive to which any given world-view conforms; it does not refer to the essence of existence, which is inseparable from appearance.

The will to power, as the plurality of competing drives, underlies all forms of knowledge. The ‘truth’ about being is perspectival. Being does not give itself over to be thought through in its essence. The desire to comprehend the ‘universal truth’ about reality simply expresses the dominion of a drive that wishes to consolidate reality according to *its perspective*, namely, the perspective that knowledge of being is attainable. This characterizes the “will to truth” that Zarathustra deems “the will to the thinkability of all beings.”[67] The thinkability of all beings means: interpreting all of existence according to the truth that *I*, the philosopher, envision. But this “I” is composed of a multiplicity of drives, each seeking dominion over the other. The “will to truth” is opposed, for instance, by a will to untruth, a desire for illusion, for ignorance. This latter will characterizes that of the artist, which has been denounced by philosophers for millennia from a *moral perspective*, privileging truth over illusion, that exults itself above all others. Philosophy is an expression of the will to power that seeks to consolidate reality; it must thereby *exclude* other wills. Philosophy does not *discover* the essence of being, but *creates* it.

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[66] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Random House, Inc., 1968), §481.

[67] Nietzsche, *Z*, “On Self-Overcoming.”

"Philosophy always creates the world in its own image; it cannot do otherwise. Philosophy is this tyrannical drive itself, the most spiritual will to power, to the 'creation of the world,' to the *causa prima*."[68] The distinctive *taste* of a philosopher communicates the dominant drive that characterizes his inner disposition, which dictates how the world appears before him.[69]

In considering the Pre-Socratic origins of philosophy, Nietzsche develops a theme that resonates throughout his later work, namely, the role of the sage as one who *legislates values*. Nietzsche writes in *Beyond Good and Evil*: "*Genuine philosophers, however, are commanders and legislators*: they say: '*thus* it *shall* be!' They alone determine the Whither and For What of man, and in so doing have at their disposal the preliminary labor of all philosophical labourers, all who have overcome the past. With a creative hand they reach for the future, and all that is and has been becomes a means for them, an instrument, a hammer. Their 'knowing' is *creating*, their creating is a legislation, their will to truth is—*will to power*. "[70] In the beginning of this passage, Nietzsche insists "that people should finally stop confounding philosophical labourers, and scientific men generally, with philosophers."[71] Genuine philosophy begins with a careful selection of knowledge, and in defining what is *worth* knowing cultivates a new way of positing the value of existence as a whole. This is what is meant by the philosopher's keen taste for reality, one which sanctifies the scientifically useless. The *use value* of philosophy consists in *excluding* knowledge that may be harmful to existence. Useful illusions that make life more

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[68] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Random House, 1966), §9.

[69] Nietzsche notes the meaning of the word "sage" for the ancient Greeks, which "is etymologically related to *sapio*, I taste, *sapiens*, he who tastes, *sisyphos*, the man of keenest taste. A sharp savouring and selecting, a meaningful discriminating, in other words, makes out the peculiar art of the philosopher, in the eyes of the people." *PTG*, 43.

[70] Nietzsche, *BGE*, §211.

[71] Ibid.

bearable, make it appear more profound, or that create for oneself a sense of certainty and security—such illusions may be embraced philosophically, while being of no value with regards to the scientific accumulation of knowledge. Nietzsche introduces this theme in his discussion of Thales. What scientific *use* remains for us today of Thales' intuition that all is water? None at all. Its value is to be found in the invention of something entirely new: a form of knowledge whose "greatness," in the case of Thales, resolves all of life into the unity of being.[72]

In contrast, the limitless lust for knowledge that characterizes natural science fails, on its own, to confer any meaning upon its findings — science alone cannot posit values. "Philosophy is distinguished from science by its selectivity and its discrimination of the unusual, the astonishing, the difficult and the divine, just as it is distinguished from intellectual cleverness by its emphasis on the useless. Science rushes headlong, without selectivity, without 'taste,' at whatever is knowable, in the blind desire to know all at any cost."[73] From the outset, Nietzsche's philosophy inaugurates a return to the self-enchantment of the sage who weighs the value of life, who himself legislates this value and in turn experiences himself as a "mirror of the world."[74] The philosopher sage produces the world that appears before him, which reflects his creative will. This theme, central to his discussion of the Pre-Socratics, resonates with Zarathustra's exhortation: "And you tell me, friends, that there is no disputing of taste and tasting? But all of life is a dispute over taste and tasting. Taste—that is at the same time weight and scales and weigher; and woe unto all the living that would live without disputes over weight and scales and

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[72] Nietzsche, *PTG*, 44.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

weighers!"[75] The art of tasting, of carefully selecting what is worthy of being known, loved, or cared for, is what gives life its meaning and significance. Only the exhausted type who no longer cares for life, who is no longer capable of discriminating between what has worth and what does not, slanders the art of tasting altogether. This in itself would express the taste for *nothingness*, for *tranquility*, for the dissipation of the will's antagonism. The disputes between the Pre-Socratics are among the most profound for Nietzsche, each of whom communicates a refined difference in taste.

These differences are played off against one another throughout Nietzsche's work. In his *Gay Science*, he returns to a critique of the logic of the Eleatics, which deceptively treats reason as an analogue of universal truth, assuming the correspondence between thinking and being. The Eleatic sage attempts to live in conformity with this truth, whose essence is unchanging and impersonal. However, Nietzsche argues that the ground of such logic is illogical. Common sense, sensory experience, the flux of material reality, are all denied because for this sage, driven by the "desire for tranquility, for sole possession, or for dominion," it is *useful* to do so.[76] The Eleatics "had to *deceive* themselves about their own state: they had to attribute to themselves, fictitiously, impersonality and changeless duration; they had to misapprehend the nature of the knower; they had to deny the role of the impulses in knowledge; and quite generally they had to conceive of reason as a completely free and spontaneous activity."[77] This deception is itself the outcome of a dominant impulse, namely, the will to truth that postulates the thinkability of all beings in accordance with immutable logic. This will to truth is a "life-preserving power" that relies upon

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[75] Nietzsche, *Z*, "On Those Who Are Sublime."

[76] Nietzsche, *GS*, §110.

[77] Ibid.

useful errors.[78] The knowledge of the Eleatics *inverts* the reality of change and material becoming in order to secure for themselves a feeling of tranquility, free from the chaos of the passions and the suffering of their affliction.

In contrast to the Eleatic indifference to suffering, Anixamander's Schopenhauerian philosophy expresses for Nietzsche the madness of the man of *ressentiment*, who is driven by the "*spirit of revenge*" that "has so far been the subject of man's best reflection; and where there was suffering, one always wanted punishment too."[79] This man preaches that:

> 'Everything passes away; therefore everything deserves to pass away. And this too is justice, this law of time that it must devour its children.' Thus preached madness.
>
> 'Things are ordered morally according to justice and punishment. Alas, where is redemption from the flux of things and from the punishment called existence?' Thus preached madness.
>
> 'Can there be redemption if there is eternal justice? Alas, the stone *It was* cannot be moved: all punishments must be eternal too.' Thus preached madness.[80]

The dominant instinct here is that of moral pessimism, which in understanding suffering as an injustice thereby gives it a meaning. When the anthropomorphic essence of such justice is demystified, suffering altogether loses its meaning. However, this confrontation with nihilism marks a decisive turn in Nietzsche's philosophy, which points towards the greatest affirmation of life expressed in the doctrine of eternal return.

> Whoever has endeavoured with some enigmatic longing, as I have, to think pessimism through to its depths. . . whoever has really, with an Asiatic and supra-Asiatic eye, looked into, down into the most world-denying of all possible ways of thinking—beyond good and evil and no longer, like the Buddha and Schopenhauer, under the spell and delusion of morality—may just thereby, without really meaning to do so, have opened his eyes to the opposite ideal: the ideal of the most high-spirited, alive, and world-affirming human being who has not only come to terms and learned to get along with whatever was and

[78] Ibid.

[79] Nietzsche, Z, "On Redemption."

[80] Ibid.

> what is, but who wants to have *what was and is* repeated into all eternity, shouting insatiably *da capo*.[81]

The Romantic artist who affirms the world as an aesthetic phenomenon is similarly confronted with the nihilism induced by his suffering, which, in being deprived of any meaning, forces him to flee into the afterworldly delusion of a self-made god in the form of an aesthetic illusion. The Romantic justifies his suffering through the aesthetic creation of a world that redeems reality. Like the moral pessimist, he cannot affirm and embrace suffering that is not justified. In this sense his vision of the world remains nihilistic. He replaces the moral interpretation of existence with an aesthetic one, without thereby coming to terms with his suffering. While this suffering may at times taint Nietzsche's early portrait of Heraclitus the aesthete, who sinks into a slumber and dreams of immortality, the fundamental ground of Heraclitus's philosophy—containing the germs of eternal recurrence—nonetheless remains compelling for Nietzsche after he has matured beyond the youthful sensibilities of the Romantic artist he later laments.

Nietzsche's concept of the will to power serves to illuminate the existential struggle with nihilism as well as its overcoming. His doctrine of eternal recurrence stands as a signpost to such an overcoming. In order to live according to this doctrine, one must embrace the suffering that life entails *unconditionally*, without the need for any justification beyond the joy of living itself. Suffering is simply a condition of life, insofar as pain necessarily accompanies growth, regeneration, and birth. The pessimist, the theoretical man, and the Romantic aesthete all seek to justify suffering beyond the scope of its sheer necessity. Each must confer upon it a meaning in prescribing a particular way of overcoming it, but for Nietzsche suffering is not something to be overcome. The pessimist understands suffering within the framework of cosmic justice and

[81] Nietzsche, *BGE*, §56.

prescribes the practise of ascetic self-denial; the theoretical man understands suffering to be the result of ignorance, which may be dispelled in the attainment of rational knowledge; the aesthete understands that suffering is meaningless, so he creates an illusory realm that redeems reality without thereby ceasing to *contradict it*. The unbearable meaninglessness of suffering forever contradicts the ideal that is set up to justify it. Nihilism is characterized by the need for such an ideal, which denies life as a process of self-overcoming, of growth and creative evolution. The overcoming of nihilism entails the repudiation of all decadent ideals that have been set up by humanity so far, ideals that have served to *justify* existence. Such an overcoming therefore entails the self-overcoming of humanity.

While Nietzsche may lament the hints of the "afterworldly" in *Birth of Tragedy*, he nonetheless looks back at this work in *Ecce Homo* with great admiration, for "only a few formulas are tainted with the cadaverous fragrance of Schopenhauer."[82] He celebrates in it the inauguration of the Dionysian as a "philosophical pathos," no sign of which he finds anywhere else *except* in the case of Heraclitus.[83] "The affirmation of passing away *and destruction* that is crucial for a Dionysian philosophy, saying yes to opposition and war, *becoming* along with a radical rejection of the very concept of 'being'— all these are more closely related to me than anything else people have thought so far."[84] If we take the essential motif of Zarathustra's fire as an example, many parallels can be drawn between this and Nietzsche's early portrait of Heraclitus, whose Dionysian philosophy posits fire as the primal element of cosmic becoming.

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[82] Nietzsche, *EH*, "The Birth of Tragedy," §1.

[83] Ibid., §3.

[84] Ibid.

How does the image of Zarathustra's fire, as a Heraclitean symbol, provide a link between the will to power and eternal recurrence? What does this have to do with Nietzsche's nauseating despair in gazing back at his early ecstatic agony, that of the Romantic artist who suffers from afterworldly delusions? In the aforementioned passage, Nietzsche describes how Zarathustra *overcame himself*: "I overcame myself, the sufferer; I carried my own ashes to the mountains; I invented a brighter flame for myself."[85] Zarathustra's fire is reborn from the ashes of his suffering, it is kindled again upon ascending to the height of his mountaintop. The self-regenerating and transformative power of fire is repeatedly emphasized throughout the work: "You must wish to consume yourself in your own flame: how could you wish to become anew unless you had first become ashes!"[86] Out of this fire comes Zarathustra's teaching of eternal recurrence. "And if a man goes through fire for his doctrine—what does that prove? Verily, it is more if your doctrine comes out of your own fire."[87] As a creator, Zarathustra speaks of a new life that erupts from himself: "I live in my own light; I drink back into myself the flames that break out of me."[88] In this case, the newly ignited fire that erupts from within the creator, his light shining forth as a gift to the world, does not give rise to that man-made god that it did earlier, as the result of afterworldly delusions. Zarathustra heralds a new conception of life that expresses the ascendency of life-affirming, rather than life-denying, instincts.

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[85] Nietzsche, Z, "On the Afterworldly."

[86] Nietzsche, Z, "On the Way of the Creator."

[87] Nietzsche, *Z*, "On Priests."

[88] Nietzsche, *Z*, "The Night Song."

While the motif of Zarathustra's fire echoes Prometheus's defiant theft from the gods, the *self-regenerating* character of Zarathustra's fire is more profoundly Heraclitean.[89] This motif demonstrates a continuity in Nietzsche's writings that averts the nihilistic traces of any "afterworldly" perspective. What is nihilistic about this perspective is its denial of suffering in setting up an ideal that justifies it, which results in a kind of creative impotence insofar as suffering is fundamental to life's creative process. Such a perspective is haunted by the despair of one who has killed one god and made himself into another, stealing fire from the heavens, while remaining unable to create new values that are remotely convincing or life affirming. This fire then becomes ashes: the memory of flame; only out of ashes can it be reborn anew.

The creation of new values marks the overcoming of nihilism and the affirmation of life. Nietzsche declares life itself to be a process of self-overcoming, which finds its expression in the Dionysian will of the tragic philosopher: "'Behold,' [life] said, 'I am *that which must always overcome itself*."[90] This will is characterized by a creative excess that seeks to discharge its power and squander its riches. At the end of *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche emphasizes that his conception of Dionysian abundance is already to be found, in its germinal form, in *Birth of Tragedy*. His philosophy comes full circle, ending where it began: "And with this I come back to the place that once served as my point of departure — the '*Birth of Tragedy*' was my first revaluation of all values: and now I am back on that soil where my wants, my *abilities* grow—I, the last disciple of the philosopher Dionysus,—I, the teacher of eternal return."[91] Nietzsche's first

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[89] While Robert Gooding-Williams emphasizes this Promethean theme, I focus on the importance of Heraclitus, which tends to be ignored by scholars. Robert Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

[90] Nietzsche, *Z*, "On Self-Overcoming."

[91] Nietzsche, *TI*, "What I Owe the Ancients," §5.

revaluation of values, as I have outlined, inverts Schopenhauer's metaphysics through an aesthetic vision of reality and a revaluing of appearance. This revaluation creates a *new need* and a *new suffering*; the Dionysian will to power, as the principle of life, must continually overcome itself. Essential to the Dionysian joy of the tragic philosopher is the eternal *strife* of Heraclitus's recurring fire—-the embodiment of the *logos*—which consumes itself endlessly. Zarathustra's doctrine of eternal return, his final teaching and last word, is deeply Heraclitean.

One may marvel at the idea that Nietzsche already had a presentiment of this artistic doppelgänger effect from the beginning of his writing career, when he notes in his *Tragic Age of the Greeks* the juxtaposition between the sages of the Orient and the ancient Greeks, placing "Zoroaster next to Heraclitus."[92] This juxtaposition, from a merely historical point of view, is of little interest to Nietzsche. While his Zarathustra revalues the primeval Zoroastrian opposition between good and evil, truth and lie, there remains a more profound significance hinted at in this passing remark in light of his later work—the connection between Zarathustra and Heraclitus. Here the Dionysian coupling of East and West resounds dramatically in Nietzsche's art, which circles back upon itself, in the end returning to its beginning.

III. CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have analyzed one facet of the philosophical continuity of Nietzsche's work, which diagnoses the illness of nihilism in the pessimism of Anaximander and Schopenhauer, in the idealism of Parmenides and the Eleatics, as well as in the aesthetic sensibilities of the Romantic artist. Nietzsche discovers a cure for this disease in the Dionysian pathos of the tragic philosopher. Zarathustra's doctrine of eternal recurrence, which I argue is

[92] Nietzsche, *PTG*, 29.

best understood within the context of Heraclitus's philosophy, affirms the creative strife of the will to power, the destructive force of which is found to be *transformative* rather than life-denying. The Heraclitean strife of creation and destruction is embodied in Zarathustra's fire, out of which his doctrine of eternal recurrence is born. In signifying the overcoming of nihilism—the self-overcoming inherent in life itself, which is a process of becoming—this doctrine marks the end of human history hitherto as well as a new beginning, pregnant with the future.

CHAPTER 2

MEMORY AND MELANCHOLY

> *Willing liberates; but what is it that puts even the liberator himself in fetters? 'It was' — that is the name of the will's gnashing of teeth and most secret melancholy. Powerless against what has been done, he is an angry spectator of all that is past. The will cannot will backwards; and that he cannot break time and time's covetousness, that is the will's loneliest melancholy.*[93]

This chapter takes up Nietzsche's critique of Judeo-Christian morality, which culminates in his idea of the death of God. While Heidegger equates the history of nihilism with that of Western metaphysics, this is only one half of its story—-the more readily digestible half. For Heidegger, the death of God, as a metaphysical event, signifies the debasement of the antithesis between the suprasensory and sensory realms, a debasement of the essence of both that results in their meaninglessness, their lack of sense. Humanity, in assigning Being a value—the highest value—at once subjects Being to its devaluation. The devaluation of Being is the story of nihilism: Nothing, nullity, befalls Being, whose unthought essence consequently withdraws from thought.[94]

Heidegger contends that Nietzsche's overturning of the Western metaphysical tradition is inextricable from it and remains fundamentally nihilistic. According to Heidegger, Nietzsche fails to grasp the *essence* of nihilism, which can only be understood in relation to the idea of Being that has been eclipsed by metaphysics. However, Heidegger's metaphysical analysis tends to obscure the psychological significance of Nietzsche's thought, which I address in the context

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[93] Nietzsche, *Z*, "On Redemption."

[94] Martin Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche," *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

of Deleuze's treatment of Nietzsche. Nietzsche's revaluation of Judeo-Christian morality concerns the nihilistic depths of our shared human psychology.

While Heidegger distinguishes incomplete and complete nihilism—the latter referring to Nietzsche's own philosophy—Deleuze identifies three phases of nihilism: negative, reactive, and passive. I argue that the first two, being the focus of this chapter, are in varying degrees characterized by the pathology of melancholy, rooted in *ressentiment*. I summarize Deleuze's comparison between Nietzsche and Freud on the relationship between consciousness and the unconscious, and incorporate Freud's psychoanalysis of melancholy to illuminate its pathological nuances. In the second section of this chapter, I discuss the limits of Freudian psychology, especially in relation to Nietzsche's analysis of the problem of nihilism.

The melancholic disposition that characterizes negative nihilism relates to the inability to bear the passing of time, which endlessly consumes mortal life. The experience of the present is weighed with memory, for the faculty of forgetting, whose restorative power is decisive for the psychic health of the human body, is deprived of its active force. All life sinks into the irreversibility of the past, the 'it was' of history, which shackles the will to what no longer is. The world-weary wisdom of Ecclesiastes gives voice to this age old phenomenon: 'All is vanity.' Melancholy results from the impotence of the will, deprived of its ability to act creatively in the world.

Schopenhauer's philosophy marks the culmination of negative nihilism and its transformation into reactive nihilism. His morality of guilt, pity, and asceticism expresses the denial of worldly life under the influence of an ascetic ideal. This ideal produces its own negation in reactive nihilism, where the sanctity of the suprasensory realm is debased, only to be

replaced with humanist, enlightenment values. Nietzsche's critique of reactive nihilism attacks the cherished concepts of the ego, free will, and causality, refuting their moral and metaphysical ground. He thereby repudiates moral responsibility. The abyssal chaos of the cosmos is unveiled, an abyss that threatens the core of human identity, which hitherto had been defined in relation to the ego and the causal efficacy of the will. While Schopenhauer advocates the denial of the individual will, the reactive man of *ressentiment* preserves the will in a state of reactivity. "The Ugliest Man," described in *Zarathustra* as the murderer of God, represents the disavowed bad conscience of reactive nihilism. He is the naked embodiment of *ressentiment* and signifies the unconscious depravity of the reactive type.

In conclusion, passive nihilism—embodied in the life and death of Jesus—annuls the guilt characteristic of negative nihilism and the *ressentiment* of reactive nihilism. Passive nihilism essentially breaks with the whole of Judeo-Christian morality as Nietzsche understands it. This chapter sets up the theme of the following one, which concerns Nietzsche's envisioned overcoming of nihilism, as well as the dispute surrounding Deleuze's controversial claim that such an overcoming is possible.

I. The Will to Nothingness

The pessimism that Nietzsche locates early on in the philosophy of Anaximander and which culminates in Schopenhauer, expresses the spirit of revenge, or *ressentiment*, prior to its sublimation into reactive nihilism. In my previous chapter, I outlined the consequences of Schopenhauer's moral pessimism for metaphysics. According to this view, the passage of time is experienced as a burden and punishment. Through a Buddhistic resignation of the will, the ascetic type seeks release from bodily suffering, transcending earthly existence through the

practise of self-denial. Nietzsche diagnoses asceticism as a symptom of nihilism, characterized by a physiological decline in health, a loss of vigour and vitality, and a repressed hostility against life.

For Schopenhauer, existence is so miserable that communal pity provides the best solace for human beings, given the universal fact of suffering as it befalls us all. "The most effective consolation in every misfortune and every affliction is to observe others who are more unfortunate than we: and everyone can do this."[95] Such solace is a symptom of interior rot, a narcotizing passion that conceals the longing for death, for nothingness, with a feeling of sympathy for all that is on its way to the grave. Nietzsche identifies pity as a symptom of cultural decadence. He calls it "the *practise* of nihilism." Pity *preserves* the sickness of all that is passing away by keeping alive those dispossessed of vitality. It *serves* the spirit of revenge insofar as the sick and the suffering make life itself appear worthless. "Pity makes suffering contagious. . . . [It] crosses the law of development, which is the law of *selection*. It preserves what is ripe for destruction; it defends those who have been disinherited and condemned by life; and by the abundance of failures of all kinds which it keeps alive, it gives life itself a gloomy and questionable aspect."[96] Pity is accompanied by a melancholic disposition; it depresses rather than revitalizes, casting an air of gloom over existence as a whole. Melancholy results from the will's inability to act creatively and manifests the pain of pity that only compounds human suffering.

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[95] Schopenhauer, *Suffering of the World*, §3.

[96] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), §7.

The melancholy of the will motivates the appeal of ascetic ideals, the most holy of the "*decadence-values*" that negate life.[97] The ideal praised by Schopenhauer is posited by the melancholic type, overwhelmed with pity, as a moral criterion of the highest value. Nietzsche criticizes the ascetic denial of the will, which nonetheless remains a form of willing: a will to nothingness.[98] As an instinct, pity serves precisely this will: "pity persuades men to *nothingness!* Of course, one does not say 'nothingness' but 'beyond' or 'God,' or '*true* life' or Nirvana, salvation, blessedness." Schopenhauer devalues the world of appearance, or representation, by positing the Will as its supersensible substratum. Through the denial of one's sensible, phenomenal will, one may be liberated from the body in a return to primordial nothingness. His ascetic idealism communicates contempt for the body, endorsing an otherworldly beyond, which "appears much less innocent as soon as we realize which tendency it is that here shrouds itself in sublime words: *hostility against life*." Such asceticism masks the corruption of the body with an air of moral virtue, a body that is no longer capable of creating anything new and therefore wishes to extinguish itself. "Schopenhauer was consistent enough: pity negates life and renders it *more deserving of negation*. . . . [He] was hostile to life; therefore pity became a virtue for him."[99] The body, weighed down by the heaviness of melancholy, desires its own death. In order to diagnose this illness, this contempt for life, we must have a proper understanding of the will and its significance for the body.

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[97] Ibid., §6.

[98] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufman and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1989), Essay 3, §28.

[99] Nietzsche, *AC*, §7.

Deleuze defines the body, for Nietzsche, as a plurality of forces, distinguishing between those that are active and reactive. The difference between these forces constitutes a bodily hierarchy; the latter are servile, being dominated by the former. Dominant, active forces are unconscious stimulants for life, creative instincts or drives that increase the vitality of an organism. Consciousness, as the outgrowth of active forces, "merely expresses the relation of certain reactive forces to the active forces which dominate them."[100] Adaptation and preservation, for instance, are reactive functions that serve higher vital impulses that expand rather than merely conserve bodily power. Reactive forces are utilitarian, serving a purpose that consciousness grasps, understanding itself as the mechanism through which they are enacted.

The relation between active and reactive forces that structures consciousness nonetheless remains unconscious. We can speak of reactive forces as utilitarian only from the limited perspective of consciousness, which fails to understand their relation to active forces that elude conscious purpose. Consciousness appropriates forces reactively, designating their purpose. The inevitable danger, Deleuze notes, is that "consciousness sees the organism from its own point of view and understands it in its own way; that is to say, reactively. What happens is that science [namely, Darwin's theory of natural selection] follows the paths of consciousness, relying entirely on *other* reactive forces; the organism is always seen from the petty side, from the side of its reactions."[101] Science follows the paths of consciousness in being constricted by the utilitarian logic of means and ends, cause and effect. It is from this reactive point of view, which conceives of an autonomous, conscious ego, that the will is understood to act with intention. This

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[100] Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 41.

[101] Ibid.

idea of the will is merely a residue of impulsive forces. What utilitarian science understands as thinking and willing in this way conceals a complex, unconscious bodily process. As Zarathustra indicates: "Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, there stands a mighty ruler, an unknown sage — whose name is self. In your body he dwells; he is your body. . . . Your self laughs at your ego and its bold leaps. 'What are these leaps and flights of thought to me?' it says to itself. 'A detour to my end. I am the leading strings of the ego and the prompter of its concepts.'"[102] The ego, as the self-representation of consciousness, prides itself as the master of the body when it is merely the phantasm of the self, that is, of the body.

Nietzsche criticizes the concepts of free will, intentionality, and causality as a bundle of illusions formed by the reactive consciousness of the ego, which misinterprets the nature of the body. His critique of free will in *Beyond Good and Evil* §19 attacks this concept as a popular moral prejudice concealed under metaphysical pretensions. He argues that this reactive conception of willing is an illusion derived from consciousness, which identifies with the ego as a causal agency. Willing involves a "plurality of sensations," namely those of attraction and repulsion, the oscillation between which the body experiences as movement.[103] Along with these bodily sensations is always a directing thought, as the intention of an act. Willing cannot be separated from thinking, for its activity exists in the mind as much as it is felt being carried out by the body. The freedom experienced in willing presupposes a mental *interpretation* of bodily sensations.

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[102] Nietzsche, *Z*, "On the Despisers of the Body."

[103] Nietzsche, *BGE*, §19.

What we interpret as freedom is for Nietzsche merely the pleasurable *affect* that accompanies the giving of a command to one who obeys it. When it comes to an individual who wills an action, the one who commands and the one who obeys are two aspects of the same self. The part that obeys within the subject feels a resistance to the commanding part, the constraint of submitting to it. However, illusion arises when the subject identifies with the commanding part alone as the ego, which is felt to be wholly responsible for an action and takes pleasure in its accomplishment. This illusion conceals the pain of obeying, and hence the *duality* inherent in all willing, which is never simply commanded by the ego as a singular entity but always includes the subordination of one part of the self to another. The ego is subordinate to forces that it cannot comprehend. An action is thus interpreted to be an effect of the will, associated with the ego as its cause, and this illusion forms the basis of one's identity as a free agent.

For Nietzsche, willing consists of a hierarchy of instincts and is accompanied by a plurality of sensations, the complex bodily process of which we reduce to the simple concept of the ego as a causal agency, as if an act necessarily follows as a consequence of the will. This concept of the "I" is the illusory *effect* of an action following its success, erroneously identified as the cause, as the sovereign willing subject. "*L'effet c'est moi*: what happens here is what happens in every well-constructed and happy commonwealth; namely, the governing class identifies itself with the successes of the commonwealth. In all willing it is absolutely a question of commanding and obeying, on the basis . . . of a social structure composed of many 'souls.'"[104] In reality, the success of an action relies upon a manifold of instincts that together we call "will," and which consciousness experiences as a heightened sense of power.

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[104] Ibid.

The feeling of power, which is pleasurable, results from the overcoming of resistance, or pain. This pleasure/pain dynamic constitutes willing only as a faculty of desire, unfree and impelled by the need one feels in response to a *lack* that must be satiated. Apart from this hedonistic aspect of willing, governed by utilitarian logic, exists the Dionysian joy of creative affirmation. Such joy *actively* expresses the overwhelming excess of life that says Yes to itself as will to power. While the former experience of willing—characterized by reactive forces—concerns self-preservation and self-enhancement, the latter experience of willing—characterized by active forces—involves an overabundant squandering of power. "Physiologists should think before putting down the instinct of self-preservation as the cardinal instinct of an organic being. A living thing seeks above all to *discharge* its strength — life itself is *will to power*; self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent *results*."[105] The will is here identified with the life-principle of will to power, which is not concerned with mere self-preservation and utilitarian calculation, but with a self-expenditure that enjoys destruction as a consequence of the will's creative excess, a voluptuousness that is overpowering.

It is from the perspective of the will to power, as the life-principle, that Nietzsche evaluates existence. This evaluation opposes the interpretation of the human subject as morally responsible for its actions. If the will is free, then every act is understood to follow from the ego as its cause, which wills with *intention* and conceives of a goal. Hannah Arendt, in her essay on Nietzsche and the *repudiation of the will*, concisely summarizes Nietzsche's critique of the will and its intentionality in *The Will to Power* §666:

> If we can no longer ascribe "the value of an action . . . to the *intention*, the purpose for the sake of which one has acted or lived . . . [if] the absence of intention and purpose in events comes more and more to the foreground of consciousness," the conclusion seems inevitable that "Nothing has any meaning," for "this melancholy sentence means 'All

[105] Ibid., §13.

> meaning lies in intention, and if intention is altogether lacking, then meaning is altogether lacking too.'" Hence: "Why could 'a purpose' not be an epiphenomenon in the series of changes of effective forces that bring forth purposive action — a pale image in our consciousness . . . a symptom of occurrences, *not* their cause?— But with this we have criticized *will itself*: is it not an illusion to take for a cause that which rises to consciousness as an act of the will?"[106]

The will, interpreted as a causal agency, is an idea formed by consciousness serving to make human action comprehensible and meaningful. This idea of the will is a psychological effect of action that is taken to be its cause. The will is understood to be the cause of an action when it is merely a concept that serves as a means of interpreting action. The impulsive forces that bring about action are interpreted by consciousness after the fact, which retroactively *inverts* the instinctual process of the body in ascribing an intention to it when none exists. The will is thus the phantom reflection of an action existing solely within the mind, a mere appearance that gives meaning to impulsive forces, designating their 'goal.' The notion of a free willing, moral subject is thus reduced to a mental contrivance, believed in because it gives life a sense of purpose, not to mention its utility as a tool for social control and domination.

