PESSIMISM AND THE AFFIRMATION OF LIFE

PESSIMISM AND THE AFFIRMATION OF LIFE: NIETZSCHE'S TRAGIC PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation maintains that Nietzsche's thought amounts to an immanent critique of culture by way of an intellectual seduction targeting the gullibility of human desire. I provide an account of this critique in the context of what Nietzsche calls "tragic" philosophy, which I argue is already fully on display in his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). I read this book continuously with the later writings as a post-Romantic critique of Enlightenment values that exposes the moral prejudices embedded in metaphysical thinking. Many interpretations of Nietzsche's late critique of morality focus on its psychological foundation and highlight the task of overcoming nihilism. My project, by contrast, focuses on the aesthetics of Nietzsche's tragic philosophy, with an emphasis on its cultural, social-political dimensions. This is a controversial topic in Anglophone Nietzsche scholarship. Some disregard this dimension of Nietzsche's work by discussing his promotion of individualism or his naturalism. Others embrace his meritocratic elitism or affirm his philosophy in the service of democratic pluralism, and some criticize his aristocratic radicalism, highlight its fascistic tendencies, or identify it with German imperialism. I take a different approach, reading Nietzsche's philosophy as an immanent critique of Western culture which, while motivated by social and political concerns, does not culminate in a positive social-political position. Rather than endorsing the variety of cultural and existential alternatives associated with his supposed aristocratic radicalism, I argue that Nietzsche ironically exposes such alternatives as the duplicitous symptoms of a characteristically modern malaise. Nietzsche's tragic ideal seduces his readers with the appeal of life-affirmation. This seduction masks his critique of our chiefly unconscious tendency toward self-idealization, which forms the religious basis of our collective belief in civilizational progress.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Unless otherwise noted, all citations refer to section numbers, along with essay numbers and abbreviated chapter titles when relevant. Translations of the early and late notebooks are taken from the respective Cambridge editions and include the date and notebook number. Citations from *World as Will and Presentation* refer to volume and page numbers. All references to Sophocles and Plato provide in-text citations.

Early Essays and Lectures

DW "The Dionysiac Worldview"
GSt "The Greek State"
OS "On Schopenhauer"
PPP *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*
PT "On the Pathos of Truth"
PTAG *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*
RL *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language*
TL "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense"

Letters and Notebooks

BVN *Letters*
NF *Posthumous Fragments from the Early and Late Notebooks*
WP *The Will to Power*

Published Works

A *The Antichrist*
BGE *Beyond Good and Evil*
BT *The Birth of Tragedy*
D *Dawn*
EH *Ecce Homo*
GM *On the Genealogy of Morality*
GS *The Gay Science*
HH *Human, All Too Human*
TI *Twilight of the Idols*
UM *Untimely Meditations*
Z *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Schopenhauer

WWP *World as Will and Presentation (2 Vols.)*

Really, my young friend, this is a very difficult investigation we're engaged in. This appearing, and this seeming but not being, and this saying things but not true things — all these issues are full of confusion, just as they always have been. It's extremely hard, Theaetetus, to say what form of speech we should use to say that there really is such a thing as false saying or believing, and moreover to utter this without being caught in a verbal conflict.

— Plato, *Sophist*

Now he was muddling and mixing some thirty airs of every style — Italian, French, tragic, comic; sometimes, singing a bass part, he'd descend into the depths of hell; sometimes, straining at the notes as he imitated a falsetto, he'd tear the upper registers, all the while imitating, with gait, carriage, and gestures, the different characters singing; by turns furious, mollified, imperious, derisive.

— Diderot, *Rameau's Nephew*

How then, how then? How do I look? No, it really is a good thing that you ask me if I know how I look, for in truth I do not know. Or I did not know, for you first call it to my attention. Be assured I have not the least regard to my appearance, leaving it to itself, so to speak. It is pure chance how I look, or rather, comes about thus, it stablishes itself as circumstance demands, without that I give it any heed. Conformation, mimicry, you know it well, the mumchance and conjuring of Mother Nature, who always keeps her tongue in cheek.

— Mann, *Doctor Faustus*

INTRODUCTION

"Whoever must be a creator in good and evil — truly, he must first be an annihilator and break values," preaches Nietzsche's trickster in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "On Self-Overcoming." The predominant scholarly wisdom posits that Nietzsche's project follows the above trajectory, distinguishing two phases in his philosophy, one critical and the other creative. The critical task of dismantling traditional belief systems complements the creative task of supplanting the old values with new ones. These fresh values affirm life in hitherto unprecedented ways, without which we would only be left with nihilism: the specter of life's fundamental valuelessness. My approach diverges from the received wisdom by experimenting within a framework that problematizes this critical/creative dichotomy. On my reading, this type of either/or prospect — a revolutionary revaluation of all values or nihilism — rhetorically appeals to our essentially moral-religious tendency to arrange the world into neat oppositions. I explore the ironical implications of this insight mainly within the context of Nietzsche's first book, *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* (1872), rather than analyzing the conventional theme of overcoming nihilism formulated in his later writings.

For the sake of general introduction, we might hint at some of these implications as they resonate with the most well-known ideas in Nietzsche's work, though these will not constitute the specific focus of my study. In pared-down terms, we might say that the critical phase of his philosophy ironically undermines its creative enterprise. Consider the following broad examples. Nietzsche's notion of the *Übermensch* or superhuman resembles the belief in humanity's ultimate salvation that he berates religions for

upholding. His concept of the will to power exhibits the teleological and metaphysical qualities that he debunks in philosophical systems. His fatalistic doctrine of eternal recurrence deprives the cosmos of meaning in much the same way as any abstract, mechanistic science would, clashing with his emphasis on the perspectival limit of our all too human knowledge whose irreducible multiplicity mutates in ever new and unpredictable ways. Furthermore, that the revelation of this doctrine reduces one to a paltry *speck of dust* (GS 341) undermines his ideal of the poet-philosopher as a sovereign legislator of world-historical values; one wonders just how these supposedly complementary visions coherently harmonize with one another, or if they were ever intended to.

Rather than systematically seeking to explain away such contradictions, I argue that they indicate nothing less than an immanent critique of the very life-affirming enterprise that Nietzsche rhetorically endorses. Let us consider the contours of what his grandiose Eurocentric vision encompasses: a hierarchical political arrangement modelled after ancient caste systems; an elite sect of poet-philosophers whose life-affirming values enshrine some sort of eugenics program; a new breed of superhuman who alone would mark the fulfillment of world history as its ultimate justification. This is the kind of vision that Nietzsche has in mind when he defines all life as will to power, calling for noble creators who would "write upon the will of millennia as if upon bronze" (Z, "On Old and New Tablets") by cultivating a European super-race (*Über-Rasse*).[1] Anything less

[1] See Robert Bernasconi, "Nietzsche as a Philosopher of Racialized Breeding," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Race*, ed. Naomi Zack (Oxford University Press, 2017), 57.

signifies the victory of nihilism. A palpable proto-fascist tenor haunts such exhortations. However, discussing these issues goes well beyond the purview of the present study. I only wish to emphasize certain disturbing connotations of Nietzsche's life-affirming enterprise in order to clarify *why* we might consider the possibility that he does not seriously, literally intend it, but instead employs it as an immanent critique of modern European culture. Within this context, Nietzsche's extreme, exaggerated expectation for the future of humanity exposes our attraction to prospects like grand cultural renewal, radical idealistic politics, revolutionary world-historical transformation, and sovereign self-mastery, amongst other things, an attraction that clings to either/or, all-or-nothing schemas. He thus panders to the socially formed moral-religious instincts from which oppositional thinking arises and, on my reading, implicitly criticizes its cultural manifestations.

If Nietzsche's life-affirming enterprise is itself a rhetorical extension of his critical project, then what we take to be his positive philosophy amounts to no more than a provocative pose. This conclusion problematizes his relationship to three preeminent philosophical adversaries, Plato, Kant, and Schopenhauer, who found positive value systems upon thoroughgoing skeptical inquiries into the ground of human knowledge. Nietzsche's critical/creative dichotomy maps onto this overall idealistic model while subverting it from within, driving the tension between skeptical criticism and creative value-positing to its breaking point. The idea is not to deprive us of the latter in a state of suspended judgement, falling back on established conventions or customs whose safety no longer holds, and thus amounting to a kind of nihilistic bewilderment. Instead, the idea

is to confront us with the myriad fantasies, desires, and beliefs that maintain our value systems, the instinctual mythopoetic components of human life. Nietzsche inverts the paradigm for philosophical knowledge found in his adversaries. Not only does the critical method of skeptical inquiry fail to emancipate us from the irrational ground of our human frailty, but our attempt to seek such emancipation leaves us even more embroiled in dogmatism. Something resembling a Socratic sensibility could result from this, wherein we humbly recognize our profound limitations, modestly admit our inadequacies, and find ourselves the better for it. Given Nietzsche's crusade against Socrates, this would amount to a most poignant ironical conclusion, though one well worth considering.

In this study, I analyze the consistency of Nietzsche's crusade against Socrates as an original paragon of rational enlightenment who expresses the intellect's salvific power. In Plato's *Phaedo* especially, the dying Socrates exemplifies a cultural ideal of redemption. Likewise in the *Symposium*, Socrates seduces us with his wisdom, letting readers think they are being drawn nearer to the perfection of the immortal forms. There Plato associates Socrates's enigmatic identity with Dionysus's satyr companion Silenus and likens the effect of his dialectical prowess to a siren song lure or the flute melodies of Marsyas, another famous satyr. In Chapter 4, I unpack the significance of these Dionysian associations as they resonate with Nietzsche's own image of a music-making Socrates, who also seduces his followers with a redemptive vision. Nietzsche heralds Dionysus, the god of theatre and masks, as a philosopher, alluding to Plato's depiction of Socrates in the *Symposium*, though in a register that sides with tragic poetry against Plato. I treat this reference to Dionysus, the god who philosophizes, as a key to interpreting the theatrical

dimension of Nietzsche's philosophy, which in this light takes the form of a dramatic performance.

Like Plato, Nietzsche is as much a literary innovator as he is a philosophical thinker, drawing on mythology to express philosophical ideas, often employing metaphor and irony rather than straightforward speech, and relying on sometimes obscure allusions to convey multiple meanings. The main imagery that I focus on relates back to Plato and Sophocles, together manifesting the rivalry between philosophy and poetry that informs Nietzsche's conception of a tragic philosophy associated with his music-making Socrates. This ideal figure dawns on the horizon of nineteenth-century European culture as a radiant vision of Dionysian life affirmation. Against the backdrop of the transcendental turn taken by Kant and Schopenhauer, emphasizing the subjective basis of our knowledge about the world, Nietzsche's music-making Socrates emerges from the collective depths of our modern social imaginary. My analysis methodically unpacks Nietzsche's theatrical staging of this and related images, while engaging with his three major adversaries throughout, namely Plato, Kant, and Schopenhauer, critically examining the subversive manner of their reception.

I. PERIODIZATION AND SCHOLARSHIP

The impenetrability of Nietzsche's authorial intentions with respect to the canonical philosophers is readily acknowledged by scholars, whose paradoxical task is to tentatively dispel this divisive feature of his philosophy. Unsurprisingly, the results more often than not cannot help but be underwhelming. We are told that, in various roundabout ways, and to greater or lesser degrees of consistency, Nietzsche wrote what he believed

and believed what he wrote, in short, that his approachability as a philosopher depends upon a modicum of sincerity. I reject this literalistic assumption, a rejection whose consequences are radically disorienting, since it implies that we are dealing with a dubious dissimulator. Nobody's experience of, say, the texts of Shakespeare would be quite this disconcerting, because we accept in advance that his is an art of lying. Conversely, Nietzsche's readers must initially assume some sort of correspondence between what he wrote and what he actually believed. So, despite his theatricality, we are told by scholars that he really did believe in *something* called the will to power, even if a naturalist principle must be coaxed out of its glaringly metaphysical formulations;[2] that he really did believe in a fundamental human hierarchy of weaker and stronger types,[3] whose literal interpretation may make us shudder; or finally, that he believed in the *Übermensch*, which, if not a prototype for contemporary transhumanism,[4] signifies a potential pinnacle of unbridled elitism. At the very least, Nietzsche is said to flatter artistic genius above all else, be it in the form of a great individual or a great culture. I will not systematically address how each of these classic tropes are misconceived. Instead, I advance an interpretation of Nietzsche as a thoroughly theatrical ironist who takes the art of lying to unprecedented heights, namely by presenting it as his philosophy.