It is in light of the aimlessness of existence, its lack of any goal or purpose, that the thought of eternal recurrence arises. The backward glance of consciousness projects intentions into all past actions and condemns human beings to the irreversibility of time, forever burdened by the weight of history. This paralyzes the will and our ability to dwell within the present, for that "the will cannot will backwards; and that [it] cannot break time and time's covetousness, that is the will's loneliest melancholy."[107] In denying the will's responsibility for its actions, liberating humans from the vengeance of the past and our inability to undo what has been done, the will is thereby reconciled with time and its continual passing. It is then free to anticipate the

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[106] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: Willing* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 168.

[107] Nietzsche, *Z*, "On Redemption."

future in what Arendt calls the "I-can," referring to Nietzsche's notion of *amor fati*, which says Yes to life as its unconditional affirmation.[108] '"Eternal Recurrence' is the term for this final redeeming thought inasmuch as it proclaims the '*Innocence* of all Becoming' and with that its inherent aimlessness and purposelessness, its freedom from guilt and responsibility."[109] If the movement of time is a process of Becoming, each moment of which, like a circle, encompasses the plurality of the past, present, and future, then to embrace fate is to wholly affirm the whole of existence: that which recurs eternally.

While *amor fati* expresses the dominion of active forces that stimulate life, for Deleuze it is the triumph of reactive forces over active ones which characterizes *ressentiment*. Reactions, in failing to be acted, become paralyzed as feelings. The man of *ressentiment* internalizes what befalls him without enacting his felt response to it. "If we ask what the man of ressentiment is, we must not forget this principle: he does not re-act. And the word ressentiment gives a definite clue: reaction ceases to be acted in order to become something felt (senti). Reactive forces prevail over active forces because they escape their action."[110] From this reactive standpoint every action is interpreted according to a specific intention, one that is projected by consciousness. Rather than actively responding to an action, the man of *ressentiment* passively judges the action according to the way it makes him feel. Incapable of acting his reactions, of expressing his feelings instinctually, the man of *ressentiment* judges action from the reactive point of view of consciousness, as I shall now explain.

Deleuze compares Nietzsche's analysis of the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious with that of Freud. In a healthy constitution, consciousness is the faculty of

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[108] Arendt, *LM: Willing*, 263.

[109] Ibid., 170.

[110] Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 111.

perception that receives impressions of external stimuli without forming any memory of these excitations. Memory is stored in the unconscious, as the "lasting trace" of a "momentary excitation."[111] In this way the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious is suited to action, orienting the subject within the present moment and the influx of excitations. For Nietzsche, the unconscious conceived of in this way is still reactive, insofar as it passively stores the impressions received by consciousness. This must be distinguished from the unconscious drives that actively dominate consciousness.

Nietzsche defines forgetfulness as a "positive faculty of repression," a renewing and invigorating faculty integral to the proper functioning of consciousness.[112] It is the active faculty of forgetting that situates the subject in the present, as memory is properly stored in the unconscious. Consciousness is then free to act out its reactions. When reactive forces triumph over active ones, the healthy relationship between the conscious and the unconscious, what Deleuze calls the "two systems within the reactive apparatus," is damaged.[113] The faculty of forgetting is thereby deprived of its active force, and the unconscious mnemonic traces invade consciousness. This negatively impacts the proper functioning of active forces, which "*are separated from what they can do*."[114] The faculty of forgetting is indispensable to the healthy functioning of consciousness and its capacity to respond to external excitations without being hindered by the unconscious traces of past impressions. Forgetfulness invigorates consciousness by actively suppressing memory. In this way, forgetfulness promotes the health of an organism,

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[111] Ibid., 112.

[112] Nietzsche, *GM*, Essay 2, §1.

[113] Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 112.

[114] Ibid., 114.

and functions as the essential link between consciousness and the unconscious—the two systems forming the reactive apparatus. When this apparatus is no longer subordinate to other active forces, and the faculty of forgetfulness is impaired, all relations of force become reactive. Consciousness, infused with memory, no longer reacts to excitations, but invests itself in their *traces*. "Whatever the force of the excitation which is received, whatever the total force of the subject itself, the man of *ressentiment* only uses the latter to invest the trace of the former, so that he is incapable of acting and even of reacting to the excitation."[115] Unable to react to excitations, the man of *ressentiment* experiences everything painfully, for all that remains to be invested in are the traces of impressions. The present, rather than being experienced in the moment, is filtered through the reactive impressions of the past.

In the second essay of his *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche contrasts the positive power of forgetfulness with the promise-making faculty, which the sovereign individual possesses in feeling responsible for the future. He regards the cultivation over the course of millennia of the sovereign individual capable of making promises as an as yet unresolved problem. "To breed an animal with the right to make promises—is not this the paradoxical task that nature has set itself in the case of man? Is it not the real problem regarding man?"[116] The danger of breeding an animal capable of making promises—the danger facing human beings—is the damage it does to the faculty of forgetfulness and the negative impact this has on consciousness. The cultivation of the human conscience is the result of a long, cruel history of punishment: "there was nothing more fearful and uncanny in the whole prehistory of man than his mnemotechnics: 'If something is to stay in the memory it must be burned in: only that which never ceases to hurt stays in the

[115] Ibid, 115.

[116] Nietzsche, *GM*, Essay 2, §1.

memory.'"[117] While this drawn-out process of psychological torture finally gives birth to the sovereign individual, capable of making promises and gifted with a lofty moral conscience, this mnemotechnics also damages the faculty of forgetfulness, by instilling a sense of guilt that makes one unable to let go of the past due to the painful burden of moral responsibility.

This damaged power of forgetfulness leads to the sickness of *ressentiment*, the thirst for revenge that overwhelms the man whose constant sense of having been injured leads him to seek out those who are guilty for having injured him, lusting after their punishment. This desire for revenge is internalized and turned against the self. The psychic self-violation of *bad conscience* turns one's experience of time itself into that of an enduring punishment—the melancholy of the will forever burdened by the weight of the past—as if a maniacal god had placed one upon this earth for the sole purpose of watching one suffer.[118] In order for human action to become calculable, for human beings to become dependable, their primal animal instincts had to undergo this merciless domestication. Only with bitter irony can we deem the product of this experiment —the sovereign individual—*free*. Paul S. Loeb insightfully observes:

> We should therefore notice Nietzsche's irony when he emphasizes the power and freedom of the sovereign individual at the start of the second essay. For insofar as this power and freedom depend upon the sovereign individual's highly developed faculty of memory, they are in fact sharply curtailed. . . . Indeed, because the sovereign individual's mnemonic will has itself been determined by a past that is fixed and gone forever, this will does not actually ordain the future in advance after all. So the sovereign individual's power over time turns out to be illusory.[119]

The irreversibility of the past, as a millstone that finally sinks the sovereign individual under the weight of melancholy, enslaves the will to the immutable "it was" of history. It is the faculty of

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[117] Ibid., §3.

[118] Ibid., §11.

[119] Loeb, *DNZ*, 219.

forgetfulness, the "capacity to feel *unhistorically*," that can liberate the will from *ressentiment* and invigorate its creative capacity to introduce newness into the world.[120]

Deleuze's portrait of the man of *ressentiment*, possessed by the spirit of revenge, coincides with Freud's analysis of melancholy. This man is fundamentally incapable of experiencing love, beauty, goodness, and reverence, for these all induce the nausea of disgust. His hypersensitivity leads him to suffer from life in whatever form it takes; life is a disease that he wishes to be cured of. The plasticity of consciousness is hardened by the invasive memory of trace impressions, which are endlessly ruminated upon. "The memory of traces is itself full of hatred. Hatred and revenge are hidden even in the most tender and most loving memories. The ruminants of memory disguise this hatred by a subtle operation which consists in reproaching themselves with everything with which, in fact, they reproach the being whose memory they pretend to cherish."[121] This description of *ressentiment* implicitly mirrors Freud's description of the melancholic. Freud's diagnosis of the melancholic's peculiar pathology illuminates Nietzsche's own struggle with this illness, a symptom of the nihilism he fiercely combats. The context of Freud's analysis differs from Nietzsche's, who treats melancholy in the broader context of Western nihilism. Freud narrates the experience of melancholy using the web of the analysand's interpersonal relationships to reveal the unconscious cause of the illness. Despite this difference, it is fruitful to compare his 1917 essay on *Mourning and Melancholia* with the aforementioned account of *ressentiment*.

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[120] Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 62.

[121] Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 117.

In this essay, Freud distinguishes mourning, as a natural, healthy response to the loss of a loved object, from melancholy, as pathological grief. In mourning the subject slowly but surely withdraws a libidinal attachment to the lost object, experiencing a period of depression that ends with a successful return to life and the ability to form new loves. For the melancholic, what exactly has been lost remains unknown; the cause of this condition is unconscious. The subject denigrates himself, lacking any sense of self-worth, and experiences a masochistic self-torture: a pain that is at once pleasurable and unbearable. The melancholic's ego is diseased with an uncompromising, irrational conscience—what Nietzsche calls *bad conscience*, that is, the desire for revenge *internalized*.

Freud theorizes that instead of allowing the lost object to die, as the mourning subject must do by giving up a libidinal cathexis, the melancholic unconsciously identifies with this object, which is internalized as part of the ego. "Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object. In this way an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss and the conflict between the ego and the loved person into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification."[122] The special agency that takes the ego as the object of its critical judgement is the conscience, or super-ego. The super-ego is the unconscious agency that *takes vengeance* upon the ego, which is denigrated and seeks to extinguish itself along with the lost object with which it is fused.

The ego's identification with the lost object implies that the original object-choice was formed on a "narcissistic basis." The libidinal cathexis regresses to the narcissistic "oral phase,"

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[122] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," *Collected Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 11, On Metapsychology*, trans. Angela Richards (New York: Penguin, 1991), 258.

wherein the infant depended upon the mother's breast as its source of nourishment, and which it devoured as an extension of itself.[123] For Freud, self-love is one of two primal human instincts: *eros*, the libidinal instinct of self-preservation and procreation, and *thanatos*, the hostile death instinct tending towards violence and destruction. The melancholic's libidinal instinct of self-love is invested in the lost object, which it preserves at the cost of subjecting itself to the violence of the death drive. A morbid, pathological narcissism substitutes for the erotic cathexis, wherein the subject's ego is devoured by the superego, the agency that *judges* and *condemns* the ego. Narcissism, as an instinct of self-preservation, is turned against itself. Metaphorically speaking, the mother's life-giving breast, which once nurtured the child in infancy, and is the original object-choice and the basis of all narcissistic attachments, now produces black bile.

A key feature of the melancholic is his ambivalence towards the lost object, feeling both love and contempt towards it. This explains the melancholic's morbid self-denigration. The conscience, or super-ego, takes vengeance on the object that is now identified with the subject's ego—risking its annihilation. The unconscious substitution of the original erotic cathexis with a regression to narcissism, developed in the oral phase, leads the subject to devour his own ego as he once devoured the mother's breast. The melancholic's *preservation* of the lost object in fact leads to his own narcissistic self-destruction. He no longer wishes to live, lamenting like Ovid's Narcissus: "Oh, I am tortured by a strange desire unknown to me before, for I would fain put off this mortal form; which means I wish the object of my love away. Grief saps my strength, the sands of life are run, and in my early youth I am cut off; but death is not my bane — it ends my woe — I would not death for that this is my love, as two united in a single soul would die as

[123] Ibid.

one."[124] Freud's analysis of the melancholic indirectly serves as a theoretical commentary on this ancient Greek myth. Narcissus's infatuation embodies the melancholic's tragic self-contradiction between *eros* and *thanatos*. The instinct of self-preservation, grounded in self-love, is in Narcissus turned against itself. In his case, self-love leads to self-annihilation, in effect because he unconsciously resents his own beauty, powerless to possess the object of his desire.

The melancholic cannot bear time and its passing away because, in light of its irreversibility, he desires its impossible reversal: to possess that which is lost to him, that which, like Narcissus's reflection, forever slips through his fingers. His consciousness, weighed down with memory, can only invest in the past that is preserved in himself, a pale reflection of a present that can no longer be inhabited. The shadow of loss that "falls upon the ego" follows him as a mirror of the past that catches the present only as something dead. Narcissus's desire to unite with the object of his fixation can only result in death, for he has become unreal to himself: a phantasmal image in a pool of despair. For the melancholic, beauty, as with love, is only found in that which eludes possession. For him, love remains an illusion, an obsession with his own image, the mirrored self-projection of an unfulfillable desire. From whence springs this unnatural desire? And what sort of psychic death does this infatuation with bodily *self-contradiction* lead to? My analysis of Nietzsche's response to these questions will be taken up in the following section.

II. The Death of God

The melancholy of the will experienced by the man of *ressentiment*, whose inability to affirm life is sublimated into its negation, bestows a meaning upon existence that is

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[124] Ovid, "Narcissus Laments," *Metamorphoses: Book 3*, trans. Brookes More (Boston: Cornhill Publishing, 1922).

fundamentally nihilistic. As noted earlier, the will to nothingness remains a form of willing, for "man would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will."[125] This meaning is found in an ascetic ideal that values pity as a virtue and assigns guilt to all who suffer. These depressive affects, sanctified by the moral pessimism of Schopenhauer, serve to negate the value of earthly existence while avoiding a suicidal nihilism. Deleuze characterizes such pessimism, which espouses the decadence-values of the ascetic type, as negative nihilism. By extension, reactive nihilism refers to the dissolution of higher values themselves, signified by the death of God, whereby the opposition between appearance and supersensible reality is abolished.[126] No transcendent truth remains, no absolute criterion of value. The meaning once found in the ascetic denial of the will is itself negated.

Schopenhauer's morality of pity, which for Nietzsche encompasses the essence of Judeo-Christian values and their European history, ends in its self-negation. While the death of God has multiple meanings, I emphasize its primary significance as the point at which negative nihilism negates itself, inaugurating reactive nihilism. This transition decisively takes place with Schopenhauer, who for Nietzsche "was the *first* admitted and inexorable atheist among us Germans. . . . This is the locus of his whole integrity; unconditional and honest atheism is simply the *presupposition* of the way he poses his problem, being a triumph achieved finally and with great difficulty by the European conscience, being the most fateful act of two thousand years of discipline for truth that in the end forbids itself the *lie* in faith in God." While Schopenhauer still clings to the Kantian distinction between phenomenal and noumenal reality, between the sensible

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[125] Nietzsche, *GM*, Essay 3, §28.

[126] Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 148.

and the supersensible—the metaphysical framework supporting his moral perspective—he nonetheless poses, "as a good European . . . and *not* as a German," the nihilistic question: "*Has existence any meaning at all?*" Nietzsche remarks that this question "will require a few centuries before [it] can be heard completely and in its full depth."[127] Schopenhauer's question, while not his own reply to it, takes in its sweep the history of European morality and its development into reactive nihilism, which openly denies the supersensible world. The development of Christianity in Europe here reaches the point of its self-overcoming; its God is murdered *in accordance with its own morality*: that of truthfulness.

Nietzsche's madman in the market place, who declares not only the death of God but his murder at the hands of the uncompromising atheists, is the first to have ears for the depth of Schopenhauer's question, while the atheists responsible for the murder remain deaf to it. They fail to comprehend how atheism implies the devastation of secular European morality—the offspring of the Judeo-Christian tradition—along with any compelling definition of what it *means* to be human. Judeo-Christian morality is founded upon the existence of a God whose creation is bound by unalterable laws, the transgression of which leads humans to suffer. If God is dead, if his existence is no longer believed in, then there is no unalterable moral law governing creation; morality must now be understood as a human fabrication, devoid of divine authority. It is therefore nonsensical to retain the values instilled by the Judeo-Christian tradition once these values are shown to conform to an imaginary authority. Without any divine authority supporting moral values, these values are fundamentally called into question, and may thereby be revalued.

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[127] Nietzsche, *GS*, §357.

Insofar as human meaning has for thousands of years been found in the Judeo-Christian moral valuation of existence, the meaning of existence is now also called into question.

Reactive nihilism conceals the *abyssal depth* of God's death, which "sends us straying as through an infinite nothing." This is nothing less than the abyss of human identity, the ground of which falls away into a boundless subjectivity. The moral subject was once defined in relation to a divine authority that is found to be altogether lacking. Human subjectivity, ounce bounded by the moral horizon believed to be set by the Creator from the beginning of time, is now deprived of the horizon that would circumscribe it. "Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down?"[128] When the highest value is devalued, when the distance between humanity and God is abolished—not by the immanence of divine love but in the absence of it—all sense of direction is lost. We are tossed, topsy-turvy, into a godless infinity. In the absence of God, we are, unbeknownst to ourselves, led down into an abyss.

Reactive nihilism conceals this abyss by replacing God with secular values that secure a sense of human moral purpose (for example, the values espoused by socialism, democracy, utilitarianism, nationalism, feminism, or anarchism). These values characterize what Nietzsche calls herd morality. While the madman wonders what will become of humanity now that the highest value hitherto no longer sanctifies existence, the reactive type clings to the secular morality of the herd. Yet the murderers of God remain oblivious of their crime. What does this unconscious criminal look like, and how could he commit this ultimate act of sacrilege? Zarathustra, in "The Ugliest Man," comes across him during his travels. The ugliest man murders

[128] Ibid., §125.

God out of *revenge*, for he could not bear to live with this divine witness, who "saw with eyes that saw everything; he saw man's depths and ultimate grounds, all his concealed disgrace and ugliness. His pity knew no shame: he crawled into my dirtiest nooks."[129] The death of God is the outcome of human *ressentiment*, compounded by the shamelessness of God's overly gracious pity for humanity. For Deleuze, "the *ugliest of men* represents reactive nihilism: the reactive man has turned his *ressentiment* against God, he has put himself in the place of the God he has killed, but he does not stop being reactive, full of bad conscience and *ressentiment*."[130]

The ugliest man bears the traits of the melancholic analyzed by Freud. His self-love is infused with self-contempt. Zarathustra observes of the ugliest man: "This fellow too loved himself, even as he despised himself: a great lover he seems to me, and a great despiser. None have I found yet who despised himself more deeply: that too is a kind of height."[131] Self-contempt remains a form of esteeming, for "Whoever despises himself still respects himself as one who despises."[132] The melancholic's self-denigration is enjoyable as a reactive exertion of force. The psychological self-torture of bad conscience, as we have seen, is for Nietzsche something that Christian morality has cultivated over the course of millennia. Finally, God too is found guilty, guilty of pity, but his death is no expiation. The ugliest man inhabits a "dead waste land" as a "self-exiled exile," disgusted by the herd who pity him, for pity "offends the sense of shame."[133] He remains a witness to himself and to the whole of reactive nihilism, causing him

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[129] Nietzsche, *Z*, "The Ugliest Man."

[130] Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 165.

[131] Nietzsche, *Z*, "The Ugliest Man."

[132] Nietzsche, *BGE*, §78.

[133] Nietzsche, *Z*, "The Ugliest Man."

the shame that God's pity lacked. While God may no longer be the object of revenge, his murderer continues to take revenge upon himself, just as Freud's melancholic does: "The self-tormenting in melancholia, which is without doubt enjoyable, signifies, just like the corresponding phenomenon in obsessional neurosis, a satisfaction of trends of sadism and hate which relate to an object, and which have been turned round upon the subject's own self."[134]

While Freud's theoretical language is useful in describing the condition of the melancholic, his analysis is narrower than Nietzsche's. Freud's method of psychotherapy proposes to relieve the melancholic of his peculiar pathology, resolving the unconscious conflict between the id and the superego by bringing it to the light of consciousness. The power of the id —that of the unconscious instincts—is reconciled with the ego by being assimilated into a newly attained self-knowledge. Freud privileges the ego as the site of psychic self-transformation, wherein the unconscious instincts can be harnessed and tamed by consciousness, without thereby being deprived of vigour. He goes some way in the same direction of Nietzsche in seeking to assuage the neurotic of the guilt, inflicted by the superego, that makes his life so miserable. However, Nietzsche's philosophy, which refutes the concept of the ego and its self-knowledge, remains opposed to Freudian psychology, which privileges the reactive consciousness of the ego in spite of its emphasis on the unconscious drives of the id. Didier Franck remarks: "To assign to psychoanalytic therapy the goal of substituting the *I* for the *it* is to make the body less powerful, and thus more reactive and sickly."[135] Deleuze supports this claim: "We can imagine what Nietzsche would have thought of Freud: once again he would have renounced a too 'reactive'

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[134] Freud, "Melancholia," 260.

[135] Didier Franck, *Nietzsche and the Shadow of God*, trans. Bettina Bergo and Philippe Farah (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2012), 287.

conception of psychic life, an ignorance of true 'activity,' and inability to conceive and provoke the true 'transmutation.'"[136] My discussion of this 'transmutation' follows in the next chapter.

For Nietzsche, melancholy is bound up with ascetic morality and the illness of *ressentiment*; it characterizes the pathos of negative and reactive nihilism. The ugliest man is the product of this morality, which reactively turns against God (a "lie") without thereby eliminating the self-tyranny of bad conscience. This self-tyranny is grounded in a perversely inverted form of narcissism, wherein ugliness and self-disgust enflame the ascetic's vanity.

> There is a *defiance of oneself* among whose most sublimated expressions some forms of asceticism belong. For certain human beings have such a great need to exercise their force and lust to rule that, lacking other objects, or because they have always failed elsewhere, they finally have recourse to tyrannizing certain parts of their own nature. . . . [T]hus the philosopher professes views of asceticism, humility, and sanctity in whose splendour his own image is made exceedingly ugly. This breaking oneself, this mockery of one's own nature . . . is really a high degree of vanity. . . . [M]an experiences a veritable voluptuousness in violating himself by means of exaggerated demands and in then deifying this tyrannically demanding force in his soul. In every ascetic morality man adores part of himself as God and to that end needs to diabolicize the rest.[137]

The ugliest man embodies the height, or rather the concealed base, of self-tyrannizing vanity precisely in his ugliness, which we can guess affords him narcissistic pleasure. The ascetic type enjoys degrading the sensuousness of the body—an enjoyment that he calls "spiritual"—but the pain of such self-abasement is itself sensual. The otherworldliness of divine beauty, as an incorporeal form, reflects the lofty purity of the soul that the ascetic type posits as an ideal, divine self, but which is produced by the ascetic's self-division between the sensual and the spiritual. Ascetic pleasure relies upon this fetishistic division of the self, the violent means by which the ascetic viciously derives pleasure from pain. This grotesque drama of self-mutilation is

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[136] Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 211.

[137] Nietzsche, *Human, All-Too-Human*, §137.

what gives rise to the ascetic's image of divine beauty, the ideal that conceals his own depraved depths. This ideal is finally sacrificed to the insatiability of the ascetic instinct, an utterly degraded sensuality. It is the vanity of the ascetic type that culminates in the death of God, another part of himself to be diabolicized and extirpated in the process of his self-denial. The instinct for adoration must itself be sacrificed to the ascetic's insatiable, lustful spirit of revenge. The sole pleasure that he is left with is to wallow in his own ugliness.

Beyond the negative and reactive stages of nihilism, Deleuze identifies a third stage, that of passive nihilism. It is Jesus who embodies this type of nihilism. "Beyond bad conscience and *ressentiment* Jesus gave the reactive man a lesson: he taught him how to die."[138] These three stages of nihilism are bound up with the development of Judeo-Christian morality. The development of Jewish morality into Christianity marks a shift of perspective on sin following Jesus's death. The Jews associate sin with the uncleanliness of guilt; it is an offence against God, before whom the sinner must repent and pay penance. This is a supernatural interpretation of human existence, for "every deed is to be considered *solely with respect to its supernatural consequences*; that is what Jewish feeling demands, for whatever is natural is considered ignoble."[139] The debasement of nature in contrast to the supernatural, accompanied by the morality of guilt and repentance, characterizes negative nihilism.

With Christian morality, the Jewish feeling of sin undergoes a fundamental change. Nietzsche argues that the Jews did not suffer as miserably from their sins as Jesus, lacking any experience of sin, mistakenly assumed. This was his error. "Thus his soul grew full of that

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[138] Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 155.

[139] Nietzsche, *GS*, §135.

wonderful and fantastic compassion for a misery that even among his people, who had invented sin, was rarely a very great misery.—But the Christians have found a way of vindicating their master since then and of sanctifying his error by making it 'come true.'"[140] Jesus's psychological misinterpretation of Jewish suffering—arising from the depths of his compassion—is perversely rectified by Christianity. While Jesus's message of immanent divine love, a love that dwells here and now, on the earth and in our bodies, seeks to liberate human beings from the suffering of sin, his death gives birth to the nightmare of Christian morality that *compounds* this suffering. "Jesus['s] dream of his rainbow and his ladder to heaven on which God descended to man" paradoxically widens the chasm between God and humanity, as the body, nature, in short all that is sinful, is slandered with a contempt hitherto unknown to the Jews.[141] The intensification of sin and its supernatural consequences inevitably makes human life appear *guiltier, uglier, more evil*. God's boundless pity for humanity becomes unbearable, a pity that compounds human suffering. This finally leads to the death of God in the sense discussed earlier, spoken of by Zarathustra in a different way than by the ugliest man, but with a reciprocal meaning: "You know *how* he died? Is it true what they say, that pity strangled him, that he saw how *man* hung on the cross and that he could not bear it, that love of man became his hell, and in the end his death?"[142] The development of Christian morality in Europe thus culminates in the godlessness of reactive nihilism.

Passive nihilism points the way to the overcoming of negative and reactive nihilism. Jesus wishes to dispel the sinner's guilt and extirpate the spirit of revenge, both of which he is

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[140] Ibid., §138.

[141] Ibid., §137.

[142] Nietzsche, *Z*, "Retired."

unafflicted by. The history of Christianity, for Nietzsche, is grounded in a calamitous misinterpretation of Jesus's teachings. Its morality manifests the psychology of the slave—that of *ressentiment*. This morality accomplishes the opposite of Jesus's teachings with its dogma of faith, punishment and reward, the *promise* of heaven, of a grace that will be experienced *one day*. Jesus speaks of heaven as a state of being. God's love is immanent as a way of life; it cannot exist elsewhere, nor is it contained in any system of beliefs.

> In the whole psychology of the 'evangel' the concept of guilt and punishment is lacking; also the concept of reward. 'Sin'—any distance separating God and man—is abolished: *precisely this is the 'glad tidings.'* Blessedness is not promised, it is not tied to conditions: it is the only reality—the rest is a sign with which to speak of it. . . . The deep instinct for how one must *live*, in order to feel oneself 'in heaven,' to feel 'eternal,' while in all other behaviour one decidedly does *not* feel oneself 'in heaven'—this alone is the psychological reality of 'redemption.' A new way of life, *not* a new faith.[143]

Jesus freely gives himself over to death because his way of life affords him the feeling of eternal blessedness; death does not threaten him. Passive nihilism teaches one how to die serenely, even the most gruesome of deaths. It demonstrates the possibility of not living *reactively*, of not living vengefully, of not living in a state of constant opposition; it overcomes the whole psychology of the slave. For Nietzsche, this way of life is possible at all times. While passive nihilism breaks with negative and reactive nihilism, Nietzsche's conception of overcoming nihilism does not end with it. The overcoming of nihilism, in the wake of its transmutation, will be the topic of the next and final chapter.

III. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how the death of God is the outcome of *ressentiment*. The psychology of the reactive type underlies the history of both Western metaphysics and Judeo-

[143] Nietzsche, *AC*, §33.

Christian morality. In order to understand the death of God as a metaphysical event, we must understand the nuances of Nietzsche's psychological critique of reactive consciousness, which I have argued is characterized by the pathology of melancholy. I have emphasized the active force of forgetfulness, which plays an important role in the overcoming of nihilism. This overcoming will be the theme of the next chapter. While Freud's psychoanalysis of the relationship between ego consciousness and the unconscious instincts is a useful comparison, it remains reactive insofar as the ego remains the privileged site of psychic transformation. In contrast, Nietzsche refutes the concept of the ego and its self-knowledge. His conception of transformation, as the transmutation of nihilism, ultimately goes beyond Freud's secular conception of moral enlightenment.

CHAPTER 3

OVERCOMING NIHILISM

> *This man of the future, who will redeem us not only from the hitherto reigning ideal but also from that which was bound to grow out of it, the great nausea, the will to nothingness, nihilism; this bell-stroke of noon and of the great decision that liberates the will again and restores its goal to the earth and his hope to man; this Antichrist and antinihilist; this victor over God and nothingness*—he must come one day.[144]

This chapter discusses Nietzsche's vision of the overcoming of nihilism, embodied in the overman, who is cultivated by creative individuals capable of legislating new values. Zarathustra, the teacher of eternal recurrence, heralds the arrival of the overman and awaits the creators who will bring his vision of the overman to fruition. Eternal recurrence, as a selective doctrine, distinguishes the affirmative quality of the will to power from its negative, nihilistic quality. The overman, in whom the will to power actively expresses itself, is one who is selected by Zarathustra's doctrine of eternal recurrence, being cultivated by those who are able to affirm it. Zarathustra embodies the transmutation of nihilism—the conversion of nihilistic forces into those of creative affirmation—in giving birth to the doctrine of eternal recurrence, while he himself perishes of his creative task, which coincides with his self-destruction.[145] The transmutation of nihilism marks its consummation, while the overman represents a being of the future, one whose will is liberated from reactive forces and from the melancholy weight of time.

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[144] Nietzsche, *GM*, Essay 2, §24.

[145] I here follow Paul S. Loeb (*The Death of Nietzsche's Zarathustra*), who contends that Zarathustra, having delivered his doctrine, dies at the end of *Z*, Part III. He reads Part IV as an "analeptic satyr play" that chronologically precedes the ending of Part III. He thus argues that the end of Part IV leads into the beginning of "The Convalescent" in Part III. While the ending of Part IV signifies the second metamorphosis of the spirit into a lion, the ending of Part III signifies the third metamorphosis of the spirit into a child. Zarathustra's death coincides with his transfiguration.