On my reading, Nietzsche's thought amounts to an immanent critique of culture by way of an intellectual seduction whose performance targets the gullibility of human

[2] E.g., Emden, "Nietzsche's Will to Power: Biology, Naturalism, and Normativity," *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 47, no. 1 (2016): 30–60.
[3] See Guay, "Order of Rank," in *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*, eds. Ken Gemes and John Richardson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 485–508.
[4] On this debate, see *Nietzsche and Transhumanism: Precursor or Enemy?*, ed. Yunus Tuncel (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2017).

desire. I provide an account of this critique within the context of what Nietzsche calls "tragic" philosophy, which I argue is already fully on display in *The Birth*. I read this book continuously with his later writings as a post-Romantic critique of Enlightenment values that exposes the moral prejudices embedded in metaphysical thinking. Many interpretations of Nietzsche's late critique of morality focus on its psychological foundation[5] and highlight the task of overcoming nihilism.[6] My project, by contrast, focuses on the aesthetics of Nietzsche's tragic philosophy, with an emphasis on its cultural, social-political dimensions. This is a controversial topic in Anglophone Nietzsche scholarship. Some disregard this dimension of Nietzsche's work by discussing his promotion of individualism[7] or his naturalism.[8] Others embrace his meritocratic elitism[9] or affirm his philosophy in the service of democratic pluralism,[10] and some

[5] E.g., Christopher Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness: Reading Nietzsche's* Genealogy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Brian Leiter, *Moral Psychology with Nietzsche* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
[6] E.g., Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).
[7] E.g., Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); Leslie Paul Thiele, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Aaron Ridley, "Nietzsche on Art and Freedom," *European Journal of Philosophy* 15 (2007): 204–24; Ken Gemes, "Nietzsche on Free Will, Autonomy, and the Sovereign Individual," in *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy*, eds. Ken Gemes and Simon May (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 33–49; Paul Franco, "Becoming Who You Are: Nietzsche on Self-Creation," *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 49, no. 1 (2018): 52–77.
[8] E.g., John Richardson, *Nietzsche's New Darwinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2015).
[9] E.g., Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Jeffrey Church, *Nietzsche's Culture of Humanity: Beyond Aristocracy and Democracy in the Early Period* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
[10] E.g., Tracy B. Strong, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Lawrence Hatab, *A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy: An Experiment in Postmodern Politics* (Chicago and La Salle IL: Open Court, 1995).

criticize his aristocratic radicalism,[11] highlight its fascistic tendencies,[12] or identify it with German imperialism.[13]

I take a different approach, reading Nietzsche's philosophy as an immanent critique of culture which, while motivated by social and political concerns, does not culminate in a positive social-political position. In support of this line of interpretation, I draw on the underappreciated work of James I. Porter, who characterizes Nietzsche as a wayward philologist. His controversial thesis is that Nietzsche subversively mimics the problematic fantasies of modern German culture in order to expose his reader's complicity in them.[14] My study analyzes how in *The Birth*, no less than in his later writings, Nietzsche lures his readers with a mytho-metaphysical ideal of cultural rejuvenation that he calls "tragic" and that he projects onto the horizon of Western history, but whose contradictory tensions at once mirror and undermine the grandiose delusions of his bourgeois milieu. In this way, Nietzsche's immanent critique of culture takes the form of its mimetic representation. Rather than endorsing the variety of cultural and existential alternatives associated with his supposed aristocratic radicalism, I argue

[11] E.g., Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Don Dombowsky, *Nietzsche's Machiavellian Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).
[12] E.g., Geoffrey Waite, *Nietzsche's Corps/e: Aesthetics, Politics, Prophecy, or, the Spectacular Technoculture of Everyday Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).
[13] E.g., William H. F. Altman, *Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche: The Philosophy of the Second Reich* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013).
[14] See e.g. James I. Porter, "Unconscious Agency in Nietzsche," Nietzsche-Studien 17 (1998): 153–95. François Laruelle's thesis in *Nietzsche contre Heidegger: Thèses pour une politique nietzschéenne* (Paris: Payot, 1977) to some extent complements Porter's. Laruelle similarly argues that Nietzsche mimics the polar imperatives of contemporary politics in order to expose his readers' complicity in them, revealing human identity as constituted by the crisscrossing tendencies of domination and subversion, mastery and rebellion, negation and affirmation. Waite, *Nietzsche's Corps/e*, 150, briefly discusses this view, namely that "Nietzsche *made himself* fascist in order better to fight fascism, he assumed the worst forms of Mastery to become the Rebel" (Laruelle, *Nietzsche*, 9).

that Nietzsche ironically exposes such alternatives as the duplicitous symptoms of a characteristically modern malaise. He mimics the hypocrisies and disavowals endemic to modern narratives of progress and decline. Building on Porter's I think sound repudiation of the usual scholarly periodization of Nietzsche's work, I illuminate lines of thematic continuity between his early and later works to flesh out the aesthetical coherence of his tragic philosophy. My approach breaks with the dominant interpretations of Nietzsche's aesthetics as one of creative life-affirmation, exemplified either by autonomous self-fashioning,[15] artistic genius,[16] physiological virility,[17] or collective cultural renewal.[18]

The common periodization of Nietzsche's works posits three distinct philosophical positions. A Schopenhauerian metaphysics of the will characterizes the first, lasting from roughly 1866–76. An abrupt positivistic, anti-metaphysical break with the earlier position marks the second, lasting between 1877–1882. The middle period transitions smoothly into the last one, where positivism gives way to the life-affirming goal of positing new values, coupled with a continual attack on metaphysical prejudices, from 1882–1888. In her 1894 philosophical biography, Lou Salomé inaugurates the

[15] E.g., Nehamas, *Life as Literature*; Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness*. Nehamas's account still prompts scholarly debate. See Christopher Janaway, "Self and Style: *Life as Literature* Revisited," *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 45, no. 2 (2014): 103–17; Robert Pippin, "Self-Interpreting Selves: Comments on Alexander Nehemas's *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*," *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 45, no. 2 (2014): 120–31; Alexander Nehamas, "Nietzsche, Drives, Selves, and Leonard Bernstein: A Reply to Christopher Janaway and Robert Pippin," *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 45, no. 2 (2014): 134–46. The ideal of aesthetic self-fashioning was popularized by the likes of Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984): 32–50; Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 23–69. For a comparison of these accounts, see Graham Longford, "'Sensitive Killers, Cruel Aesthetes, and Pitiless Poets': Foucault, Rorty, and the Ethics of Self-Fashioning," *Polity* 33, n. 4 (2001): 569–92.
[16] E.g., Leiter, *Moral Psychology*.
[17] E.g., Gregory Moore, *Nietzsche, Biology and Metaphor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
[18] E.g., Andrew Huddleston, *Nietzsche on the Decadence and Flourishing of Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

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."[19] We find this familiar if tendentious periodization of Nietzsche's works in a host of biographies,[20] not to mention its pervasive influence on scholarship.[21]

We find a starting point for rejecting the Schopenhauerian interpretation of Nietzsche's early work in the major influence of Friedrich Albert Lange, whose *History of Materialism* Nietzsche reads in 1866.[22] The following year, in his unpublished

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[19] Lou Salomé, *Nietzsche*, trans. Siegfried Mandel (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 135.

[20] Biographers locate Nietzsche's break with Schopenhauer around 1876, several years after BT. E.g., Ronald Hayman, *Nietzsche*: *A Critical Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 195; R. J. Hollingdale, *Nietzsche: The Man and his Philosophy* (London: ARK, 1985), 91–106, 119–20; Rüdiger Safranski, *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, trans. Shelley Frisch (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), 135, 157; Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 221, 242–43; Sue Prideaux, *Nietzsche, I Am Dynamite! A Life of Nietzsche* (New York: Random House, 2018), 157, 172–76.

[21] While scholars may tend to conflate the last two periods, they consistently date the emergence of Nietzsche's mature, anti-metaphysical position sometime after BT, regardless of whether that work is considered to be Schopenhauerian. But the assumption of Nietzsche's early Schopenhauerianism is, to a large extent, still the prevailing view, as evidenced by the following examples. Treating this periodization as undisputed, Nadeem J. Z. Hussain, "Nietzsche's Positivism," *European Journal of Philosophy* 12, no. 3 (2004), 364–65 n. 98, communicates the significant weight of its canonicity, which remains firmly entrenched. E.g. Paul Franco, *Nietzsche's Enlightenment: The Free-Spirit Trilogy of the Middle Period* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 1–13; Matthew H. Meyer, *Reading Nietzsche Through the Ancients* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 13, 36, 39; Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Ethics and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), ch. 13; Paolo D'Iorio, *Nietzsche's Journey to Sorrento: Genesis of the Philosophy of the Free Spirit*, trans. Sylvia Gorelick (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 49; Laurence Lampert, *What A Philosopher Is: Becoming Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 15 n. 17. Christian J. Emden, *Nietzsche's Naturalism: Philosophy and the Life Sciences in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 23, is a notable exception, though he takes a naturalist approach that is unconcerned with BT.

[22] For a discussion of Lange's early influence on Nietzsche, see James I. Porter, *The Invention of Dionysus: An Essay on* The Birth of Tragedy (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 9–16. George J. Stack, *Lange and Nietzsche* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1983) analyzes the influence of Lange without challenging the traditional periodization of Nietzsche's early position. Keith Ansell-Pearson, "The Question of F. A. Lange's Influence on Nietzsche: A Critique of Recent Research from the Standpoint of the Dionysian," *Nietzsche-Studien* 17 (1988): 539–554, challenges Stack's reading of Lange and the extent of Lange's influence on Nietzsche. For approaches that also attempt a Langean analysis of Nietzsche's early work, see e.g., Claudia Crawford, *The Beginnings of Nietzsche's Theory of Language* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter,

manuscript "On Schopenhauer," Nietzsche advances a lucid critique of Schopenhauer's whole conception of the will as the thing in itself, roughly five years before he publishes *The Birth*.[23] R. J. Hollingdale accurately summarizes Lange's neo-Kantian thesis, which collapses the distinction between appearances and things in themselves.[24]

> According to Lange, ultimate reality is not only unknowable, as Kant maintained, but the very *idea* of it is a consequence of the way we think; that is, the concept of the thing-in-itself is part of the phenomenal world. Translated into Schopenhauerian terms, the will is nothing but one more idea. Because even the idea of ultimate reality must belong to the plane of appearance, says Lange, nothing meaningful can be said about it.[25]

In spite of this, Hollingdale maintains that *The Birth* remains fundamentally Schopenhauerian,[26] pushing the anti-metaphysical ramifications of Lange's influence into Nietzsche's mature period, where it poses some confusion for such doctrines as the will to power and eternal recurrence. Hollingdale's clear acknowledgement of Lange's early influence, only to deny its implications for *The Birth*, is still a common move in contemporary biographies.[27] This is in line with the common scholarly consensus, which

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1988); Peter Durno Murray, *Nietzsche's Affirmative Morality: A Revaluation Based in the Dionysian Worldview* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999).

[23] Scholars now more widely acknowledge the evidence of Nietzsche's early rejection of Schopenhauer's metaphysics in OS, on which see Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 57–73.

[24] Béatrice Han-Pile, "Nietzsche's Metaphysics in the *Birth of Tragedy*," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 3 (2006), holds that Nietzsche only collapses this distinction in GS, even though his adherence to it in BT renders his position self-contradictory (p. 396).

[25] Hollingdale, *Nietzsche*, 74.

[26] Ibid., pp. 83, 89–90. This reading remains pervasive. E.g. Aaron Ridley, "Nietzsche on Tragedy," *The Monist* 102 (2019): 316–330; Dylan Jaggard, "Dionysus versus Dionysus," in *Nietzsche and Antiquity: His Reaction and Response to the Classical Tradition*, ed. Paul Bishop (Boydell & Brewer: 2013), 260-275. Julian Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 56, maintains that Nietzsche holds fast to Schopenhauer's metaphysics up until 1876, only to backslide in 1888 (Julian Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Art* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992)), 139–40. Ivan Soll similarly emphasizes Schopenhauer's persistent influence in "Pessimism and the Tragic View of Life: Reconsiderations of Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*," in *Reading Nietzsche*, eds. Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 104–131.

[27] Over fifty years later, in one of the most popular philosophical accounts of Nietzsche's life to date, Prideaux does the same. In her *Nietzsche*, Prideaux points out Lange's early influence (p. 50), but only

emphasizes a contrast between Nietzsche's early metaphysical position and his later critical attitudes.

Julian Young and Henry Staten argue that Nietzsche's early Schopenhauerian position only posits the will as "the most universal form of appearance" (NF-1870 7[165]) that the true thing in itself transcends as Absolute Presence.[28] This reading identifies Nietzsche's conception of the primordial unity (*das Ur-Eine*) with an "unrepresentable universality"[29] that in Schopenhauer refers to the "transcendent plane of being," to the One beyond the will.[30] However, this reading fails to cohere with Nietzsche's Langean critique of the thing in itself in "On Schopenhauer," which critiques the very notion of a *Ding an sich* in its Kantian no less than Schopenhauerian formulation.

> What is true of the three predicates of unity, eternity (i.e. timelessness), liberty (i.e. lacking any reason [*Grundlosigkeit*]) is the same as what is true of the thing-in-itself: they are tied inseparably to our organisation one and all, so that it is extremely doubtful that they have any meaning at all outside the sphere of human knowledge. But that they should pertain to the thing-in-itself, because their

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stresses its anti-metaphysical impact in the years following BT (p. 185). Hayman, *Nietzsche*, 82, points out Lange's early influence but makes no mention of it in his chapter on BT. In his *Nietzsche*, Safranski superficially reconciles Lange's neo-Kantianism with the Schopenhauerianism of BT, whereby the dark striving of "*the* primary life force," though no longer assignable to the thing in itself, remains conceptually intact, along with the mystical "possibility of transcendent knowledge" (p. 48). Young, *Philosophical Biography*, 89–95, makes a similar move. However, in typical fashion, Safranski's account of Nietzsche's emergent anti-metaphysical attitude is unquestionably Langean (pp. 160–61, 164). Cf. Clark's Langean characterization of Nietzsche's mature view in *Truth and Philosophy*, 203. Lange's superficial confluence with Nietzsche's purported Schopenhauerianism, only to faithfully crop up ten years later as its anti-metaphysical opponent, is hard to justify.

[28] Young's formulation of this argument in his *Philosophical Biography*, 89–95, supports his earlier interpretation of Schopenhauer in *Willing and Unwilling: A Study in the Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), according to which an "ultimate level of being" (p. 131) resides beyond the will as the true thing in itself, an argument he repeats in *Philosophical Biography*, 84–86. Henry Staten, "*The Birth of Tragedy* Reconstructed," *Studies in Romanticism* 29, no. 1 (Spring, 1990): 19 n. 12, similarly entertains this reading of Schopenhauer and applies it to BT. In Chapter 2, I analyze how Schopenhauer is inconsistent on this central feature of his philosophy.

[29] Staten, "*Birth of Tragedy* Reconstructed," 17.

[30] Young, *Willing and Unwilling*, 133; *Philosophical Biography*, 84.

> opposites rule in the world of appearances, is something that neither K[ant] nor Sch. will be able to prove to us . . . [because the thing-in-itself] is continually having to raise a loan from the world of appearances, i.e. transfer the concept of multiplicity, temporality and causality to itself. (OS 3)

Nietzsche criticizes the predicate of unity as a privation of plurality that translates from the realm of appearances. Hence, his critique of the will as the thing in itself applies just as well to his conception of the primordial unity, which predicates of transcendent being the unity, eternity, and liberty (groundlessness) that are "tied inseparably to our organization." As we saw in the above citation from Hollingdale, Lange posits that even the idea of the thing in itself is a product of cognition. Nietzsche cites the following passage from Lange in his 1866 letter to Gersdorff. "Thus the true essence of things — the thing-in-itself — is not only unknown to us; the concept of it is neither more nor less than the final product of an antithesis which is determined by our organization, an antithesis of which we do not know whether it has any meaning outside our experience or not" (BVN-1866 517).[31] The contradiction between being and becoming, like that between reality and appearances, is a representation produced by our psychophysiological organization, which is itself a mere semblance, since, as Lange states, "our real organization is . . . as much unknown to us as real external things are. We continually have before us nothing but the product of both" (ibid).[32] The language of semblance is problematic but unavoidable.

[31] Translated by Christopher Middleton, *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), 16. See Friedrich Albert Lange, *History of Materialism and Criticism of its Present Importance*, 2nd ed., 3 Vols., trans. Ernest Chester Thomas (Boston: Osgood, 1877), 2:217–18.
[32] See Lange, *History of Materialism*, 3:219.

In light of such evidence, Porter offers a singular, rigorous critique of the common periodization. In *Philology of the Future*, he analyzes the development of Nietzsche's early philological subversion of the modern historical sense and the need for historical meaning that exposes the cultural fantasies at play in the German construction of classical antiquity. Nietzsche's own philological constructions mirror the irresolvable tensions and contradictory disavowals endemic to these fantasies.[33] Porter argues that Nietzsche's methodology remains unchanged throughout his writing career and develops well before *The Birth*. In *Invention of Dionysus*, he examines how Lange's neo-Kantian demystification of the metaphysical tradition influences Nietzsche's early philosophical position, which at once affirms the anthropological *need* for a metaphysical distinction between reality and appearance even after this distinction is itself understood to be a mere phenomenal appearance and is therefore no longer unproblematically believed in. The metaphysical distinction between being and becoming is the ineliminable basis of subjective representation through which we structure our reality. It is by virtue of this distinction that we posit the cultural values and societal goals that stabilize the world. We need this because as human beings we are fundamentally mythopoetic creatures who cannot help but posit cultural ideals, particular myths projected by a society that shape our worldviews. Such representations are collective constructs grounded in nonrational beliefs about the ultimate value of human life. The project of Enlightenment critique was to undermine the validity of myth in order to free ourselves from archaic, ancestral

[33] For obvious reasons, this reading strongly opposes a literalist reduction of Nietzsche's thought to its historical context. E.g., Bernasconi, "Racialized Breeding;" Robert C. Holub, *Nietzsche in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

superstitions. This resulted in the recognition of modern cultural ideals as mere appearances themselves. We discover our reality to be the outcome of an irreversible process of cultural-historical conditioning, a human construction grounded in metaphysical thinking. However, as myth-producing, value-positing creatures of habit, we cannot live without belief in these appearances, or without collective models of self-understanding that are entirely fictional.

While the metaphysical distinction between appearance and reality is thereby sublated (both demolished and preserved), the result is a self-conscious understanding of thoroughly nonrational belief, rather than a rational synthesis, which remains untenable, since as Porter observes, "there is a profound paradox in having to register one's belief in the inescapable necessity of metaphysical assumptions that by themselves inspire absolutely no belief."[34] While according to Nietzsche's tragic philosophy art inspires such belief — the inspiration that he calls *Dionysian* — this illusion is, according to Porter, "plainly a mirror of modernity's yearning for a Beyond."[35] Another illusion, namely that of a meaningless world stripped of metaphysical qualities, enmeshes this yearning, an illusion that is also troublingly Dionysian insofar as it masks the banality of existence with the appearance of metaphysical horror. The nihilistic vacuity of existence is no less of a metaphysical appearance, since the Beyond persists in the experience of its apparent loss. Porter asks conclusively, "isn't the Dionysian precisely the consummate form of escapism and the cleverest seduction to aesthetic illusion, in the guise of the absence of

[34] Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 20.
[35] Ibid., 57.

all such illusion?"[36] The final seduction of Nietzsche's anti-metaphysical Dionysianism (and a stance already taken in *The Birth*) is the illusory appearance of having freed oneself from the deceptive force of metaphysics, characterized by the distinction between appearance and reality. Metaphysical thinking imbues life with a nonempirical, ideal content that juxtaposes appearances in relation to an invisible value that we posit as the nonhuman kernel of reality but which, beneath this deception, reveals itself as a human projection, at which point metaphysical thinking, even after its demystification, persists precisely in our psychological disavowal of it. Even the mundane indifference of the world is just another intermittent appearance, where the canvas of our aesthetic construction of reality appears, yet again, to disappear.

This last point elucidates a crucial insight that goes largely unheeded among scholars and importantly distinguishes my approach from others. Concerning the role of illusion in *The Birth*, interpreters of all stripes mainly emphasize its salvific power, its protective function in a world devoid of meaning,[37] or the notion that we must become well disposed toward illusion as, for instance, a benign feature of art that Plato reactively slandered.[38] Such readings share the idea that we must develop a sympathetic relationship to illusion given its intrinsic value as a necessary condition for life's flourishing. Alternatively, Porter's analysis demonstrates that life's meaninglessness can only remain an appearance, given the fictive quality of any true world as it would exist in itself. This

[36] Ibid., 85.
[37] See n. 44 below, where I provide a list of non-Schopenhauerian readings that subscribe to this view, one held in common with the Schopenhauerian reading that we find in e.g. Young, *Philosophy of Art*, ch. 2; Young, *Philosophy of Religion*, ch. 2.
[38] Timothy Stoll, "Nietzsche and Schiller on Aesthetic Semblance," *The Monist* 102, no. 3 (2019): 331–48.

in turn problematizes the purported salvific quality of illusion, one propelled — and hence in an important sense constituted — by the very imaginary horror against which it defends. We are thus left with illusion *without ground*, that is, without any available recourse to its rational demystification. As I have said, Nietzsche posits the ineluctability of our collective social conditioning. We cannot escape the nonrational world that we construct, which cannot fail to have meaning for us, however strongly we might frighten ourselves with its apparent dissolution. However, we must not for that reason simply remain well disposed towards illusion. On my reading, Nietzsche's method of immanent critique aims to expose the contradictions inherent in our historically contingent beliefs, especially those produced by the modern revolutionary tendency to inaugurate grand new ideals upon the ruins of the old. In the spectacular form of its dramatic re-enactment, Nietzsche displays how the rational demystification of myth characteristic of Enlightenment critique relapses into dogmatism. He exposes this contradictory tendency in the form of its exaggeration: the increasing violence of its paroxysmal intensity is supposed to leave us fundamentally suspicious of the illusions that it produces, but not without seducing us with them first, given the failure of Enlightenment reason to successfully dispel our need for myth. Nietzsche's ironical seduction panders to this need and serves to inoculate us against the illusion of its elimination, laying bare not only the impotence of rational critique but its complicity in the very structure of irrational belief that it targets.

Since Nietzsche communicates such insights performatively rather than discursively, his attitude is extremely difficult to pin down. Unsettled by *The Birth*'s

profound ambiguities, Eric Blondel tentatively characterizes Nietzsche's early position as "a post-romantic reaction to the intellectuality of the *Aufklärung*, 'soulless' science, the Hegelian system," without a regression to Schopenhauer's metaphysics. Unfortunately, Blondel takes credit for this insight as if Nietzsche held this position "without suspecting it," in other words, as if the text were not an intentional representation of the dilemma that ensues, whereby redemption in appearance

> either ultimately falls within the field of metaphysics, as in the case of Schopenhauer's philosophy, which is a second-degree metaphysics in so far as it goes beyond the limits assigned by Kantian transcendental philosophy, or else it is excluded from metaphysics, and ends up only as an *illusion* that, for lack of a concept or word to designate it, remains a mute limit on the outer perimeter of thought.[39]

Concerning Nietzsche's early attitude toward metaphysics, Blondel briefly entertains a reading compatible with Porter's, wherein Nietzsche sublates the distinction between reality and appearance and paradoxically affirms truth as an illusion. "To say this is both to deny metaphysics, its *verum index sui* and, in speaking of a sort of *illusion index veritatis*, to reconstitute it furtively. In short, it involves a counter-discourse, which oscillates between the non-discursive ('art') and a discourse that is metaphysical ('truth')."[40] However, Blondel goes on to describe Nietzsche's first "Schopenhauerian stage" as one in which "genius and art . . . are presented as means of access to the thing-in-itself."[41] Such a chronology obscures both the meaning of Nietzsche's early work as well as its resonance with his later "optimism." I agree with Porter's thesis that *The Birth*

[39] Eric Blondel, *Nietzsche, The Body and Culture: Philosophy as a Philological Genealogy*, trans. Seán Hand (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 25.
[40] Ibid., 26.
[41] Ibid., 36.

must be read as an expression of a robust philosophical position that is in many ways compatible with his mature outlook. Note how Blondel undermines his two-stage periodization in his interpretation of the following passage from Nietzsche's "first stage," on the relationship between skepticism and tragic knowledge.