The overman signals a new breed of human being, who is the affirmation of the will to power that is the basis of Nietzsche's theoretical understanding of evolution.

I begin by contrasting Deleuze's interpretation of the will to power with Heidegger's, which leads into my discussion of Nietzsche's opposition between Dionysus and the Crucified. Dionysus represents the affirmation of life, while the latter represents its nihilistic repudiation. The transmutation of nihilism, the focal point of Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche, signifies the ascendancy of Dionysus and the defeat of the Crucified. With reference to Klossowski, I argue that Nietzsche himself experienced such a conversion of affective forces in being struck by the thought of eternal recurrence alongside Lake Silvaplana, while staying in Sils-Maria. I conclude the first section of this chapter with a contrast between Deleuze's notion of transmutation and Klossowski's notion of an equilibrium that is reached between Dionysus and the Crucified, one which he argues underlies Nietzsche's delirium in Turin. In distinguishing the euphoria of transmutation from the delirium of equilibrium, I argue that Klossowski pushes Deleuze's thinking into new philosophical territory.

In the second section, I discuss Zarathustra's affective experience of the transmutation of nihilism, one which parallels Nietzsche's own experience at Sils-Maria. Here I take up Ashley Woodward's philosophical critique of Deleuze's interpretation of eternal recurrence. I argue that Woodward fails to adequately distinguish the transmutation of nihilism (embodied by Zarathustra's creative self-destruction) from its overcoming (embodied by the overman). Zarathustra converts nihilism into the affirmation of creative force, thereby transmuting the value of values—the quality of the will to power—without himself legislating new ones. This is the task of future creators, whom we as yet do not know, and whose task is to cultivate the overman.

Woodward rejects the feasibility of the overcoming of nihilism insofar as it remains a philosophical abstraction, an affective conversion of nihilistic forces that is *extra*-worldly and foreign to human experience. However, I contend that the transmutation of nihilism embodied by Zarathustra is in no way extra-worldly, nor foreign to human experience; it is grounded in Nietzsche's own revelation of the thought of eternal recurrence. While Woodward voices the scholarly protest that Deleuze's interpretation of eternal recurrence potentially lends itself to totalitarian ideology, I counter this view in light of Klossowski's discussion of Nietzsche's political conspiracy that would produce the overman, one which opposes a totalitarian interpretation of Nietzsche's thought.

In conclusion, I note the Heraclitean dimension of eternal recurrence as a theory of evolution, one which heralds the advent of the overman. Heraclitus's world-child divinity, the Aeon whose game of chance at once affirms an immanent law of cosmic necessity, in Nietzsche serves to unify the opposites of freedom and necessity, cosmic chaos and human culture, natural evolution and creative self-cultivation. Dionysian affirmation unifies the chaotic multiplicity of cosmic forces; it affirms the chance inherent in becoming *as necessity*. The creative affirmation that produces the overman gives aesthetic form to the natural evolution of the human species; he justifies the life of the species in being the product of creators who legislate new values. Without the creative legislation of future creators, who cultivate the overman as a new race of human being, the species would remain senselessly condemned to a life of nihilistic reactivity. The future is pregnant with newness, but its promise is no guarantee.

I. Dionysus Versus The Crucified

For both Heidegger and Deleuze, Nietzsche's philosophy marks the completion of nihilism in the Western philosophical tradition. According to Deleuze, incomplete nihilism refers to the aforementioned three phases of negative, reactive, and passive nihilism.[146] Here he is in agreement with Heidegger, for whom incomplete nihilism refers to all of its forms leading up to and including nineteenth-century bourgeois values, "e.g., marriage; work; one's profession; the fatherland; the family; order; law."[147] However, Deleuze's understanding of complete nihilism opposes Heidegger's, who interprets Nietzsche's concept of the will to power as a metaphysical principle that posits Being as a value and thereby precludes the "coming to presence" of Being "in its truth."[148] The will to power, which for Nietzsche is the value-positing principle of life, is for Heidegger fundamentally nihilistic in that it eclipses the truth of Being, a truth that is independent of human valuations. Deleuze opposes Heidegger on the question concerning Being. He argues that complete nihilism ultimately refers to its transmutation, wherein the negative quality of the will to power negates itself, thereby unveiling its positive quality: the affirmation of eternal recurrence as the being of becoming. What for Heidegger remains the unthought essence of Being, presents itself for Deleuze as the *unknown side* of the will to power.[149]

Deleuze's idiosyncratic interpretation of Nietzsche's concept of the will to power supports, contra Heidegger, his thesis that the thought of eternal recurrence points to the overcoming of nihilism. For Heidegger, this thought refers to the eternal return of the will to power, which in mounting beyond itself returns to itself as the *selfsame* will that generates and

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[146] Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 172.

[147] Nietzsche, *WP*, §316.

[148] Heidegger, "Word of Nietzsche," 108.

[149] Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 173.

increases its own power. Like an ever-expanding circle, the will to power at once wills beneath and behind itself in order to fall back into itself. The will is thus liberated from the "it was" of history in willing its own eternity. "Deliverance from revenge is the transition, from the will's revulsion against time and its 'It was,' to the will that eternally wills the recurrence of the same and in this willing wills itself as its own ground." This selfsame will remains a metaphysical one, for "the eternal recurrence of the same is the supreme triumph of the metaphysics of the will that eternally wills its own willing."[150] The will to power, which for Heidegger Nietzsche posits as the metaphysical ground of Being, interprets Being as that which exists in order to be given a human value, i.e., its truth is dependent upon the will as the value-positing principle of life. Heidegger concludes that Nietzsche's triumphant "metaphysics of the will" conceals the essence of Being, which withdraws from thought precisely in being ascribed a human, metaphysical value.

In contrast, Deleuze interprets the thought of eternal recurrence to signify the return, not of the same or of the identical, but of that which differs: a chaotic multiplicity of corporeal forces. The qualitative difference between active and reactive forces expresses the quantitative difference between dominant and dominated forces. This *affective* play of difference is internal to all relations of force, which never produce a state of equilibrium, for forces are not equal to one another. The will to power, as an empirical rather than a metaphysical principle, is what determines the qualitative and quantitative differences between forces. "*The will to power is the element from which derive both the quantitative difference of related forces and the quality that*

[150] Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 104.

devolves into each force in this relation."[151] As the plastic principle of force that produces and determines its ever-changing relations, the will to power cannot be separated from the sensibility of particular forces. However, the sensible qualities of the will to power must be distinguished from those of force. While force is either active or reactive, the will to power is either affirmative or negative. It is through the will to power as affirmation that force *becomes active*, and through the will to power as negation that force *becomes reactive*. The will to power is the value-creating element of life that brings forces into relation with one another in a process of becoming; as the unity of multiplicity it synthesizes forces. Eternal recurrence, understood as the passage of time, is a synthesis of the past, present, and future. The will to power conditions forces in their becoming active or reactive, it produces this difference in the being of what becomes (in time), but it is also conditioned by forces, insofar as its quality cannot be abstracted from particular forces. The will to power is inseparable from the multiplicity of forces, which are unified in the synthetic relation of forces in time. Only those creative forces that are affirmed by the will to power, affirming the plurality of becoming, return. Nihilistic forces, which deny the difference internal to being, fail to return insofar as they end in self-negation.

As discussed in the previous chapter, nihilism results from the triumph of reactive forces, which separate active forces from what they can do. Nihilism, as the becoming-reactive of forces, constitutes the history human experience. "Are there no other ways of becoming? The fact remains that we do not feel, experience or know any becoming but becoming-reactive. We are not merely noting the existence of reactive forces, we are noting the fact that everywhere

[151] Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 50.

they are triumphant."[152] *Ressentiment* and bad conscience, which express the negative quality of the will to power as a will to nothingness, define the affective relations of the human body. The will to power as affirmation is missing from our experience. The overcoming of nihilism entails the becoming-active of forces, a sensibility that is alien to us.

The transmutation of nihilism marks its completion in the sense of its self-defeat, which at once reveals the possibility of its self-overcoming. I argue that Deleuze distinguishes the transmutation of nihilism, embodied by Zarathustra, from its overcoming, embodied by the overman who is cultivated by future creators who legislate new values. The transmutation of nihilism is the point of conversion in the will to power, where the will to nothingness *actively* destroys itself and the affirmation of the will is made possible. "Destruction becomes active to the extent that the negative is transmuted and converted into affirmative power: the 'eternal joy of becoming' which is avowed in an instant, the 'joy of annihilation,' the '*affirmation* of annihilation and destruction.'" This is the fourth and final phase of nihilism according to Deleuze, and expresses the Dionysian joy of the tragic philosopher, embodied in "the man who wants to perish."[153] Here the negative quality of the will to power, from which derive the decadence-values of nihilism, is transmuted into the positive quality of the will to power, out of which new, life-affirming values are created. Deleuze's distinction between passive and active nihilism must be clarified in order to understand this transmutation.

In the previous chapter, I defined passive nihilism in relation to Jesus, who teaches the reactive man how to die. Passive nihilism breaks with the will to nothingness, since "it is better

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[152] Ibid., 64.

[153] Ibid., 174.

to have no will at all, better a nothingness of the will than a will to nothingness."[154] It signifies "the exhausted life which prefers not to will, to fade away passively, rather than being animated by a will which goes beyond it."[155] This is the exhausted will of the "*last man*," the "most contemptible" of the human race whom Zarathustra scorns for being "as ineradicable as the flea-beetle," for "the last man lives longest."[156] The last man is content not to will anything, least of all his own death. He lacks any creative longing for the future, the longing of which the creator, as an active nihilist, perishes. The passive nihilism of the last man preaches *slow death* by not willing anything, whereas the active nihilism of the creator wills self-destruction. While passive nihilism breaks with the will to nothingness, the latter continues on in the creator who actively seeks his own destruction. "The will to nothingness continues its enterprise, this time in silence, beyond the reactive man. *Reactive forces break their alliance with the will to nothingness, the will to nothingness, in turn, breaks its alliance with reactive forces.* It inspires in man a new inclination: for destroying himself, but destroying himself actively."[157]

This begs for the question: how could Jesus be a representative of the last man? For Jesus *does* precisely the opposite of the last man—he perishes early, indeed, *too early*, according to Zarathustra. "Verily, that Hebrew died too early whom the preachers of slow death honour; and for many it has become a calamity that he died too early. As yet he knew only the tears and melancholy of the Hebrew, and hatred of the good and the just—the Hebrew Jesus: then the

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[154] Ibid., 150.

[155] Ibid., 151.

[156] Nietzsche, *Z*, "Prologue," §5.

[157] Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 174.

longing for death overcame him."[158] This is a very different portrait of Jesus than the one drawn earlier, of a man who seemed to know nothing of hatred and melancholy, nor of any particular *longing* for death. Here we have two different portraits of Jesus: one who "gave the reactive life a certain hedonism, the last man a certain nobility, when men were still at the stage of wondering whether they would take God's place," and another who wants to perish, who hangs as a criminal crucified by the good and the just, the pharisees, for having broken their tables of values: "the good *must* be pharisees—they have no choice. The good *must* crucify him who invents his own virtue."[159] While the former signifies passive nihilism, I contend that the latter signifies active nihilism. "*Destruction as the active destruction of known values* is the trail of the creator: 'Look at the good and the just! What do they hate the most? The one who breaks their tables of values, the destroyer, the criminal: but it is he, the creator.'"[160] By inventing his own virtue, the creator destroys all known values—the decadence-values of nihilism—thereby providing the soil for the cultivation of new values.

The history of reactive nihilism in the form of Christianity, as we have seen, originates with a specific interpretation of Jesus's death, just as the Jewish interpretation expresses the values of negative nihilism. For Deleuze, the death of God has multiple senses depending on the particular force of the will to power that determines its meaning. As such, it remains to be interpreted anew, for Nietzsche "does not make this death an event possessing its meaning in itself. The death of God has as many meanings as there are forces capable of seizing Christ and making him die; but we are still waiting for the forces or the power which will carry this death to

[158] Nietzsche, *Z*, "On Free Death."

[159] Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 155.

[160] Ibid., 177.

its highest point and make it into something more than an apparent and abstract death. . . . An event needs silence and time to discover finally the forces which give it an essence."[161] The forces that carry the death of God to its highest point, giving it a positive rather than a negative essence, are those of transmutation. It is by the plastic principle of the will to power, which determines the quality of forces, that Christ's death is interpreted. Deleuze defines the will to power as "*the one that* wills in the will. Power . . . is 'the one that' interprets, 'the one that' evaluates, 'the one that' wills. . . . What the will to power wills is a particular relation of forces, a particular quality of forces. And also a particular quality of power: affirming or denying."[162] The death of God has hitherto been an expression of the will that denies rather than affirms life. Christ's martyrdom has always been interpreted by this same will, determined by either negative, reactive, or passive forces. The death of God can only be *affirmed* by the creative will in its active self-destruction, which transmutes nihilistic forces into their opposite.

The transmutation of nihilism converts the negative quality of the will to power, the one that denies, into its positive quality, the one that affirms. The latter quality is what Nietzsche calls Dionysian, and is characterized by the joy of the tragic philosopher. It is here that the meaning of Nietzsche's opposition between Dionysus and the Crucified is illuminated. "Have I been understood? — *Dionysus versus the crucified*."[163] These divinities signify two different interpretations of the death of God; each in their martyrdom express the opposite qualities of the will to power. In the ancient Greek myth, Dionysus is torn to pieces and devoured by the Titans, but this death leads to his rebirth. In the New Testament, Christ is crucified by the Jews, but he is

[161] Ibid., 156.

[162] Ibid., 85.

[163] Nietzsche, *EH*, "Why I am A Destiny," §9.

later resurrected from the tomb. The martyrdom of each divinity engenders new life. Nietzsche contrasts the ancient Greek cult of Dionysus, in which the practise of animal sacrifice—a symbolic ritual representing the dismemberment of Dionysus—was central, with Christianity, in which the symbolic ritual of eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ, who sacrificed himself for the sins of humanity, is routinely practised. Their martyrdom, which in both cases signifies the transmutation of death into new life, is symbolically reproduced by the worshippers of these two divinities in the form of a religious rite devoted to the sacred celebration of divine sacrifice.

Nietzsche is not interested in analyzing the anthropological similarities between the worship of Dionysus and the worship of Christ. What he emphasizes is the religious significance of martyrdom itself and how this relates to the meaning of suffering. He writes: “It is *not* a difference in regard to their martyrdom — it is a difference in the meaning of it.” For Nietzsche, Dionysian martyrdom affirms suffering and destruction out of an overabundance of power, a suffering that requires no moral justification and is therefore blameless at all times, while Christian martyrdom depreciates life in bestowing upon suffering a moral justification. Christian martyrdom promises *deliverance* from earthly life. “The tragic man affirms even the harshest suffering: he is sufficiently strong, rich, and capable of deifying to do so. The Christian denies even the happiest lot on earth: he is sufficiently weak, poor, disinherited to suffer from life in whatever form he meets it.” Dionysus signifies the affirmation of the innocence of becoming, while the Crucified signifies an accusation against the injustice of life, which is redeemed in the heavenly afterworld. “One will see that the problem is that of the meaning of suffering: whether a Christian meaning or a tragic meaning. In the former case it is supposed to be the path to a holy

existence; in the latter, being is counted as *holy enough* to justify even a monstrous amount of suffering."[164] Active nihilism converts the Christian, otherworldly meaning of martyrdom, which condemns earthly life with its contempt for the body, into the joy of Dionysian intoxication with life, which restores meaning to the earth. Zarathustra implores us: "*remain faithful to the earth*, and do not believe those who speak to you of otherworldly hopes! . . . Once the sin against God was the greatest sin; but God died, and these sinners died with him. To sin against the earth is now the most dreadful thing, and to esteem the entrails of the unknowable higher than the meaning of the earth."[165] Nietzsche contends that the worshippers of Dionysus celebrate his martyrdom as an expression of the eternally recurring cycle of nature, in which death and destruction lead to creation and new life. They thus worship the earth and the frantic proliferation of life. In contrast, Christians slander earthly life in their celebration of Christ's martyrdom, which promises an otherworldly afterlife. Dionysian martyrdom expels the otherworldly meaning of God's death. The Christian moral justification for human existence, expressed in the doctrine of sin and atonement, is negated along with the belief in a God who promises a life beyond this earthly one.