> *The philosopher of tragic knowledge*. He does not restrain the uncontrolled drive for knowledge through metaphysics. He establishes no new faith. He feels that the *removal of the ground of metaphysics* from underfoot is tragic and yet can never be satisfied by the bright whirligig of the sciences. He is building a new *life*: he restores art to its rights. The philosopher of *desperate knowledge* will be absorbed by blind science: knowledge at all costs. For the tragic philosopher the *image of existence* is completed by the fact that the metaphysical only appears in anthropomorphic form. He is not a *sceptic*. Here a concept must be *created*: for scepticism is not the goal. The drive for knowledge, having arrived at its limits, turns against itself in order to proceed to a *critique of knowledge*. Knowledge in the service of the best life. One must *want* even *illusion* — that is where the tragic lies. (NF-1872 19[35])

For Blondel, such a passage "involves a counter-discourse, which oscillates between non-discursive ('art') and a discourse that is necessarily metaphysical ('truth')."[42] But this characterization parallels Nietzsche's duplicitous "second stage," as a metaphysical discourse that is at once an anti-metaphysical *anti-discourse*.[43]

While recent commentaries continue to challenge the pervasive view that Nietzsche commits himself to Schopenhauer's pessimism and/or metaphysics in *The Birth*, most still support the view that tragic myth communicates some fundamental truth about nature or the meaning of life, features that my reading problematizes. For instance, Ken Gemes and Chris Sykes interpret life's meaninglessness as the objective feature of

[42] Ibid., 26.
[43] Ibid., 36.

reality that Nietzsche's aesthetic illusion protects against,[44] and Béatrice Han-Pile holds that Nietzsche sincerely endorses the ontological value of tragic myth.[45] Han-Pile further concludes that Porter's reading is "of little philosophical interest"[46] based on a superficial misinterpretation of his position. She erroneously claims that he follows De Man[47] when he is consistently critical of De Man's reading, which reduces metaphysical thinking to the linguistic and rhetorical structures of cognition, whereas for Porter it is *anthropological*: it coincides with our instinctual, mythopoetic construction of reality and is ineliminable from our positing of cultural ideals.[48] His account does not support Derrida's deconstructionist reading, according to which interpretation is an indecisive matter of free play.[49] Neither does it support an emphasis on the non-subjective,

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[44] Ken Gemes and Chris Sykes, "Nietzsche's Illusion," in *Nietzsche on Art and Life*, ed. Daniel Came (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 81, 85, 104. This view is ubiquitous. E.g., M. S. Silk and J. P. Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 351–52, 380; Douglas Burnham and Martin Jesinghausen, *Nietzsche's* The Birth of Tragedy: *A Reader's Guide* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 52, 70–71; Paul Raimond Daniels, *Nietzsche and* The Birth of Tragedy (New York: Routledge, 2014), 21, 42–43, 81, 98–104; Daniel Came, "The Themes of Affirmation and Illusion in *the Birth of Tragedy* and Beyond," in *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*, eds. Ken Gemes and John Richardson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 209–225; Clark, *Ethics and Politics*, ch. 11; Ivan Soll, "Schopenhauer as Nietzsche's 'Great Teacher' and 'Antipode,'" in *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*, eds. Ken Gemes and John Richardson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 163–176; Andrew Huddleston, "Nietzsche on Nihilism: A Unifying Thread," *Philosophers' Imprint* 19, no. 11 (2019): 6.

[45] Han-Pile, "Nietzsche's Metaphysics," 380–82, 386, 390, 395–96. As do e.g. Burnham and Jesinghausen, *Birth of Tragedy*; Daniels, *Birth of Tragedy*. Burnham and Jesinghausen state that "Nietzsche too is seeking to justify the world metaphysically. . . . [H]ow can metaphysical principles be demonstrated as physically manifest in the phenomena of the empirical world? Nietzsche's answer here is that only in art does genuine metaphysics become manifest. He sees the developments in culture, which he thinks of as largely determined through developments in the arts, as indicators of metaphysical tendencies" (p. 45). Without naming them as metaphysical per say, Daniels still holds that the "Apolline and Dionysiac are foremost artistic forces, or *drives* . . . and are seen as aestheticized forces of nature *unmediated by the human subject* (emphasis added). This lends a curious, quasi-ontological air to this dialectical pair of gods, and opens the door to understanding Nietzsche's response to the wider German philosophical tradition" (p. 3). He repeats this point on pp. 50, 70.

[46] Han-Pile, "Nietzsche's Metaphysics," 390.

[47] Ibid., 389.

[48] Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 189 n. 3. See also pp. 79–80, 176–77 n. 31

[49] Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979). Clark outlines these positions in *Truth and Philosophy*, ch. 1.3.

groundless chaos of Being[50] (another metaphysical phantasm), nor Deleuze's ontological distinction between active and reactive forces,[51] whose binarism remains pervasive throughout the literature, variously couched in terms of decadent and virile types or sick and healthy cultures.[52]

This type of binarism, typical of many such hierarchical value judgements commonly taken at face value throughout Nietzsche's writings, shows from a psychological standpoint just how inescapable the delusions of metaphysical thinking really are. As Daniel Livingstone Smith remarks, "philosophers' metaphysical intuitions may be grounded in the same cognitive biases that are responsible for folk-metaphysical commitments," referring specifically to any natural hierarchy of types.[53] To take a rather blunt historical example, the great chain of being displays how the fictitious taxonomical division of life into natural kinds presupposes the type of metaphysical essentialism that Livingstone refers to. This type of prejudice informs Nietzsche's typological casting of

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[50] E.g., Jean Granier, "Nietzsche's Conception of Chaos" and "Perspectivism and Interpretation," in *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, ed. David B. Allison (New York: Dell, 1977), 135–141, 190–200; John Sallis, *Crossings: Nietzsche and the Space of Tragedy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

[51] Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), ch. 2. On the problematic politico-ontological implications of Deleuze's schematization of Nietzsche's thought in terms of activity and reactivity, see Ashley Woodward, "Deleuze, Nietzsche, and the Overcoming of Nihilism," *Continental Philosophy Review* 46 (2013): 115–147.

[52] Scholars generally accept that Nietzsche straddles the line dividing these opposing spheres (since he tells us as much) without questioning this distinction. E.g., Blondel, *Body and Culture*, ch. 10; Kofman, "Metaphor, Symbol, Metamorphosis"; Daniel R. Ahern, *Nietzsche as Cultural Physician* (State College: Penn State University Press, 1995); Daniel W. Conway, *Nietzsche's Dangerous Game* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Jacqueline Scott, "Nietzsche and Decadence: The Revaluation of Morality," *Continental Philosophy Review* 31 (1998): 57–78; Moore, *Biology and Metaphor*; Huddleston, *Decadence and Flourishing*; Nicholas D. More, "The Philosophy of Decadence," in *Decadence and Literature*, eds. Jane Desmarais and David Weir (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 184–99.

[53] Daniel Livingstone Smith, "Paradoxes of Dehumanization," *Social Theory and Practice*, 42, no. 2 (2016): 420 n. 15. He references Sarah-Jane Leslie, "Essence and Natural Kinds: When Science Meets Preschooler Intuition," in *Oxford Studies in Epistemology, Vol. 4*, eds. Tamar Szabó Gendler and John Hathorne (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 108–165.

individuals, societies, religions, races, and whole historical periods as manifestations of distinct instinctive essences that fit on a scale distinguishing the weak from the strong, an intuition characteristic of what Sarah-Jane Leslie calls "quintessentialism."[54] However, in Nietzsche's hands, the allure of rank ordering (*Rangordnung*) demands a level of hermeneutical suspicion that is in this case seldom exercised by scholars, and tellingly so. At least as early as 1873, in his unpublished essay "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense," Nietzsche discredits the foundational framework by which we measure knowledge claims whose truth we derive from the "construction of a pyramidal order according to castes and degrees, the creation of a new world of laws, privileges, subordinations [and] definitions of borders" (p. 146). By Nietzsche's own lights, it is hard to see how a hierarchy of decadent and virile types or sick and healthy cultures could correspond to anything other than its imaginary construction. While the degree of an individual or a culture's hierarchical harmony supposedly forms the internal basis of its essential character, its *quintessence*, this cognitive bias is an illusory product of our thinking.

For many of the reasons listed above, Porter's reading of Nietzsche opposes that of Leo Strauss and his followers. The central theme of Strauss's reading is the antagonism between radical historicism, the view that justice is historically relative, and natural right, the view that justice exhibits a natural order.[55] Strauss interprets the will to power as Nietzsche's solution to the problem of historicism as it provides a modern basis for

[54] See Leslie, "Essence and Natural Kinds."
[55] Leo Strauss, *On Nietzsche's* Thus Spoke Zarathustra, ed. Richard L. Velkley (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2017), ch. 1. Cf. George Grant, *Time as History*. *CBC Massey Lectures 1969* (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1974).

natural hierarchy.[56] The highest human type creates cultural values, which are in no way fixed. While the creation of values is a transhistorical expression of natural right, values themselves are historically conditioned. In this way historicism is reconciled with natural right.[57] The good is not a static Platonic form[58] but is immanently realized through the transvaluing revolutions of history. The good finds its highest expression in the self-recognition of the philosopher as a creator and legislator, whose values ultimately resemble Plato's noble lie insofar as they are human creations masquerading as truths. The crisis of nihilism, that of life's value-lessness, attends the historical emergence of a self-consciousness of the will to power. Nihilism signifies the crisis of humanity's creative responsibility in relation to nature, which does not supply us with values and in this sense resembles an unfathomable chaos. Here Strauss's notorious esoteric/exoteric distinction emerges.[59] Nietzsche's exoteric teaching is that humanity must create values in the face of nihilism by exercising the will to power. However, only the philosopher understands the creative essence of this teaching; he bears the responsibility of humanity's creative task and is able to fulfill it. This is the teaching's esoteric dimension, whose subjective significance only the philosopher comprehends as one who draws on a characteristic strength that others lack.[60]

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[56] Strauss, *Nietzsche's* Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 139.
[57] Laurence Lampert, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 90–93.
[58] Leo Strauss, "Note on the Plan of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*," in *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche*, 189; Lampert, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche*, 28–30.
[59] Stanley Rosen, *The Ancients and the Moderns: Rethinking Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 196–202; Stanley Rosen, *The Mask of Enlightenment: Nietzsche's* Zarathustra (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 15–16, 137–38, 236, 247–49; Lampert, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche*, 20–24, 126–28.
[60] Strauss, *Nietzsche's* Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 161.