Zarathustra brings about the transmutation of nihilism, its consummation. He is representative of the man who wants to perish, the gift-giving creator who squanders his riches. His will, longing to affirm itself as the being of becoming, as the will that wills its own return, actively destroys itself. In this way he says Yes to life in all of its agonizing glory, denying the No that condemns earthly life. "The no stripped of its power, transformed into the opposite

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[164] Nietzsche, *WP*, §1052.

[165] Nietzsche, *Z*, "Prologue," §3.

quality, turned affirmative and creative: such is transmutation. This transmutation of values is what essentially defines Zarathustra."[166] Out of the fire of transmutation, which transforms pain into joy, melancholy into laughter, abyssal darkness into light, the doctrine of eternal recurrence emanates: "for in laughter all that is evil comes together, but is pronounced holy and absolved by its own bliss; and if this is my alpha and omega, that all that is heavy and grave should become light; all that is body, dancer; all that is spirit, bird—and verily, that is my alpha and omega: Oh, how should I not lust after eternity and the nuptial ring of rings, the ring of recurrence?"[167] The ring of recurrence weds Zarathustra eternally to the earth. The Dionysian powers that affirm eternal recurrence are those of laughter, dance, and play. Zarathustra's lusting after eternity is what Nietzsche calls *amor fati* (*GS* §276), which affirms the tragic character of human existence expressed by Heraclitus: "Man's character is his fate."[168] As the teacher of eternal recurrence, Zarathustra is able to embrace his suffering joyously by loving his fate—that which his character, his destiny, demands of him.

From the perspective of those unable to affirm earthly life, the doctrine of eternal recurrence signifies a curse upon existence, a condemnation to eternal suffering and damnation. It evokes the wail of interminable lamentation, the nihilistic return of all that is worthless. For Zarathustra, this perspective adduces the eternal return of the last and smallest man. "'All is the same, nothing is worth while, knowledge chokes.' . . . The eternal recurrence of even the smallest —that was my disgust with existence. Alas! Nausea!"[169] Zarathustra must undergo the despair

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[166] Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 191.

[167] Nietzsche, *Z*, "The Seven Seals," §6.

[168] Heraclitus, *ATH*, CXIV, 81.

[169] Nietzsche, *Z*, "The Convalescent," §2.

that his doctrine evokes in order to transmute nihilism; as such he *prepares the way* for the overman who is capable of *living* his doctrine, which he himself perishes of. "I spoke my word, I break of my word . . . as a proclaimer I perish." The transmutation of nihilism is the creative act that consumes Zarathustra, who sacrifices himself to the earth by giving birth to this thought of thoughts. "That you as the first must teach this doctrine—how could this great destiny not be your greatest danger and sickness too?"[170] From the perspective of affirmation, this sickness is at once a blessing; suffering expresses the joy of giving birth and the innocence of new life. For Deleuze, the Dionysian affirmation of eternal recurrence precludes the return of the smallest man, the return of the negative and its host of nihilistic forces, which must finally be overcome.

Klossowski expounds upon Nietzsche's psychological experience of the thought of eternal recurrence, which struck him while walking the mountains of Sils-Maria. For Klossowski, this thought expresses the highest feeling (*hohe Stimmung* or *hochste Gefuhl*) of the soul—the chaos of the impulses forming the incommunicable, affective depth of the body. This high tonality extinguishes ego-consciousness, the consciousness that bestows an unalterable, stable identity upon the self. The thought of eternal recurrence, as a communicable doctrine, arises from an ecstatic loss of identity, experienced in a singular moment that coincides with the death of God, the guarantor of ego-consciousness. This death sunders individual identity into a multiplicity of identities, each signifying a different impulsive state, a different tonality (*Stimmung*) of the soul. The illusion of the 'individual' conceals a plurality of drives, an intensity of psychic forces that extinguish the ego in the moment of God's death. Dionysus and the

[170] Ibid.

Crucified signify a difference in tonalities—the high and the low, the ecstatic and the depressive —which are multiple, changing, and repetitive.

> The emphasis must be placed on the loss of a given identity. The 'death of God' (the God who guarantees the identity of the responsible self) opens up the soul to all its possible identities, already apprehended in the various *Stimmungen* of the Nietzschean soul. The revelation of the Eternal Return brings about, as necessity, the successive realizations of all possible identities: 'at bottom every name in history is I' — in the end, 'Dionysus and the Crucified'. In Nietzsche, the 'death of God' corresponds to a *Stimmung* in the same way as does the ecstatic moment of the Eternal Return.[171]

Each historical identity signifies a particular fluctuation in the intensity of the soul, a given tonality. The communicable thought of eternal recurrence, as an intelligible doctrine, is therefore only a sign for the highest feeling, and as such extinguishes itself in the moment of its revelation. This feeling is inseparable from the totality of affective tonalities, the chaos of multiplicity, the eternally recurring variety of *Stimmungen*. Thus, Zarathustra perishes of this thought insofar as it signifies the revocation of individual identity.

In contrast to the Deleuzian notion of transmutation, which permits of no equilibrium between impulsive states, Klossowski contends that in the days leading up to Nietzsche's mental collapse in Turin, he experienced such an equilibrium, expressed in his final histrionic letters, between Dionysus and the Crucified. Having previously aligned himself solely on the side of Dionysus, he now signs certain of his letters as the Crucified. "Sing me a new song: the heavens are transfigured and all the heavens are full of joy—The Crucified."[172] The opposition between Dionysus and the Crucified is reconciled in Nietzsche's euphoric identification with both divinities, a "double apotheosis" that results from the disintegration of his ego-identity and, it

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[171] Klossowski, *NVC*, 57.

[172] Nietzsche, *PN*, "Letters," 685.

would seem, the lucidity of his thought.[173] Klossowski understands this loss of self from within his complex interpretive framework, which treats Nietzsche's thinking as an expression of his singular "physiognomy" — the body and its affects, or conflicting drives. Consciousness is merely an outgrowth of bodily impulses, varying in intensity, which remain incommunicable. What is communicated through language is never the impulses themselves, but their residue in consciousness (as thoughts), which appropriates their force for specific *purposes*, designating their intentionality. The aimless, chaotic flux of bodily forces threatens the equilibrium of the ego, the illusory "unity" of a stable identity that consciousness gives itself by means of appropriation.

The "tenuous equilibrium" between Dionysus and the Crucified reflects the ego experienced by consciousness as a *phantasm* and its own dissolution into a whirl of euphoria, what Klossowski calls "a lived Chaos, a total vacancy of the conscious ego."[174] Nonetheless, Nietzsche remains conscious of this dissolution, lucid in his ecstatic experience of ego loss. "If the process that destroys 'the reality principle' consists in a suspension or extinction of the consciousness of the external world, it would then seem that Nietzsche, on the contrary, had never been more lucid than during these final days in Turin. *What he was conscious of was the fact that he had ceased to be Nietzsche*, that he had been, as it were, emptied of his person."[175] In contrast to the highest feeling experienced at Sils-Maria, as a *singular moment* of impulsive intensity, Nietzsche now remains lucid in experiencing a successive variety of fluctuating intensities: a multiplicity of identities. Daniel W. Smith writes: "Nietzsche's delirium, in short,

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[173] Klossowski, *NVC*, 234.

[174] Klossowski, *NVC*, 235.

[175] Ibid.

passed through a series of intensive states, in which his impulses each received various proper names, some of which designated his allies, or manic rises in intensity . . . while others designated his enemies, or depressive falls in intensity . . . —a chaos of pure oscillations that was ultimately invested by 'all the names in history.'"[176] His identification with both the Crucified and Dionysus signifies the psychic creation of the world anew—the transfiguration of the external world, interpreted variously by a plurality of impulses—which coincides with the loss of his personal identity.

In *Ecce Homo*, these divinities symbolized two conflicting dispositions towards life, each in their martyrdom expressing opposite drives. The Crucified signified the nihilistic denial of life, while Dionysus signified its affirmation. For Klossowski, a paradoxical equilibrium between the two gods is reached insofar as Nietzsche creates the world anew from an array of perspectives, each expressing a tonal fluctuation of the soul, while at the same time ridiculing himself, his identity becoming a joke "on account of which I condone my boredom at having created a world."[177] Nietzsche writes: "are we content? I am the god who has created this caricature."[178] The philosopher, like the artist, creates the world in his own image, resembling the unity of self and world. However, this image is in fact a caricature of the self, which is composed of multiple identities and is not a stable, changeless unity. Nietzsche's delirium dissolves the unity of the self, its phantasmal image, into the cosmic void of becoming. He remains conscious

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[176] Daniel W. Smith, "Klossowski: Impulses, Phantasms, Simulacra," *Essays on Deleuze* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 336.

[177] Klossowski, *NVC*, 237.

[178] Nietzsche, *PN*, 687.

of this dissolution, and can only laugh at his own about-face, as anti-Christ taking on the appearance of Christ.

While Deleuze's account of the transmutation of nihilism compellingly assesses this movement as the central theme in *Zarathustra*, Klossowski's psychological analysis of Nietzsche's delirium in Turin opens up new philosophical territory. For Klossowski, the transmutation of impulsive forces is replaced with their *oscillation*. Dionysus does not exclude or negate the Crucified; sickness and privation do not preclude joy and laughter. For Deleuze, such an equilibrium of forces is untenable. "This is the 'decisive point' of Dionysian philosophy: the point at which negation expresses an affirmation of life, destroys reactive forces and restores the rights of activity. The negative becomes the thunderbolt and lightning of a power of affirming. *Midnight*, the supreme focal or transcendent point which is not defined by Nietzsche in terms of an equilibrium or a reconciliation of opposites, but in terms of their conversion."[179] For Klossowski, this conversion is present in Nietzsche's experience at Sils-Maria, in which he was struck as by a thunderbolt by the thought of eternal recurrence. Indeed, in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche is in agreement with Deleuze's position: no reconciliation between Dionysus and the Crucified is possible. However, Klossowski makes the case that Nietzsche's final delirium was the utmost point of his lucidity, in which he became conscious of a psychical chaos no longer ruled by the identity of Dionysus, and no longer suppressing the identity of the Crucified. Both emerge together alongside every name in history, each expressing a particular fluctuation of the soul. In his later work with Guattari, Deleuze incorporates Klossowski's profound insight, which

[179] Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 175.

contributes to the concept of the *schizo*.[180] The Nietzschean aspect of Deleuze's thought is finally pushed further by Klossowski.

The transmutation of nihilism, which I have argued corresponds to Nietzsche's euphoric revelation of eternal recurrence at Lake Silvaplana, is embodied in Zarathustra's creative task of delivering the doctrine of eternal recurrence, his teaching, to humanity. Nietzsche's delirium in Turin, by contrast, corresponds to a fragile equilibrium of impulsive states, the oscillation of depressive and affirmative tonalities of the soul. While both experiences abolish the principle of identity, the latter marks a transfiguration of reality, wherein all the names of history are identified and invested with a particular fluctuation of dynamic intensity. The chaotic oscillation of dynamic intensities is at once nihilistic, being deprived of any inherent meaning or purpose, and creative, affirming a plurality of identities in the singular experience of eternal recurrence. Eternal recurrence presupposes both the loss of personal identity, the goal-lessness of existence, as well as the circular return of a multiplicity of psychic drives, investing every name in history. In the following section, I discuss the overman as the one who breaks with human history hitherto. Nietzsche's own experience of nihilism and its transmutation leads him to herald the arrival of such a being.

II. Going Under: The Overman

Near the end of his career, Nietzsche noted: "It is only late that one musters the courage for what one really knows. That I have hitherto been a thorough-going nihilist, I have admitted to myself only recently: the energy and radicalism with which I advanced as a nihilist deceived me

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[180] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 20-22. Ashley Woodward maintains that many of the philosophical objections to Deleuze's interpretation of Nietzsche, which I discuss below, are resolved in his later work with Guattari.

about this basic fact. When one moves toward a goal it seems impossible that 'goal-lessness as such' is the principle of our faith."[181] As a nihilist, Nietzsche's philosophical goal is, paradoxically, to unveil the goal-lessness of the universe. From this perspective, human life may be seen as a kind of cosmic accident, but even this conception of life results from the loss of an ordered cosmos, without which the idea of such an accident is unthinkable. "Once you know that there are no purposes, you also know that there is no accident; for it is only beside a world of purposes that the word 'accident' has meaning."[182] Similarly, it is only for a goal-oriented species that the principle of faith in 'goal-lessness as such' can become thinkable, precisely in the collapse of our primal orientation. Only beside a world of goals does the word 'goal-lessness' have any meaning.

Insofar as goal-lessness is therefore synonymous with meaninglessness, the absurd and paradoxical premise that such *despair* could be the principle of a *faith* ironically reflects the Christian pathos of humility that supports the belief in God: *credo quia absurdum est*. For the humble Christian, faith in God follows from the failure of reason to grasp God's existence. Despairing of reason, he humbly accepts the absurdity of God's existence through faith. For Nietzsche, complete nihilism takes this humility one step further; it entails the acceptance of *oneself* as an absurd being in a godless universe. "Many have no doubt attained to that humility which says *credo quia absurdum est* and sacrificed their reason to it: but, so far as I know, no one has yet attained to that humility which says: *credo quia absurdus sum*, though it is only one step further."[183] To posit goal-lessness as a principle of faith is to acknowledge the absurd character of

[181] Nietzsche, *WP*, §25.

[182] Nietzsche, *GS*, §109.

[183] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), §417.

human existence, an absurdity that is both concealed and disavowed in the belief in God. This absurdity is experienced in the collapse of divine meaning. It is experienced as the precipice of meaning, where meaning falls away, and the step across which leads one to plunge into the abyss within oneself—or to soar beyond it.

The thought of eternal recurrence grounds the principle of faith in goal-lessness. "Let us think this thought in its most terrible form: existence as it is, without meaning or aim, yet recurring inevitably without any finale of nothingness."[184] The consequence of this thought for those unable to bear it, for those who thirst for nothingness, is suicidal nihilism, for suicide is finally "*the deed of nihilism.*"[185] Nietzsche embraces such a consequence. Suicidal pessimism is the nihilistic outcome of the thought of eternal recurrence as a selective doctrine: those able to bear it are healthy enough to affirm life, while the rest perish from it. Insofar as Nietzsche blames Christian morality for preserving the nihilistic, exhausted type in a state of reactivity opposed to life, the thought of eternal recurrence serves to negate nihilism. Conversely, the groundless goal-lessness of existence at once reveals new, soaring possibilities for life hitherto unthought of.