The Straussian line of interpretation, which emphasizes the conservative value of meritocratic elitism over that of liberal egalitarianism, contrasts with neopragmatist and naturalist interpretations. The neopragmatist appropriation of Nietzsche's thought attempts to make use of his project of the private individual's creative self-fashioning by putting this into the service of liberal pluralism.[61] The politically neutral, naturalist reading of Nietzsche analyzes his denial of free will in light of a hardline psychological determinism, one which illuminates his perspectivism in the context of scientific naturalism.[62] For the neopragmatist, Nietzsche's perspectivism illuminates the self-understanding of the postmodern subject as one who affirms her private, autonomous individuality through a process of aesthetic self-creation. This position makes use of perspectivism for neopragmatism's political ends by defanging Nietzsche's philosophy of its unpalatable political implications, expressed in his critique of herd morality, his apparent support of eugenics, and his unapologetic elitism. The naturalist position attempts to avoid domesticating Nietzsche in this way by setting aside the alarming political dimensions of his thought, intending solely to demonstrate the scientifically objective quality of his perspectivist psychology.[63] While the neopragmatist position has been criticized for appropriating a philosophy whose very core opposes the values of liberal pluralism,[64] the naturalist interpretation has been criticized in light of Nietzsche's

[61] E.g., Nehamas, *Life as Literature*; Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*.
[62] E.g., Richardson, *New Darwinism*; Leiter, *Moral Psychology*.
[63] E.g., Brian Leiter, "Perspectivism in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*," in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, and Morality: Essays on Nietzsche's* Genealogy of Morals, ed. Richard Schacht, 334–357 (Oakland: University of California Press, 1994); *Nietzsche on Morality*.
[64] E.g., Daniel W. Conway, "Disembodied Perspectives: Nietzsche contra Rorty," *Nietzsche-Studien* 21 (1992): 281–289; Daniel W. Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

critique of the value of truth, rooted in his analysis of an asceticism common to both science and religion.[65]

Porter's account of Nietzsche's position is not motivated in these directions. We may straightforwardly divide his account into four steps. First, it posits that the horizon of human knowledge circumscribes our comprehension, or rather incomprehension, of nature. We cannot grasp nature from a nonhuman perspective. This is not a controversial thesis, indeed it is that of an anthropological relativism that passes through Kant and leads to a variety of widely held contemporary views. It involves a crucial transvaluation of the distinction between appearances and reality. Our cultural values constitute the virtual horizon of appearances, which we designate "ideality," while science is restricted to the natural phenomena this horizon circumscribes, which we more or less naively designate "reality." Hence, secondly, the metaphysical distinction between the real and the ideal, between appearance and reality, is inextricable from human experience. This is not to say, with Kant, that beyond the limit of scientific knowledge lies the sphere of metaphysics. Rather, this limit is already metaphysical, beyond which our cultural ideals amount to mythical constructions. In addition, these mythical constructions are historically conditioned. Thirdly, what makes Nietzsche's anthropological relativism still controversial today is for Porter its radically subjectivist character. Human subjectivity is collectively constituted by a historically conditioned mythical horizon that cannot be transcended. However, the myth of its transcendence still persists for science, in Nietzsche's case for philology, which attempts to grasp the objective truth about classical

[65] E.g., Dirk R. Johnson, *Nietzsche's Anti-Darwinism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

antiquity. For Nietzsche, the philological construction of classical antiquity ends up reflecting the myths endemic to modernity, and this applies no less to our scientific understanding of nature, which is culturally formed. Lastly, the mythical horizon of human experience, as the sociocultural lens through which we interpret nature, no longer delimits scientific knowledge but tragically infects it.

II. OVERVIEW

Porter's challenge to the common periodization of Nietzsche's writings offers a new interpretive approach that opens up unique avenues for further exploration. My project builds on Porter's analysis and breaks not only with the conventional Schopenhauerian assessment of *The Birth* but with recent non-Schopenhauerian interpretations as well. While Porter's main concern is with Nietzsche's early writings, this study provides a reading of *The Birth* in relation to Nietzsche's later writings and draws lines of thematic continuity throughout his oeuvre. I argue that the figure connecting Nietzsche's early and later works is none other than Socrates, whose depiction consistently ties together the central themes of optimism, pessimism, and tragedy. I take Nietzsche's depiction of Socrates as the guiding thread of my discussion from beginning to end. Wrapping up my introduction, I lay out the philosophical significance of these themes with a synopsis of *The Birth*, followed by an overview of the chapters in this study. While it may sound counterintuitive, this overview is best structured in reverse chronological order. I shall start with the last chapter and run through to the beginning.

The philosophical antagonism between optimism, pessimism, and tragedy in ancient Greece largely structures *The Birth*, whose implicit narrative runs as follows.

Nietzsche presciently posits the existence of pre-Homeric culture in the Bronze Age,[66] wherein the primeval Greeks confront the nonrational abyss of nature and in the face of its cosmic indifference draw a pessimistic conclusion: the value of human existence amounts to nought. The Greek gods emerge as a cultural remedy to pessimism. Divine spectators and agents make human life meaningful. Homeric art flourishes. In the sixth century, the pre-Socratic philosophers begin to investigate nature. The development of pre-Socratic intellectualism accounts for how the Greeks, emerging from the instinctual wilderness of the Bronze Age, are led into the Socratic daylight of moral-rational order.[67] The success of their investigations gives rise to the secular ideal of scientific optimism, which designates a faith in the salvific power of knowledge, its value as a moral-rational panacea.[68] Socrates embodies the triumph of this ideal, whose world-historical success is unprecedented, given the perspective of early Greek pessimism. Indeed, another ideal had to be defeated in order for scientific optimism to triumph. This counter-ideal is found in

[66] Archeological support for the Bronze Age is cemented over the course of the next century. See Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, 163–64.

[67] Though this is not made explicit, PTAG covers the territory that leads to the emergence of Socrates in BT and reads like its prequel. As James I. Porter, "Nietzsche and Tragedy," in *A Companion to Tragedy*, ed. Rebecca Bushnell (Malden MA: Blackwell, 2005), 83, points out, "decline in Greek culture sets in already with the Presocratics, which leaves that *other* tragic age, the age of Aeschylus to Euripides, and, indeed, the very meaning of 'tragic knowledge,' in a precarious state indeed."

[68] Despite the anachronistic flavour of Nietzsche's interpretation of Anaximander, for whom human beings must "pay penance and be judged for their injustices" (PTAG 4), it displays a conception of divine justice consistent with the development of bad conscience in GM II, predicated on the debtor-creditor relationship and requiring "a divine audience . . . to appreciate the spectacle that began then." One such divine spectator is "Heraclitus' 'great child', call him Zeus or fate" (GM II.16), who in BT is identical with "the essential being which gives itself eternal pleasure as the creator and spectator [*Schöpfer und Zuschauer*] of that comedy of art" (BT 5), namely human existence, whose reality is hitherto *justified*. In the case of Heraclitus's predecessor Anaximander, Nietzsche interprets this justification from a moral-rational perspective, albeit tinged with the pessimism that is in the process of being overcome. The development of pre-Socratic intellectualism that foregrounds the emergence of Socratism in BT may thus be seen to parallel the development of bad conscience in GM II, linking the two works as grand narratives of cultural decline coupled with the expectation of its renewal.

Attic tragedy, which flourishes in the fifth century. An underrecognized feature of Nietzsche's depiction of Attic tragedy is that it responds to the conflict between optimism and pessimism.[69] Scientific optimism sharply opposes the old religious tradition that had arisen from pessimism as a cultural remedy. The power of tragic art emerges from this conflict as a healing balm that impels the Greeks to affirm life as an aesthetic phenomenon, rather than a moral-rational one. Ancient tragic culture exhibits a religious hallowing of life that is neither pessimistic nor optimistic. In sum, Nietzsche depicts pessimism as the primeval Greek standpoint out of which traditional religion arises. Scientific optimism challenges the religious tradition whose life-affirming instincts flourish in Attic tragedy, which confronts pessimism while rebuking the ideal of humanity's moral-rational sovereignty. This ephemeral artform sublimely squanders, rather than preserves, the mythopoetic instincts that originally gave rise to the Olympians. Due in large part to Plato's infatuation with Socrates, scientific optimism proves victorious, destroying the newborn art of tragedy.

In Chapter 6, I explore how this narrative plays out in Nietzsche's account of the Oedipus saga. Oedipus's moral-rational confidence exemplifies the optimistic pursuit of scientific knowledge, which comes to wreck upon his insight into the terrible depths of nature, manifested in the horrific crimes that culminate in his tragic self-undoing. This

[69] In *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, Silk and Stern inconsistently date the emergence of scientific optimism in BT. Nietzsche's allusion to the secular demystification of Greek religion in §10 — no doubt a result of bourgeoning rationalism — apparently refers to the period between 7–6 B.C. (p. 66). They thus rightly emphasize that "Socratism is logically prior to Socrates and indeed *chronologically* prior as well" (p. 153) but go on to state that Nietzsche pivotally restricts "the operations of rationalism to the fifth century and later" (p. 163). Considering the emergence of pre-Socratic science as part of the historical background of BT remedies this inconsistency, especially in light of PTAG.

undermines the noble ruler's moral-rational sovereignty, displayed by his ability to solve the Sphinx's riddle. I discuss how Nietzsche's account of the myth synthesizes Schopenhauer's metaphysics with a Christian-Romantic redemption narrative. Oedipus's Socratic optimism plunges into pessimism, only for the hero to emerge transfigured as a saint-like martyr. This functions as an allegory for Nietzsche's vision of the modern rebirth of tragic culture, which displays the messianic horizon of history in the form of a mytho-metaphysical phantasm. Nietzsche's use of the Oedipus myth reflects the anachronistic structure of *The Birth*, which I argue offers a post-Romantic critique of Enlightenment values. Far from endorsing a salvific vision of history, Nietzsche exposes this illusion under the guise of its seduction. He challenges readers to confront the irrational basis of Christian-Romantic idealism that emerges from the moral-rational optimism of the Enlightenment.

In Chapter 5, I discuss Nietzsche's portrait of the tragic philosopher, who posits an aesthetic ideal that contrasts with Plato's moral-rational idealism. Nietzsche calls his tragic philosophy a form of "inverted Platonism," since it affirms an entirely illusory aesthetic ideal. He thereby inverts Plato's hierarchical antithesis between appearance and reality, following Lange's neo-Kantian critique of metaphysics, who posits the ineliminable quality of this antithesis even after it is demystified as an imaginary product of human cognition. Within this framework, I analyze how *The Birth* inverts the Platonic structure of Schopenhauer's metaphysics. Nietzsche's conception of the primordial unity in my view reflects Schopenhauer's apophatic reformulation of Plato's good beyond being that Nietzsche treats as the mythical horizon of metaphysics. The exact nature of

mystical-artistic experience in *The Birth* remains highly ambiguous. On the one hand, I argue that it corresponds to the self's exhaustion at the limit of subjectivity, into which the myth of metaphysical transcendence collapses. On the other hand, I argue that Nietzsche reifies this myth in the illusion of cultural-historical redemption, which he represents by way of its immanent critique. With this background in mind, I shift to an analysis of Nietzsche's later writings. I argue that these are consistent with the critical, anti-metaphysical stance of his early tragic philosophy, which ironically undermines the aesthetic ideal that it posits.

The last two chapters provide a new interpretation of the Oedipus myth and explore the relationship between Schopenhauer's apophatic mysticism and Nietzsche's primordial unity. Porter offers no in-depth treatment of these topics, which remain relatively unexplored in the literature, and which continuously engage the theme of Socratic optimism. I also draw parallels between *The Birth* and Nietzsche's later writings, as I do in Chapter 4. This chapter builds on Porter's interpretation of Socrates's role in *The Birth*, notably the death of Socrates, a focal scene that recurs throughout Nietzsche's oeuvre. In *The Birth*, scientific optimism confronts the limits of knowledge and transforms into pessimism, whose transfiguration by the healing balm of art coincides with the affirmation of life as an aesthetic phenomenon, overcoming the opposition between optimism and pessimism. Nietzsche represents this unity of opposites in his image of the music-making Socrates, a figure whose social-political consequences I draw out of Nietzsche's essay "The Greek State." This essay provides an interpretation of Plato's noble lie, which I argue illuminates the significance of Nietzsche's music-making

Socrates, who I go on to read as an elaboration of the dying Socrates, and a symbol of Dionysus. I discuss how this imagery evokes Plato's depiction of Socrates in *Symposium* and *Phaedo*. I argue that Nietzsche's music-making Socrates exposes Plato's Socrates as a sophistical seducer. As a seducer himself, Nietzsche's music-making Socrates offers a new aesthetic ideal in lieu of Plato's moral-rational one. I demonstrate how this ideal remains fundamentally unaltered throughout Nietzsche's career by highlighting the continuous connection between Socrates and Dionysus, a key theme in Plato's *Symposium*. In agreement with Porter, I interpret Nietzsche's aesthetic ideal to be tragically duplicitous, one that aims to expose the dangerous, delusional basis of modern cultural values. However, my treatment of this topic extends, in depth and scope, beyond Porter's confined analysis of *The Birth*.

In Chapter 3, I argue that Nietzsche's music-making Socrates overcomes the opposition between scientific optimism and Schopenhauerian pessimism, symbolizing the aesthetic affirmation of life. I show how beneath this opposition lies the unresolved antagonism between teleological and antiteleological worldviews, which exposes the aesthetic ideal of *The Birth* as an illusion whose metaphysical solace undermines itself in being recognized as such, thereby ceasing to be comforting. I interpret Nietzsche's early work on the pre-Socratics to contextualize how *The Birth* presents existence as an aesthetic problem that collapses the Platonic distinction between myth and metaphysics, a position that he calls tragic. While recent commentaries similarly contest the pervasive Schopenhauerian reading of *The Birth*, most still support the view that tragic myth communicates some fundamental truth about nature or the meaning of life. By contrast, I

contend that Nietzsche treats any such truth as a cultural fiction that emerges from the poetic staging of reality.

Throughout these chapters, we must bear in mind that Nietzsche's discussion of classical antiquity, into which he projects the philosophical landscape of nineteenth-century German philosophy, is consistently anachronistic. On the one hand, Nietzsche adapts Socrates's rational optimism to his depiction of modern science, whose identification with moral progress is said to infect it with a religious belief in humanity's moral perfectibility. However, Nietzsche's adaptation of the ancient to the modern world does not always entail an anachronistic re-description of the former, since at times he provides us with a straightforward reading of Plato. On the other hand, I shall show how Nietzsche reads the defeat of modern scientific optimism — inaugurated by Kant and Schopenhauer and indicated by the collapse of Plato's metaphysical expectation for science — back into the context of Plato's own philosophy. It is here that Nietzsche's adaptation of the ancient to the modern world involves an anachronistic projection of the latter onto the former. In this light, I shall show how *The Birth* functions as a critique of modern culture.

In Chapter 2, I analyze the specter of nihilism that for Nietzsche haunts the horizon of nineteenth-century culture. I begin by discussing Schopenhauer's ethical-religious conception of salvation that posits an apophatic realm resembling Plato's good beyond being, which the saint attains by means of her mystical abnegation of the will, its return to nothingness (the *nihil negativum*). I engage recent scholarship concerning the exact status of the *nihil negativum*, which I argue marks the convergence of atheism and

ascetic Christian morality that Nietzsche's critique of nihilism targets. I contend that this critique remains valid against contemporary advocates of philosophical nihilism, whose roots go back to Schopenhauer's pessimistic denial of life's value. This chapter builds on my analysis of the *Genealogy* in Chapter 1, which concerns the Western faith in the unconditional value of truth that for Nietzsche culminates in nihilism.

While Porter's scholarship influences the standpoint from which I interpret the continuity between Nietzsche's early and later work in Chapter 1, this influence does not extend to its philosophical framework, which provides an account of the specific social-political mechanism by which the slave revolt in morality proves successful. In this chapter, I argue that the triumph of Socratic optimism in *The Birth* is due to a slave revolt in morality that promulgates a religious faith in the value of scientific truth. I show how this narrative parallels Nietzsche's critique of science in the Third Essay of the *Genealogy* and crucially complements his depiction of the Jewish slave revolt in the First Essay. I draw out the resemblance between Socrates's martyrdom in *The Birth* and Jesus's crucifixion in the *Genealogy* in order to illuminate how ritual human sacrifice mythically immortalizes both figures, together inaugurating the new moral ideals that Christianity will eventually unite. I identify Nietzsche's concept of incorporation (*Einverleibung*) as designating the social and physical process of religious martyrdom that grounds his cultural explanation for the political integration and transmission of the ideals particular to these figures.

In this chapter, my account of Nietzsche will equate Greek plebeians with Jewish slaves, and Greek democracy with the slave revolt as depicted in the *Genealogy*. I argue

that Nietzsche connects these disparate histories by his loaded conception of "slave morality" and I draw out the significance of this connection. The pejorative connotation of "slave morality" makes it a loaded term that is both descriptive and evaluative. While Nietzsche elaborates this terminology in the *Genealogy*, I locate its thematic origin in his similarly loaded conception of Socratism in *The Birth*. "Socratism," not unlike "herd morality," is a loaded term whose significance for Nietzsche's understanding of scientific optimism is inextricable from "modern ideas" and is quite unthinkable without any modern points of reference. One such anachronism is Nietzsche's association between the universalism of Socrates's mission to enlighten his fellow citizens, thereby uncovering their innate goodness, and the "socialist movements of the present" (BT 19). To some extent, this type of anachronism indicates why Nietzsche associates Socrates, a critic of democracy, with democratic principles.

In both *The Birth* and the *Genealogy*, the modern malaise of European culture, which Nietzsche attributes to ideals of scientific and social progress, permeates his grand narrative of humanity's ancient past. For a reason I shall explain, we will see that the delusional belief in progress, culminating in its acutely modern form, is symptomatic of slave morality. In *The Birth*, no less than in the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche conceives of "morality" *tout court* in a pejorative sense that applies not so much to the beliefs of actual slaves — neither the Jews of the Roman empire nor the "rabble" of Athenian democracy were slaves — as to a qualitatively slavish morality manifesting certain social-political ideals. These ideals, according to Nietzsche, spread like an illness through the Graeco-Roman world. I do not take the cultural-historical status of "slavery" or "slave morality"

in a literal sense. I take Nietzsche's anachronistic cohesion of the ancient and modern worlds, connected by the trope of master/slave morality, to function as a philological fiction whose philosophical significance must be drawn out as from a work of literature. The binary value judgement associated with masters and slaves is purely heuristic, since my study ultimately calls it into question. The narrative's historical veneer serves as a provisional entry-point highlighting the basic thematic framework of this study. Understood in this context, Nietzsche's *Genealogy* examines the metaphysical hinge between historical reality and mythical appearances, its extinction at the level of cultural politics, and the aesthetic ideal that heralds its reinvention. My study analyzes the uncanny quality of this hinge in Nietzsche's writings, which, throughout his career, suffuses his obsession with Christian Platonism and its inauguration by way of ritual human sacrifice.

CHAPTER 1
SOCRATES AND THE SLAVE REVOLT

Christianity is Platonism for the "people." BGE Preface

The spirit is a stomach! Z:III "On Old and New Tablets," 16

Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality* analyzes the historical origin of ascetic ideals and the dual role, psychological and cultural, that they play in Western narratives of progress, particularly that associated with modern science.[70] Psychologically, ascetic ideals provide suffering with a distinctive type of existential meaning. Culturally, they contribute to the homogenization of humanity through the elimination of hierarchical social difference,[71] a leveling process that culminates in what Nietzsche describes as the victory of the rabble. Nietzsche's polemic against Christian-Platonic morality climaxes in the Third Essay of the *Genealogy*, where he distinguishes the asceticism peculiar to artists (Wagner), philosophers (Schopenhauer), and priests. Generically, ascetic ideals refer us to a sphere transcendently beyond the world, which Nietzsche finds to infect the idealism of science insofar as it harbors a faith in the unconditional value of truth. He understands this as a historical consequence of what he calls the slave revolt in morality and discusses in the First Essay. Plato's asceticism, which I will discuss, combines the instincts of a priest, an artist, and a philosopher. Since his overall conception of an otherworldly Beyond informs each of these instincts, my discussion shall in that context refer to "the ascetic ideal" in the singular, as Nietzsche often does.

[70] This chapter has been submitted as an article for peer review.
[71] See Guy Elgat, *Nietzsche's Psychology of Ressentiment: Revenge and Justice in On the Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Routledge, 2017), ch. 6, 157–62.

Identifying the mechanism by which the ascetic ideal triumphs has proven troubling for scholars.[72] While scholars dispute whether the values of what Nietzsche calls slave morality are created by the slaves themselves,[73] or by the more powerful priestly caste,[74] they predominantly agree in their conclusion that the ascetic ideal succeeds by providing suffering with an existential meaning.[75] While this explanation may broadly describe the psychological appeal of the ascetic ideal, it does not account for the cultural mechanism by which Christian-Platonic morality achieved hegemony in the West. This event heralds the decline of Graeco-Roman polytheism and the rise of Judeo-Christian monotheism. In the history of philosophy, this decline parallels the rise of idealism (Platonism and Aristotelianism) and the virtual extinction of materialism (Epicureanism and Stoicism). On the one hand, Nietzsche's critique of asceticism targets the otherworldly domain posited by idealism, which consequently values virtue and reason as transcendent ends in themselves, rather than as instrumental means for

[72] E.g., Mark Migotti, "Slave Morality, Socrates, and the Bushmen: A Critical Introduction to *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Essay I," in *Nietzsche's* On the Genealogy of Morals: *Critical Essays*, ed. Christa Davis Acampora (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 122–42; R. Jay Wallace, "*Ressentiment*, Value and Self-Vindication: Making Sense of the Slave Revolt," in *Nietzsche and Morality*, eds. Brian Leiter and Neil Sinhababu (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 110–37; Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*.
[73] E.g., Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 83–90, 163; Rüdiger Bittner, "*Ressentiment*," in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, and Morality: Essays on Nietzsche's* Genealogy of Morals, ed. Richard Schacht (Oakland: University of California Press, 1994), 127–38.
[74] E.g., Bernard Reginster, "Nietzsche on *Ressentiment* and Valuation," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57, no. 2 (1997): 281–305; R. Lanier Anderson, "On the Nobility of Nietzsche's Priests," in *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morality: A Critical Guide*, ed. Simon May (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 24–55; Didier Franck, *Nietzsche and the Shadow of God*, trans. Bettina Bergo and Philippe Farah (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 2012), 310–30; Huddleston, *Decadence and Flourishing*, 98–100. For a combination of these views, see e.g., Aaron Ridley, *Nietzsche's Conscience: Six Character Studies from the "Genealogy"* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1998), chs. 1–2; Guy Elgat, "Slave Revolt, Deflated Self-Deception," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 23, no. 3 (2015): 524–25 n. 3.
[75] E.g., Bernard Reginster, *The Will to Nothingness: An Essay on Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), ch. 6; Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness*, ch. 13; Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*; Huddleston, *Decadence and Flourishing*, 22–23.

achieving earthly *ataraxia*. On the other hand, his critique targets the affective value of guilt and pity characteristic of Judeo-Christian monotheism. Taken together, these features constitute the specific type of moral-rational meaning that Nietzsche contrasts with the philosophical and polytheistic values of the Graeco-Roman nobility.[76] How did Christian Platonism eclipse the diverse religious and philosophical tradition of the Graeco-Roman nobility, which surely ascribed meaning of some kind to human suffering?

Brian Leiter's influential reading of the *Genealogy* is at pains to explain exactly how, according to Nietzsche, the slave revolt in morality proved successful. While Leiter tentatively doubts whether a psychological explanation can be found, he then proposes that the revolt triumphed due to the ascetic ideal that provided suffering with a meaning, thereby solving "the basic *existential* problem for 'man,' both slave and master."[77] However, the "noble" ideals characteristic of Graeco-Roman antiquity gave diverse causal explanations and reciprocal remedies for suffering, thereby providing it with meaning without evoking the immense guilt characteristic of Christian asceticism.

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[76] "The fact that the stronger races of northern Europe failed to reject the Christian God does not say very much for their skill in religion . . . Almost two thousand years and not one new god! And all the while, this pathetic God of Christian monotono-theism instead" (A 19). "[T]he sacrifice of the innocent, like *unio mystica* in drinking blood, above all the slowly fanned fire of revenge, of chandala-revenge — *that* became master over Rome, the same kind of religion on whose preexistent form Epicurus had already waged war. Read Lucretius to understand *what* Epicurus fought against, *not* paganism but 'Christianity,' or rather, corruption of souls through guilt, through the concept of punishment and immortality. — He fought against the *underground* cults, the entire latent Christianity — to deny immortality back then was already a true *redemption*. — And Epicurus would have triumphed, every respectable intellect in the Roman Empire was an Epicurean: *then came Paul*" (A 58). "To regard as honest a Paul, whose homeland was at the main seat of Stoic enlightenment, when he contrives the *proof* of the *continuing*-life of the Redeemer from a hallucination, or even to give credence to his tale *that* he had had this hallucination, would be a true *niaiserie*" (A 42). In BGE 44, Nietzsche praises the enhancing influence of Stoicism on humanity, and in 227 he calls his ideal free spirits "the last of the Stoics!" In EH "BT," 3, Nietzsche tips his hat to the Stoics when heralding his Dionysian doctrine of eternal recurrence.
[77] Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 229.