The flight of the soul, freed from the spirit of gravity that would draw it down into the abyss, is what Zarathustra speaks of as his great longing. "If ever I spread tranquil skies over myself and soared on my own wings into my own skies; if I swam playfully in the deep light-distances, and the bird-wisdom of my freedom came—but bird-wisdom speaks thus: 'Behold, there is no above, no below! Throw yourself around, out, back, you who are light!'"[186] While a lack of direction previously defined the experience of meaninglessness, of plunging headfirst

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[184] Nietzsche, *WP*, §55.

[185] Ibid., §247.

[186] Nietzsche, *Z*, "The Seven Seals," §7.

into an infinite nothingness, the soul liberated from the burden of melancholy now experiences the weightless freedom of flying in all possible directions. The groundlessness of existence is in the first instance felt as a *loss*, while in the second instance it creates the feeling of fullness, of voluptuous delight. Only in being deprived of any goal is the soul led to such a height, which first requires its *going under*.

In the Prologue to *Zarathustra*, Zarathustra abets humanity's "going under," its nihilistic self-destruction, which coincides with its self-overcoming: "What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that he is an *overture* [*Übergang*] and a *going under* [*Untergang*]. I love those who do not know how to live, except by going under, for they are those who cross over."[187] The going under of those who wish to perish coincides with their crossing over. Where? Whence? Whither? The curvature of a circle is evoked in this double movement, whose ascending and descending arcs mirror one another, forming the image of a ring — "the nuptial ring of rings, the ring of recurrence."[188] The self-overcoming of humanity, which entails its going under, manifests the *movement* of eternal recurrence: that which returns to itself by going beyond itself, whose likeness is found in the image of a circle. Once again, the words of Heraclitus resound in the imagery evoked in Zarathustra's speech: "The way up and down is one and the same."[189] The ring of recurrence binds together the descending and ascending movements of life, whose law is that of self-overcoming. Zarathustra becomes what he is—the teacher of eternal recurrence—by descending into the abyss of nihilism, a descent that at once propels him beyond himself in a movement of self-overcoming.

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[187] Ibid., "Prologue," §4.

[188] Ibid., "The Seven Seals," §7.

[189] Heraclitus, *ATH*, CIII, 75.

The abyss of nihilism that threatens to devour the human species may serve as the womb of its creative rebirth in the form of the overman. Humanity must cross this abyss, over which it is suspended. "Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman—a rope over an abyss. A dangerous across, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and stopping."[190] The one who perishes by going down into the abyss is also the one crosses over it, who points the way beyond humanity in its current form.[191] This abyss is the Dionysian chaos within humanity, which may one day "give birth to a dancing star."[192] The abyss is pregnant with the newness of the overman: a being not of yesterday or of today, but of the future. Zarathustra embodies the double movement of humanity's going under and going over, like the sun that must descend into the ocean in order to be born anew from it. "For that I must descend to the depths, as you do in the evening when you go behind the sea and still bring light to the underworld, you overrich star. Like you, I must go *under*—go down, as is said by man, to whom I want to descend."[193] This movement is that of eternal recurrence, the doctrine into which he empties himself for the benefit of humankind.

Zarathustra thus represents the man who goes under, whose plunge into the abyss gives wings to the soul, which soars beyond him and into the future. He speaks of an abyss and an azure existing within himself as two-in-one, as opposites unified in the lightness of flight. "O heaven above me, pure and deep! You abyss of light! Seeing you I tremble with godlike desires.

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[190] Nietzsche, *Z*, "Prologue," §4.

[191] Robert Gooding-Williams notes that "Going-under and going-over converge, Zarathustra's language suggests, because the abyss in which man goes under can be a ground, or a bridge, across which he goes over." Gooding-Williams, *Dionysian Modernism*, 67.

[192] Nietzsche, *Z*, "Prologue," §5.

[193] Ibid., §1.

To throw myself into your height, that is *my* depth. . . . And when I climbed mountains, *whom* did I always seek on the mountains, if not you? And all my wandering and mountain climbing were sheer necessity and a help in my helplessness: what I want with all my will is to *fly*, to fly up into *you*."[194] Such flight is only possible following the plunge, and there is no guarantee that one's soul will grow wings. It is the creator who gives birth to a new soul that is light rather than heavy, that finds its home in the sky. But the creator also sacrifices himself in the process of giving birth to the child—the third and final metamorphosis of the soul, filled with the Dionysian powers of transmutation. "Indeed, there must be much bitter dying in your life, you creators. . . . To be the child who is newly born, the creator must also want to be the mother who gives birth and the pangs of the birth-giver."[195] The child is born out of the affirmation of eternal recurrence, the transmutation of nihilism, which points the way to the self-overcoming of humanity.

The foregoing discussion has focused on the transmutation of nihilism as an affective experience, which indeed it is for Nietzsche. The philosophical objections raised against Deleuze's assertion that the overcoming of nihilism is not only possible, but desirable, tend to overlook this crucial aspect of his interpretation. Ashley Woodward discusses several such objections, agreeing with Peter Hallward that "Deleuze's philosophy is oriented by lines of flight that lead out of the world; though not other-worldly, it is *extra*-worldly."[196] Woodward takes up this argument specifically in relation to Deleuze's interpretation of eternal recurrence as a selective doctrine, which he contends offers a kind of metaphysical security: once nihilism is overcome, there remain solely those powers of Dionysian affirmation. From this perspective, the

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[194] Nietzsche, *Z*, "Before Sunrise."

[195] Nietzsche, *Z*, "Upon the Blessed Isles."

[196] Woodward, "Deleuze," 135.

doctrine of eternal recurrence *guarantees* both the self-negation of reactive forces as well as the self-perpetuation of active forces. However, given that we have no worldly experience of *pure activity*, the overcoming of nihilism remains a philosophical abstraction, the belief in which removes us from any tangible affective reality. Indeed, Deleuze identifies Dionysian affirmation as the *ratio essendi* of the will to power—"the essence or 'formal reason' of a thing, the definition of it or its essential attributes as they are conceived by us, as they are abstracted from particular conditions"—which as yet humanity has no knowledge of, while the *ratio cognoscendi* of the will to power—"the being of a thing in the mode of object known"—, i.e., nihilism in all of its forms, is all that we know.[197]

Woodward further contends that Deleuze re-introduces the idea, rejected by Nietzsche, of eternal novelty, i.e., the idea that "the world eternally creates new things."[198] By this he means that Deleuze privileges an extra-worldly process of creative becoming—that which affirms difference and denies the return of the same—which devalues nature and the creatures in it. "Deleuze's eternal return places all value on the creative processes themselves, while created things are entirely devalued. Thus in Deleuze's philosophy value is separated from this actual, created world—value is attached solely to the virtual world of difference, or being as creative process (the 'divine' production of eternal novelty)."[199] Deleuze's philosophy of immanent forces, forming the interactive stream of pure becoming, is guilty of a nihilistic idealism that fails to remain empirically grounded.

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[197] Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 219.

[198] Nietzsche, *GS*, §109.

[199] Woodward, "Deleuze," 136.

Woodward suggests that this view makes dangerous concessions to forms of totalitarian domination. He expresses Lyotard's concern that Nietzschean ethics, "which separate movements of being-more from those of being-less, of action and reaction . . . [makes us] dread to see the reappearance of a whole morality or politics under the cover of these dichotomies, their sages, their militants, their tribunals and their prisons."[200] The will to power as an ethical principle expressing a hierarchical difference between active and reactive types, between greater and lesser forms of power, may potentially be assimilated by totalitarian ideology that serves to consolidate the political power of the state, subduing the individual who is made powerless against it. However, one cannot in good conscience call such ideology "Nietzschean" unless the meaning of this term is to be lost entirely. Nietzsche has nothing but contempt for the idolatry of state power. Zarathustra decries it in "On the New Idol":

> State is the name of the coldest of all cold monsters. Coldly it tells lies too; and this lie crawls out of its mouth: "I, the state, am the people." That is a lie! It was creators who created peoples and hung a faith and a love over them: thus they served life.
>
> It is annihilators who set traps for the many and call them "state": they hang a sword and a hundred appetites over them. . . .
>
> State I call it where all drink poison, the good and the wicked; state, where all lose themselves, the good and the wicked; state, where the slow suicide of all is called "life."
>
> Where the state *ends*—look there, my brothers! Do you not see it, the rainbow and bridges of the overman?[201]

It is doubtlessly possible to transpose the difference between activity and reactivity, between dominant and dominated forces, into a totalitarian ideology whose brute force dominates a people into submission, but this is a perversion of Nietzsche's philosophy, one that Deleuze is far from somehow making palatable. He makes it clear that "will to power" does not mean that "the

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[200] Ibid., 140.

[201] Nietzsche, *Z*, "On the New Idol."

will wants power, that it desires or seeks out power as an end, nor that power is the motive of the will."[202] This erroneous understanding of "will to power" mirrors the sort that Lyotard has in mind, the power of the state that is an end in itself and the motive for its greater accumulation. For Nietzsche, state power expresses the coldest of all reactive forces: it deprives entire peoples of their culture and their morality as a vampirism that drains their life-blood, it blights their creative flourishing by poisoning them with its ideology, one that works like an opiate with which they slowly commit suicide, and it achieves all of this under the pretext that the state serves "life." Nietzsche contrasts the nihilism of state power with the creative power of cultural innovators, whose task is to serve life in the creation of new, life-affirming values.

The above concern is directed by Deleuze's contemporaries (Lyotard and Malabou, who criticize the Nietzschean critique of dialectics) toward eternal recurrence as a selective doctrine, one that abets the self-destruction of those unable to bear it. While Nietzsche speaks of eternal recurrence as a selective doctrine of elimination, a doctrine of which the weak will perish and the strong will flourish, the concern here is that Deleuze turns this into an *ontological* theory of becoming, wherein selection is no longer viewed as the result of a historical process, but as the "intrinsic character of being itself."[203] The selectivity of eternal recurrence, interpreted in this way, potentially lends support to the annihilating process of totalitarianism, which endlessly destroys all that opposes its power. The affirmation of active forces and the denial of reactive forces, as qualities of the will to power, are no longer expressive of human judgement, but of an ontological reality. I.e., Deleuze's critics contend that a selective ontology of hierarchical

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[202] Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 79.

[203] Woodward, "Deleuze," 141.

difference could provide a kind of "metaphysical" justification for the domination of the "weak" by the "strong," a hierarchy that is not understood to be grounded in the dialectical antagonism between lower and higher social classes, but rather as an expression of the hierarchical order within "being" itself. The elimination of the less powerful would therefore be justified according to a process of ontological selection. I shall raise counter-arguments to this critique of Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of the creators who may cultivate the overman, in which I pair Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche with Klossowski's. Considering that Klossowski dedicates his book to Deleuze, it is fitting to read these two thinkers in dialogue with one another.

Insofar as Woodward's main argument hinges upon Deleuze's idea that the *ratio essendi* of the will to power remains fundamentally unknown to us in our current historical situation, it would therefore be wrong to associate this quality in any way with the selective powers of totalitarianism, with which we are well acquainted, e.g., those wielded by the Communist regimes of Stalin and Mao. To assert that the "extra-worldly" dimension of Deleuze's thought potentially lends itself to totalitarian ideology implies that the selective doctrine of eternal recurrence has already found its expression in a decidedly worldly way, in the form of totalitarian domination, and is therefore decisively *not* grounded in any "extra-worldly" dimension. Of course, Woodward seems to deny that the Dionysian affirmation of the will to power can be said to exist at all; it is Deleuze's ill-begotten belief in such a power that potentially lends his early philosophy to totalitarian ideology. But the will to power is never described by Deleuze as an extra-worldly phenomenon; he maintains, on the contrary, that "the will to power is body."[204]

[204] Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 172.

Nihilism is the sickness of the body that makes the will to power known to us *as body*. Nietzsche diagnoses nihilism as an illness, a symptom of declining health that implies a lost state of bodily vitality. This loss of health points us in the direction of its recovery, wherein the will to power is made known to us in feelings of strength, bravery, and endurance in the face of suffering. Similarly, the self-negation of nihilism in the form of its transmutation is, as I have shown, an *affective* experience, one which is not foreign to human beings. I have argued that Nietzsche himself had such an experience, in his revelation of eternal recurrence at Sils-Maria, which Zarathustra ultimately embodies. What is foreign to human experience is the overcoming of nihilism represented by the overman: the being of the future, whose arrival Zarathustra heralds. Oddly, Woodward makes no reference to the overman. He mistakes the transmutation of nihilism —its affective, bodily consummation—with its overcoming.

The transmutation of nihilism expresses the "negativity *of the positive*," the conversion of the negative into the positive power of affirmation.[205] In this sense the *ratio essendi* of the will to power is in fact made known, but only paradoxically, as the transmutation of the *ratio cognoscendi* of the will to power, wherein human knowledge *as we know it* is replaced with a creative affirmation of love.

> Thus we can see that the relation between nihilism and transmutation is deeper than was initially suggested. Nihilism expresses the quality of the negative as *ratio cognoscendi* of the will to power; but it cannot be brought to completion without transmuting itself into the opposite quality, into affirmation as *ratio essendi* of this same will. A Dionysian transmutation of pain into joy, which Dionysus announces in reply to Ariadne in a suitably mysterious way, "Must we not first of all hate ourselves if we have to love ourselves?" That is to say: must you not know me as negative if you are going to experience me as affirmative, espouse me as affirmative, think of me as affirmation?[206]

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[205] Ibid., 198.

[206] Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 173.

Active nihilism expresses the negativity of the positive that negates what we reactively conceive of as knowledge. Hitherto, our conception of knowledge has been defined by reactive forces. The *ratio essendi* of the will to power, the revelation of which grounds the thought of eternal recurrence, does not refer to a hypothetical knowledge of the essence of the will to power, but to the annulment of reactive forces in the corporeal experience of creative affirmation: an *apotheosis* of the soul rather than a *theophany*.[207] This experience is reflected in the god-like feeling of flight described by Zarathustra, who must first descend into the depths of nihilistic despair in order to overcome his great disgust with humanity. His nausea is then transformed into love, an affective conversion that signifies the final metamorphosis of the spirit into a child and to the birth of a new soul. This birth coincides with the death of Zarathustra, an event that embodies the bliss of the tragic philosopher. As discussed earlier, the will to power cannot be abstracted from the *sensibility* of the forces it determines. The *ratio essendi* of the will to power cannot refer to some abstract knowledge of 'pure being' that can never actually be experienced, as Hallward and Woodward suggest, but must refer to the passionate joy that annihilates reactive forces by converting pain into love. While this affective conversion gives rise to an experience of Dionysian affirmation, characterized by the innocence of the child, we still do not know the overman who does not only transmute the value of values, as Zarathustra does, but who is the product of creators who legislate new ones.