Leiter's conclusion does not adequately address Nietzsche's response to the question of how it came about that a homogenized Christian Platonism that compounded suffering with guilt successfully devalued the heterogeneous religious and philosophical values of the Graeco-Roman world.[78] An account of Nietzsche's explanation of how the moral-rational meaning peculiar to ascetic ideals originates on a political scale is therefore needed, one that would indicate a social and physical basis for their cultural integration and transmission, and whose psychological dimension would be consistent with these features. I will provide such an account strictly as it applies to the rise and success of Christian Platonism in the West.

This chapter is divided into three parts. I begin by tracing Nietzsche's formulation of unconditional truth as an ascetic value back to his characterization of Socrates and scientific optimism in *The Birth*.[79] I demonstrate the continuity between his early and late treatments of Socrates, connecting this theme to the slave revolt in the First Essay of the *Genealogy* and to the triumph of the ascetic ideal in the form of Christian-Platonic morality. In the second part, I relate the conceptual interplay between the terms *pharmakon* (poison/remedy) and *pharmakos* (ritual human sacrifice), highlighted in the work of Jacques Derrida and René Girard, to Nietzsche's underappreciated conception of

[78] See ibid., 174–77, 227–29.
[79] Migotti, "Socrates and the Bushmen," 126–29; Lawrence J. Hatab, "Why Would Master Morality Surrender Its Power?" in *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morality: A Critical Guide*, ed. Simon May (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 202–07, highlight Socrates's connection with the trope of slave revolt. For an overview of Socrates's role in BT, see Daniels, *Birth of Tragedy*, 125–138. For a general discussion of the "problem of Socrates" in Nietzsche, see James I. Porter, "Nietzsche and 'The Problem of Socrates,'" in *A Companion to Socrates*, eds. Sara Ahbel-Rappe and Rachana Kamtekar (Malden MA: Blackwell, 2006), 406–425.

incorporation (*Einverleibung*).[80] I argue that the concept of "incorporation" explains the social process through which ascetic values develop in the West, as well as the physical basis for their integration and transmission. Ritual human sacrifice manifests this process as the strategic political mechanism whereby the slave revolt in morality became successful. In the third part, I show how this cultural process grounds Nietzsche's understanding of both Platonism in *The Birth* and Christianity in the *Genealogy*. I thereby identify a line of continuity between these two texts, illuminating Nietzsche's understanding of the relationship between Platonism and Christianity that results in their eventual synthesis.

I. SCIENTIFIC OPTIMISM AND THE ASCETIC IDEAL

I establish the political continuity between Nietzsche's early and late work by analyzing the parallel narratives in *The Birth* and the *Genealogy* that depict a slave revolt in morality. In both cases, the optimism of modern science originates out of such a revolt, which has a corrosive effect on art. Well before the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche already formulates a critique of the ascetic ideal with his polemic against Socratism, whose disintegrating, unaesthetic effects he opposes to the Apollonian and Dionysian art impulses or drives. The height of Attic tragedy manifests the harmonious reconciliation of these otherwise antagonistic drives: a theatre of moving, dreamlike images, combined with the effects of passionate, musical intoxication. These mythopoetic impulses instinctually ground the religious deification of reality, hallowing its timeless sacred core

[80] This polysemous term can refer to ritual cannibalism and also bears the meaning of "incarnation" or "embodiment." See Waite, *Nietzsche's Corps/*e, 8.

from a nonrational, amoral, aesthetic perspective. In contrast, the demystifying tendency of secular rationalism and moral enlightenment characterizes Socratism, apparently marking the decline of religious instinct. Such decline, embodied in the decline of Attic tragedy, is evidenced for Nietzsche as follows:

> when the mythical presuppositions of a religion become systematized as a finished sum of historical events under the severe, intellectual gaze of orthodox dogmatism, and people begin to defend anxiously the credibility of the myths while resisting every natural tendency within them to go on living and to throw out new shoots — in other words, when the feeling for myth dies and is replaced by the claim of religion to have historical foundations. (BT 10)

In Nietzsche's narrative, Attic tragedy emerges in Greek antiquity as the final expression of religious, mythopoetic instincts that abruptly perish as the rationalistic tendency of Socratism gains sway. Euripides emblemizes this cultural shift.[81] His poetry is neither properly Apollonian nor Dionysian, but distinctively Socratic (BT 12). As the power of rationalism gains force, it reduces religion to a form of moral dogmatism that defends itself on a crumbling edifice of defunct myth. The impotence of mythopoetic instinct becomes evident as soon as the credibility of religious myth begins to be defended against the creeping suspicion of critical theoretical inquiry. What is preserved of myth, for instance in the work of Euripides, is merely its dogmatic function: to uphold the "non-Dionysiac art" of morality (BT 12).

While Nietzsche attacks Euripides's so-called aesthetic Socratism for its lack of both Apollonian and Dionysian qualities, of greater significance are the political undertones of Nietzsche's critique. He finds that a form of slave morality infects

[81] See Daniels, *Birth of Tragedy*, 108–124.

Euripides's art; this is the real consequence of Socratism for aesthetics. Nietzsche asks, "what did you want, wicked Euripides, when you sought to force this dying figure [Attic tragedy] to do slave's work for you once more?" (BT 10). He sees Euripides's New Comedy as indulging its plebeian audience and the "bourgeois mediocrity on which Euripides built all his political hopes." Now "the fifth estate, that of the slaves . . . comes to power," transforming "Greek serenity" into the mere "cheerfulness of slaves," a "senile and slavish enjoyment of life." The slavish qualities exemplified in Euripides's art are those of "slyness and cunning," injecting an "unheard-of cleverness" into Athenian culture, whose "broad mass now philosophizes" (BT 11). It is clear from these passages that Nietzsche's attack is politically motivated against what he sees as the democratic impulse of rational enlightenment, its goal being the deliverance of humanity from the bondage of ignorance, by means of intellectual inquiry, into the daylight of moral self-mastery. He finally identifies the guiding principle of "aesthetic Socratism" in "Socrates' dictum that 'Only he who knows is virtuous'" (BT 12). The moral dictum of Socratism exemplifies a morality of fanatical rationalism, and it is this morality that characterizes the "slyness and cunning" of Athens's newly enlightened fifth estate.

Nietzsche's polemic against Euripides's aesthetics thus diagnoses a slave revolt in morality, inaugurated by Socrates's "profound *delusion* . . . namely the imperturbable belief that thought, as it follows the thread of causality, reaches down into the abysses of being, and that it is capable, not simply of understanding existence, but even of *correcting* it" (BT 15). The basis of Socratic rationalism, characterized by the scientific optimism described in this passage, is a faith in the power of causal logic not only to explain reality

but to solve the problem of suffering and evil in the world. Nietzsche exposes this belief as a moral prejudice, the ironic dose of dogmatic hubris that infects science in what he alleges to be its hypocritical combat against the mythopoetic instincts proper to art and religion.[82] He connects Socratism in classical antiquity, according to which the practise of dialectics exercises one's moral perfectibility, with the optimistic pursuit of modern science, propelled by the ascetic quest for a truth that is forever denied to it. Plato expresses Socratic asceticism in his view that the philosopher's moral perfectibility, linked with a logical inquiry into the ground of being, can never be satisfied in this mortal life. For Nietzsche, this ancient form of asceticism carries over into modernity. "This is why Lessing, the most honest of theoretical men, dared to state openly that searching for the truth meant more to him than truth itself; thereby the fundamental secret of science is revealed, much to the astonishment, indeed annoyance, of the scientifically minded" (BT 15). Lessing's statement discloses the unconditional faith in the value of truth upon which science is founded. A moral imperative that transcends the obtainability of truth spurs Lessing's search for truth. Being denied the pleasure of possessing the object of his desire, Lessing ascetically commits himself to its pathological pursuit, which ultimately gives life meaning.[83] Nietzsche's citation of Lessing resonates with his characterization of Kantian asceticism in the *Genealogy*, in which the rational pursuit of truth amounts to a

[82] Science is hypocritical in assuming the stance of logical objectivity, while nonetheless expressing "the prejudices of democratic taste" and of "practical and ethical *utilitarianism*" that coincide with the "victory of *optimism*" ("Attempt," 4).
[83] On the convergence of asceticism and the scientific ideal, see Babette E. Babich, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Science: Reflecting Science on the Ground of Art and Life* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), ch. 4; Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness*, ch. 13.

form of ascetic self-denial, and which Nietzsche identifies as a consequence of the slave-revolt in morality (GM III.12).[84]

We have begun to see how the political rise of Socratism depicted in *The Birth* parallels the slave revolt of the *Genealogy*. In his 1886 preface to a second edition of *The Birth*, "An Attempt at Self-Criticism," Nietzsche adds some helpful context for his critique of science in this early work.[85] He describes the scientific optimism of Socratism as a flight from what he calls a Dionysian pessimism of strength, which manifests a "preference for the hard, gruesome, malevolent and problematic aspects of existence." Conversely, Socratic optimism conceals a dread of humanity's fundamental dissonance. "Is scientific method perhaps no more than a fear and flight from pessimism? A subtle defense against — *truth*?" (BT "Attempt," 1). Nietzsche stands Socratic irony on its head, suggesting that the rational pursuit of truth is really a dishonest attempt at evading life's irrational character. Textual evidence attests to a deeper political continuity between Nietzsche's early and later writings, which clarifies the type of "truth" that he refers to. In his first book, Nietzsche had intended to include his unpublished essay "The Greek State," which he gifted to Cosima Wagner in the Christmas of 1872.[86] This essay gives us

[84] "[A] violence and cruelty against *reason*: a lustful delight that reaches its pinnacle when ascetic self-contempt and self-mockery decree: 'there *is* a realm of truth and of being, but precisely reason is *excluded* from it!' . . . (Incidentally: there is something of a residue of this lustful ascetic conflict even in the Kantian concept 'intelligible character of things,' which loves to turn reason against reason: that is, 'intelligible character' means in Kant a sort of constitution of things whereby the intellect comprehends just enough to know that for the intellect — it is *completely incomprehensible*.)"

[85] Nietzsche notably alludes to this in GM III.25. "Science formulated as a problem; what does science mean? — on this see the preface to *Birth of Tragedy*." He identifies "dialectic in place of instinct" as a specific ascetic feature of science, again referring us back to his characterization of Socratism in BT.

[86] See Martin A. Ruehl's discussion of this essay in "*Politeia* 1871: Young Nietzsche on the Greek State," in *Nietzsche and Antiquity: His Reaction and Response to the Classical Tradition*, ed. Paul Bishop (Boydell & Brewer: 2013), 79–97, which dates the beginning of Nietzsche's rupture with Wagner back to 1872 and clarifies its political dimension.

a transparent picture of the bitter, terrible "truth" that Socratic science shields its culture against and that a Dionysian pessimism affirms.

> Accordingly, we must learn to identify as a cruel-sounding truth the fact that *slavery belongs to the essence of a culture*: a truth, granted, that leaves open no doubt about the absolute value of existence. *This truth* is the vulture which gnaws the liver of the Promethean promoter of culture. The misery of men living a life of toil must still increase in order to make the production of the world of art possible to a small number of Olympian men. (GSt, p. 166)

While, in Nietzsche's view, Plato's ideal polis maintains the hierarchy necessary for its flourishing, Nietzsche carefully points out the corrupting influence that Socratic dialectics had on Plato's otherwise aristocratic politics. "The fact that he did not place genius, in its most general sense, at the head of his perfect state, but only the genius of wisdom and knowledge, excluding the inspired artist entirely from his state, was a rigid consequence of the Socratic judgement on art, which Plato, struggling against himself, adopted as his own" (GSt, p. 173). Nietzsche polemicizes primarily against the corrosive political consequences of the Socratic judgement in opposition to art and in favour of theoretical knowledge.[87] For Nietzsche, slavery is necessary for an artistically robust culture, which Socrates devalues due to his own plebeianism.[88] Socrates undermines the noble ideals of artistic culture with a rigorous intellectualism that aims to liberate citizens from political bondage, brandishing the novel ideal of moral, universal self-improvement. Nietzsche

[87] See Werner J. Dannhauser, *Nietzsche's View of Socrates* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1974), 84–85; cf. Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 151. In his interpretation of the preface to *Beyond*, Nehamas defends Socrates against his alleged corruption of Plato, arguing that Nietzsche "saw that philosophical dogmatism, the effort to articulate an ideal mode of life that all ought to approximate so far as they are able, is Plato's creation. But he insists on blaming Socrates, the creature, for his creator's fault." On this point, I agree with Dannhauser's view that, for Nietzsche, Socrates corrupts Plato.