The political consequences of Deleuze's ontological account of eternal recurrence as a selective doctrine are illuminated by Klossowski's discussion of "the conspiracy of the vicious

[207] "Hallward argues that while there is no 'transcendent world' in Deleuze's philosophy, there is a *theophanic* tendency in it . . . [which] functions in the same way: to devalue the actual world of experience in the name of a virtual dimension, beyond experience." Woodward, "Deleuze," 136.

circle," which culminates in his last published writing on Nietzsche, entitled *Circulus Vitiosus*. The "vicious circle" refers to the phrase coined by Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil* §56—*circulus vitiosus deus* (a vicious circle made god)—which for Klossowski stands as the "sign and figure" that "facilitates the passage from passive to active nihilism."[208] The "conspiracy" refers to Nietzsche's anti-Darwinian theory of evolution that evokes the overman: the cultivation of a new human race by a secret society composed of philosophers, artists, and experimenters of the future—the singular cases among human beings, the *creators*. Nietzsche criticizes the Darwinian theory of evolution for privileging the preservation of the herd, of the mediocre type, at the expense of the exceptional individual. Thus for Nietzsche the strong must defend themselves against the weak, and not the other way around. Klossowski writes:

> If Nietzsche rejects Darwin's concept of natural selection as a falsification of the real selection, as a selection that ensures the reign of those who *compromise the meaning and value of life*, it is because he feels that the Darwinian selection *conspires with gregariousness* by presenting *mediocre* beings as *strong*, rich and powerful beings. The latter, from Nietzsche's point of view, are nothing other than singular and exceptional cases that have been practically *eliminated* up to now. The selection expounded by Darwin coincides perfectly with bourgeois morality. This then is the external conspiracy —the conspiracy of the science and morality of institutions—against which Nietzsche projects the conspiracy of the Vicious Circle. This sign will henceforth inspire an experimental action—a kind of counter-selection that follows from the very nature of the interpretation of Eternal Return, that is to say, from the *lived experience* of a singular and privileged case. The *unintelligible depth* of experience is thus in itself the challenge thrown up against the gregarious propensities, as they are expressed in everything that is communicable, comprehensible and exchangeable.[209]

Insofar as the thought of eternal recurrence *in experience* abolishes the principle of identity and with it the 'reality principle' that guarantees identity, Eternal Return can only stand as a sign for a singular, incommunicable experience. It cannot be communicated by means of the gregarious

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[208] Pierre Klossowski, "Circulus Vitiosus," trans. Joseph D. Kuzma, *The Agonist* 2, no.1 (2009), 33.

[209] Klossowski, *NVC*, 169.

semiotics of the herd, nor appropriated by the nihilistic structures of knowledge grounded in reactive ego-consciousness. The conspiracy of the vicious circle defies its political assimilation by any institutional body politic.

The abolition of the 'reality principle' deprives existence of any established goal, meaning, or purpose. It would therefore be paradoxical to think of the overman as a rational *telos*. Nietzsche nonetheless posits the economic necessity of a counter-movement to the levelling process of humanity, its homogenization. This counter-movement is the *surplus production* of exceptional cases who fortuitously rise above the homogenized mass of levelled-down humanity. The levelling-down of humanity is the process of passive nihilism, which results in the dominion of the last man and requires a *justification* if the life of the species is to have any meaning. Humanity stands in need of creators capable of legislating new values; the utilitarian dream of a docile, contented labouring mass indirectly serves the cultivation of new creators. For this reason, Nietzsche abets the levelling process:

> *The strong of the future*. — That which partly necessity, partly chance has achieved here and there, the conditions for the production of a stronger type, we are now able to comprehend and *consciously will*: *we are able to create the conditions under which such an elevation is possible*. . .
>
> The *homogenizing* of European man is the great process that cannot be obstructed: one should even hasten it. The necessity *to create a gulf, a distance, order of rank*, is given *eo ipso — not* the necessity to retard this process.
>
> As soon as it is established, this *homogenizing species* requires a *justification*: it lies in serving a higher sovereign species that stands upon the former and can raise itself to its task only by doing this. Not merely a race of masters whose sole task is to rule, but a race with *its own sphere of life*, with an excess of strength for beauty, bravery, culture, manners to the highest peak of the spirit; an *affirming* race that may grant itself *every great luxury* — strong enough to have no need of *the tyranny of the virtue-imperative*, rich enough to have no need of thrift and pedantry, beyond good and evil; a hothouse for strange and choice plants.[210]

[210] Nietzsche, *WP*, §898.

This is the basis of Nietzsche's understanding of eternal recurrence as a selective doctrine, which refers to the ongoing cultivation of the human species and to the production of a new breed of human being. Nietzsche envisions the overman as the affirming race which, having overcome nihilism, justifies the life of the species. The Dionysian economy of surplus production, as the necessary counter-movement to the utilitarian economy of self-preservation, gives rise to creators who may cultivate this new race.

In this Dionysian economy, grounded in the law of life's self-overcoming, *necessity* is not opposed to *chance*. Nietzsche adopts the immanent law of Heraclitean becoming, expressing the unity of opposites, as a theory of evolution in which nature and culture are interpenetrating. The time of eternal recurrence—the pure heterogeneity of becoming—encompasses the whole of evolution. The overman, who affirms life as an *aesthetic phenomenon*, gives a new meaning to human existence by affirming the will to power as the principle of creative evolution. This is illuminated by my previous discussion of Heraclitus in the first chapter, who for Nietzsche perceives "how the struggle of the many can yet carry rules and laws inherent in itself, how the artist stands contemplatively above and at the same time actively within his work, how necessity and random play, oppositional tension and harmony, must pair to create a work of art."[211] This artist is "the great world-child Zeus," whose eternal law (necessity) indwells the chaos of the cosmos — its random play.[212] This paradoxical conception of "*law in becoming*" and "*play in necessity*" characterizes natural evolution of as a child at play, as a cosmic experiment.[213] While nature has no goal, humanity in its self-cultivation has set it one, entailing the self-inflicted

[211] Nietzsche, *PTG*, 61.

[212] Nietzsche, "On the Pathos of Truth," *Early Notebooks*, 251.

[213] Nietzsche, *PTG*, 68.

violence of domesticating its natural instincts. The future of humanity, as an experimental species, is open ended, unfinished, awaiting new creators to shape and form it, sculptors who impose their creative will upon the species. The image of the overman, the envisioned product of future creators, indwells Zarathustra's soul: "my fervent will to create impels me ever again toward man; thus is the hammer impelled toward the stone. O men, in the stone there sleeps an image, the image of my images."[214] Insofar as the sculptor *dominates* the stone, insofar as the creator must "write on the will of millennia as if on bronze," the will to power as active force is at once destructive and creative; these two impulses are inseparable from one another in the transformation of the artist's material.[215] This vital expenditure of force expresses the depths of nature as a process of evolution and becoming, which is affirmed in the overman as a product of humanity's creative self-experimentation.

This experiment is a gamble, the dice-throw of chance, which mirrors the *play* of nature symbolized by Zeus, the world-child divinity. Contrary to the reigning ideal that praises humanity as if it had set itself free from nature and attained its desired goal — the "ripest fruit" of the sovereign individual — Nietzsche believes that humanity hitherto is only a bridge to the overman.[216]

> The existence on earth of an animal soul turned against itself, taking sides against itself, was something so new, profound, unheard of, enigmatic, contradictory, *and pregnant with a future* that the aspect of the earth was essentially altered. Indeed, divine spectators were needed to do justice the spectacle that thus began and the end of which is not yet in sight —a spectacle too subtle, too marvelous, too paradoxical to be played senselessly unobserved on some ludicrous planet! From now on, man is *included* among the most unexpected and exciting lucky throws in the dice game of Heraclitus' "great child," be he

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[214] Nietzsche, *Z*, "Upon the Blessed Isles."

[215] Nietzsche, *Z*, "On Old and New Tablets," §29.

[216] Nietzsche, *GM*, Essay 2, §2.

> called Zeus or chance; he gives rise to a new interest, a tension, a hope, almost a certainty, as if with him something were announcing and preparing itself, as if man were not a goal but only a way, an episode, a bridge, a great promise.[217]

The sovereign individual is something to be overcome, being the chance result of a game that at every step *affirms the necessity* of what humanity has *so far become*. In this game of chance — the self-destining of humanity — the opposites of nature and culture, freedom and necessity, are unified and affirmed as *fate*. At this moment in the game, along the tightrope of its self-cultivation, humanity has bred a being that passively preserves itself, that is exhausted and no longer wills anything: the last man who is creatively impotent, erotically castrated, and spiritually bereft. "'What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?' thus asks the last man, and he blinks."[218] In order for eternal recurrence, the unity of chance and necessity, to be affirmed, humanity must overcome the nausea of its despair with itself, the melancholy of the will crushed by the weight of time, and finally the baffled blinking of the last man.

The overman can be *consciously willed* insofar the illusion of a rational *telos* has been eliminated by the thought of eternal recurrence, which affirms the dice-throw of chance. The overman may be cultivated by a higher rank of society composed of *fortuitous cases*. Such creators affirm chance by freely imposing their will upon millennia, legislating values that give aesthetic form to the life of the species. In this way the chaos of the cosmos, the groundless ground of nature, is given an earthly meaning. The overman would thus be the creative product of dice players who take part in the game of chance that characterizes Heraclitus's world-child divinity. Zarathustra exults: "O heaven over me, pure and high! That is what your purity is to me now, that there is no eternal spider or spider web of reason; that you are to me a dance floor for

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[217] Ibid., §16.

[218] Nietzsche, *Z*, "Prologue," §5.

divine accidents, that you are to me a divine table for divine dice and dice players."[219] Conversely, totalitarianism is characterized by the implementation of a rigorous, systematic political order—the opposite of a dance floor—which replaces the old divine spider of the priests with an even more malicious beast, whose logic culminates in the indiscriminate devouring of life.

III. Conclusion

In this chapter I have distinguished the transmutation of nihilism, the affective experience of the man who perishes of his creative longing, from its overcoming, embodied in the overman who is cultivated by value-legislating creators. While Zarathustra revalues the value of values, converting the negative quality of the will to power into the positive quality of creative affirmation, the overman, as the product of future creators, is *yet to come*. The doctrine of eternal recurrence, which Zarathustra dies of in giving birth to, signifies the transition from nihilism to creative affirmation. He is the forefather of the overman. The overman is the one who is selected by eternal recurrence as a new breed of human being, resulting from the artistic affirmation of the cosmos as a process of creative evolution. The development of the human species is grounded in a plurality of natural, economic, and cultural processes that create a hierarchical rank ordering within society. The cosmic time of eternal recurrence is the chaos of becoming that may give rise to the overman, who is cultivated by a noble class of fortuitous cases.

[219] Nietzsche, *Z*, "Before Sunrise."

FINAL REMARKS

In conclusion, I wish to assess the lines of inquiry opened up in my analysis concerning the overman and the contrast between Nietzsche's theory of evolution and Darwinism. I will elaborate upon two main questions: i) why is Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence, as an evolutionary theory that eliminates the illusion of a rational *telos* in nature, and which in affirming the dice-throw of chance frees up the human species to creatively experiment with itself, any better than Darwinism? And ii) how is a society of singular cases—set apart from the herd in being given the task of cultivating the overman—possible when their singularity opposes the political conformity of group consciousness and the regularity it imposes? I do not intend to provide definitive answers to these questions, but rather leave them open as further lines of inquiry.

As discussed in chapter two, Nietzsche understands consciousness as a late evolutionary outgrowth of the body, one that expresses a weak and reactive will to power, which serves the self-preservation of an organism, rather than an increase in the will to power, marked by the vital expenditure of an organism. He criticizes Darwin's theory of evolution for interpreting nature from the reactive perspective of consciousness, thereby ignoring the true activity of the will to power as the biological principle of life. Consciousness, as an organic function, exists in serving higher, dominant drives—that is, until these unconscious stimulants for life are deprived of their vitality and subjugated by consciousness itself. When consciousness, whose subservient role consists in its utility for the body, comes to dominate the body, then life is interpreted according to utilitarian values—that which is *useful* for an organism is interpreted as an *end* rather than a *means*. "'Useful' in the sense of Darwinist biology means: proved advantageous in the struggle

with others. But it seems to me the feeling of increase, the feeling of becoming stronger, is itself, quite apart from any usefulness in the struggle, the real *progress*: only from this feeling does there arise the will to struggle."[220] In this way Darwinism reinstates "*superfluous* teleological principles," one of which is "the entire concept 'instinct of preservation.'"[221] For Nietzsche, what is useful for an organism, for instance, its self-preservation, is an indirect result of the will to power that seeks to expand, to grow, and to dominate life. Conversely, the values posited from the reactive perspective of consciousness serve to diminish life. For this reason, the cultivation of morality often tends to serve the weak, reactive type who is useful to the herd, at the expense of the more powerful type who fails to serve its needs.

Nietzsche contends that the Darwinian struggle for existence is not the overall condition of life, which is one of "abundance, opulence, even absurd squandering," rather than a state of privation, hunger, and need. When there is a struggle for existence, which is a struggle for *power*, the weak prevail over the strong in virtue of their greater number and, more importantly, their greater quantity of "spirit," by which Nietzsche means their heightened self-consciousness, inclining them towards mimetic social behaviour, out of which the morality of the herd develops and conserves the species.[222] The strong, those who squander their power and whose values develop independently of the herd, are at a disadvantage. Nietzsche argues that the feeling of increased strength experienced by powerful types is not "useful" in terms of their self-preservation, that which characterizes the Darwinian struggle for existence, but rather expresses the principle of life as one of self-overcoming. Such self-overcoming is only possible out of an

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[220] Nietzsche, *WP*, §649.

[221] Ibid., §650.

[222] Nietzsche, "Squirmishes of an Untimely Man," *TI*, §14.

abundance of strength that seeks to discharge itself in ever greater measures, leading to an increase in the will to power.

The breeding of human beings in line with Darwinism, for Nietzsche, would abolish the hierarchical distinction between weaker and stronger types. It would lead to the overall diminution of humanity, to the cultivation of a herd without any masters to dominate it, to impress aesthetic form upon the species. This is the task he envisions for future creators, who conspire under the sign of the vicious circle. This is the conspiracy that Klossowski has in mind when he discusses the possibility of a community composed of creators responsible for cultivating the overman. Deleuze writes:

> What we call a society is a community of regularities, or more precisely, a certain selective process which retains select singularities and regularizes them. . . . But a *conspiracy* — this would be a community of singularities of another type, which would not be regularized, but which would enter into new connections, and in this sense, would be revolutionary. . . . the problem which we now inherit from [Klossowski] is to know if it is possible to conceive of links between singularities which would have as their criteria the eternal return, insofar as it implicates the loss of identity, not just for individuals but also for societies or groups. (Deleuze in Klossowski, 2009, pp.46-47).[223]

This revolutionary, clandestine society would act as a counter-conspiracy to the external conspiracy of institutional science and morality, which accomplishes the levelling-down of humanity. Insofar as the eternal return abolishes the 'reality principle' determined by the gregarious semiotic of ego-consciousness, and with it the 'principle of identity' that regularizes communities, the unexchangeable singularity of fortuitous cases would itself constitute the basis for their creative interactions. It remains to be seen whether such a society is feasible, for it

[223] Ashley Woodward, "Klossowski's Nietzsche," *Interpreting Nietzsche: Reception and Influence*, ed. Ashley Woodward (London: Continuum, 2011), 94.

defies the very meaning of what we gregariously conceive of as 'society.'[224] Can a community be founded upon a total ambiguity of meaning, upon a nebulous reality that may be arbitrarily revoked at any point, consigned to the chaotic fluctuations of value-positing impulses? This would seem to leave us in a state of utter absurdity, which, perhaps unknowingly, we are already in.

[224] Deleuze anticipates something of what Klossowski has in mind, in the conclusion of his book *Bergsonism,* trans. Hugh Tomlison and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 2011), 111. Here he describes an "*open* society, a society of creators" who embody and communicate "creative emotion."

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