[88] See e.g. Huddleston, *Decadence and Flourishing*, ch. 6, whose discussion of the relationship between slavery and cultural flourishing in Nietzsche is overly literalistic and apologetic.

sees this Socratic ideal corrupting the nobility of Greek politics specifically in the form of Platonism. Nietzsche thus opposes the plebeianism of Socrates's moral evaluation of truth to the noble evaluation of truth as an amoral phenomenon that corresponds to life's cruelty. The former characterizes the idealism of modern science, while the latter characterizes the aesthetic flourishing of culture.

The opposition between moral and aesthetic evaluations of life appeals to the political distinction between slaves and masters. Scientific optimism does not arise from the overabundant, life-affirming strength of Dionysian pessimism, but as a reactionary defense serving to protect a culture from all that is questionable and terrible about life, pre-eminently the tragic necessity of slavery.[89] Nietzsche thus derisively characterizes Socratic logic as a form of "cunning" — a plebeian strategy for outwitting nobles. This is the political significance of Socrates's dialectical cunning that Nietzsche identifies as the concealed essence of Socratic irony. He makes this view explicit in "The Problem of Socrates," a chapter of *Twilight of the Idols* that illuminates how he understands Socratism as a slave revolt in morality.

> — Is Socratic irony an expression of revolt? of the rabble's *ressentiment*? does he, as one suppressed, savor his ferocity in the knife-thrusts of the syllogism? does he *avenge* himself on the nobles he fascinates? — As a dialectician you have a ruthless tool in your hand; you can play the tyrant with it; you can show people up by winning. The dialectician leaves it to his opponent to prove he is not an idiot: he simultaneously renders people furious and helpless. The dialectician *impairs the potency* of his opponent's intellect. — What? Is dialectic just a form of *revenge* with Socrates? (TI "Socrates," 7)

[89] Such pessimism characterizes the spirit of Greek nobility exemplified by Theognis, whom Nietzsche alludes to in GM I.5, highlighting the distinction Theognis makes between nobles and plebeians. This reinforces the political continuity between BT and GM. In both texts, Nietzsche contrasts the pessimism of Greek nobles with the optimism of Greek plebeians.

According to this picture, Socrates masks the resentful violence of his mission to enlighten his fellow citizens with the ironical pose of a fool who is wise about his ignorance.[90] Intellectual humility masks plebeian impudence; sage-like benevolence cloaks hostility against the Athenian nobles; the infuriating effects of his dialectical attack are used as proof *against* his opponents, themselves caught unaware by the onslaught, leaving them dazed and confused. Nietzsche gives a similar account in *Beyond Good and Evil*: "At the time of Socrates . . . *irony* was necessary for greatness of soul: that Socratic, malicious certainty of the old physician and rabble man who mercilessly cut into his own flesh, as into the flesh and heart of the 'noble,' with a gaze that said clearly enough: 'Don't pretend in front of me! Here — we are equal!'" (BGE 212). In the works contiguous with the *Genealogy*, we thus see how Nietzsche further fleshes out the political dimension of Socrates's plebeian revenge, manifesting an uprising of the rabble that aims to level any hierarchical social difference within society, a feat accomplished in the name of universal reason.

In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche connects his late critique of Socrates back to *The Birth*. He introduces it as a central theme at the beginning of the book. "My readers might know the extent to which I see dialectics as a symptom of decadence, in the most famous case of all, for instance: the case of Socrates" (EH "Wise," 1). As in his "Attempt at Self-Criticism," he holds this to be one of the "crucial *innovations*" of *The Birth*: "the understanding of Socrates: Socrates, recognized for the first time as an instrument of

[90] In TI "Socrates," 5, Nietzsche writes that "Socrates was the clown who *made people take him seriously*: what was really going on there?"

disintegration, as a typical decadent. 'Rationality' *against* instinct. 'Rationality' at any price as dangerous, as a form of violence that undermines life!" (EH "BT," 1). Already in *The Birth*, Nietzsche's threefold critique of scientific optimism takes aim at the political, moral, and metaphysical prejudices he believes this optimism upholds. He characterizes this threefold idealism by the plebeianism of democratic enlightenment, the moral conviction that causal reasoning produces virtue and leads to happiness, and the metaphysical idealism that places an unconditional value on the pursuit of an elusive truth. In the *Genealogy* Nietzsche identifies the consequence of Plato's corruption as the asceticism of science, which I trace back to Nietzsche's account of Socratism in *The Birth*. We see a clear line of continuity running through Nietzsche's narratives of slave revolt in both texts, enough to suggest that Nietzsche's characterization of Socratism in *The Birth* critically complements and thematically prefigures his genealogical account of Christianity. According to Nietzsche, the problem of science and its putative asceticism did not, as the *Genealogy* seems to suggest, originate in the soil of Jerusalem, but rather in the Athenian agora: "the question of whether with respect to the valuation of things instinct deserves more authority than rationality . . . — this is still that old moral problem as it first emerged in the person of Socrates and already divided minds long before Christianity" (BGE 191). In *Twilight*, Socrates signifies a symptom of cultural decline. Pitting reason against instinct as a means of self-preservation, Socrates arrives at his decadent formula that "reason = virtue = happiness" (TI "Socrates," 10). The scientific worldview that Nietzsche criticizes, already in *The Birth*, equates reason with happiness and opposes the passions, whose gratification involves pain no less than pleasure. In

Nietzsche's view, a science that offers liberation from suffering amounts to life-denying asceticism. I now elaborate on the significance of the ascetic ideal as it pertains to Socratic science.

In *The Birth*, Nietzsche declares Socrates to be "the archetype of a form of existence unknown before him, the archetype of *theoretical man*" and which makes him "the nub and turning-point of so-called world history" (BT 15).[91] Socrates is the archetype of the ascetic faith in science that Nietzsche critiques in the *Genealogy*, "the belief in a *metaphysical* value, a value *in itself of truth*" (GM III.24). A passage from *The Birth* clarifies the instinctual basis of this Socratic faith: "the logical drive which appeared in Socrates . . . reveals a power of nature such as we encounter . . . only in the very greatest instinctual forces." Such is "the enormous drive-wheel of logical Socratism . . . in motion *behind* Socrates . . . [I]n order to see it one must look through Socrates as through a shadow" (BT 15). The Socratic opposition between reason and instinct is deceptive insofar as the Socratic lust for knowledge is already instinctual. Socratic optimism disavows the instinctual basis of rational inquiry, the realization of which would reveal the rational quality of truth as yet another instinctive, passionate illusion. The Socratic faith in the supposedly purely rational character of the pursuit of truth is a misguided belief in the ultimate power of reason to penetrate the depths of nature. This Socratic instinct is "incapable of turning against itself"; it is a power that Socrates is possessed *by* rather than a power that he is in possession *of* (BT 13). For Nietzsche, Socratism is a

[91] Nietzsche duplicates his characterization of Socrates as "the archetype of *theoretical man*" in BGE 80. "An issue that is clarified ceases to concern us. — What did that god mean who counseled: 'Know thyself!' Was it perhaps: 'stop being of concern to yourself! become objective!' — And Socrates? — And the 'scientific human being'?"

perversion of the instrumental value of reason that inverts humanity's proper relationship to it; instead of a useful means it becomes an end in itself, enslaving humanity in the service of a hypostasized universal reason. Furthermore, scientific truth is valued above and to the detriment of human life; the scientific drive for knowledge has the same degrading effect as religious asceticism. "*All* science . . . aims today to dissuade humans of their previous respect for themselves, as if this had been nothing but a bizarre conceit" (GM III.25).

This is why, in both *The Gay Science* and *Twilight*,[92] Nietzsche depicts Socrates as one who despairs of life on his death bed, a despair that he already points to in *The Birth*: "Just occasionally that despotic logician felt there was something missing in his relation to art, an emptiness, a half-reproach, a duty which he had perhaps failed to perform" (BT 14). By itself Socrates's logical drive fails to justify existence and in valuing this drive *as if it were an alternative to blind and irrational instinct*, of a higher, divine origin, Socrates does a disservice to the mythopoetic dimension of human life. This same conflict grounds the antagonism between science and art in the *Genealogy*, which *The Birth* represents in the archetypal figure of Socrates, the "mystagogue of science" (BT 15) whose "optimistic dialectic" embodies the "anti-Dionysiac tendency" (BT 14) that has an annihilating effect on tragic myth. In *The Birth*, as in the *Genealogy*, it turns out that the drive of optimistic science coincides with a religious faith in the capacity of reason both to comprehend and amend reality. Science turns suffering into a problem to solve and thereby imbues it with rational meaning. By creating the illusion

[92] See GS 340; TI "Socrates," §12.

that we can logically locate the cause of existential suffering, science promises a solution to this problem. “This sublime metaphysical illusion is an instinct which belongs inseparably to science” (BT 15). As in the *Genealogy*, it is the ascetic ideal that justifies suffering in this way, holding out the promise of its overcoming by means of a morality of improvement spearheaded by Socrates (TI “Socrates,” 11). In the figure of Socrates Nietzsche originally finds the instinctual unity between science and optimism that opposes an aesthetic vision of life, according to which suffering has no rational basis and is only justified as an *aesthetic phenomenon* (BT 5). Suffering is not seen as a problem to solve but rather as an ineliminable aspect of life.

I have demonstrated the political continuity between *The Birth* and the *Genealogy*, which both depict a slave revolt in morality that gives rise to the ascetic ideal infecting modern science. In *The Birth*, Nietzsche directs his polemic against Socratic optimism. We have seen how he fleshes this out in the works contiguous with the *Genealogy*, where he continues to attack Socrates’s cultural influence. Nietzsche’s critique of science in *The Birth* is continuous with his later work, targeting a form of plebeian optimism that he contrasts with the noble pessimism of what he calls tragic culture. Socratic optimism displays a religious faith in reason that degrades life and devalues art, while Dionysian pessimism displays a religious hallowing of existence as an aesthetic phenomenon. Nietzsche embraces the necessity of suffering and exposes the supposedly rational promise of its eradication to be grounded in irrational instinct.

II. CULTURAL INCORPORATION

So far, my discussion of the parallel between Nietzsche's early and late work is consistent with the conclusion that the ascetic ideal triumphs by giving suffering a meaning. This functional explanation does not account for the cultural, rather than merely psychological, origin of its success, the political significance of which I have nonetheless begun to sketch. In this part of the chapter, I identify Nietzsche's concept of incorporation (*Einverleibung*) to designate the social and physical process through which the values of slave morality develop. The strategic political mechanism of ritual human sacrifice exemplifies this process and accounts for the success of slave revolt. I argue that this mechanism is at work in Nietzsche's account of how Socrates corrupted Plato, a longstanding view first expressed in *The Birth*. Let us bear in mind my introductory remarks concerning the anachronistic relationship between antiquity and modernity in *The Birth*. Nietzsche's narrative is not overly concerned with historical accuracy. He makes use of antiquity in order to shed light on his own culture, specifically on the relationship between science and religion. Nietzsche's depiction of Plato's supposed corruption at the hands of his teacher crucially stages, in rhetorical and literary terms tainted with anachronism, the initial cultural role of science in Athens and its corrosive effect on art. What is often not adequately stressed with regard to Nietzsche's longstanding critique of Platonism is how consistently he confers nobility upon Plato himself while withholding the qualification from Socrates. Plato was supposedly corrupted by Socrates, who strategically submits to his own execution. Nietzsche expresses these two major views — regarding Socrates's corruption of Plato and his martyrdom at the hands of the Athenian court — both at the beginning and end of his

career. This theme is central to his critique of morality in the *Genealogy*, for he understands the asceticism of science to be grounded in a moral worldview that is not only devoid of aesthetic values but is hostile to the production of artistic culture. I now analyze Nietzsche's first view concerning Socrates's corruption of Plato, which leads into my examination of Nietzsche's second view concerning Socrates's voluntary martyrdom. Taking these two views together illuminates how, for Nietzsche, Socratism is a form of slave revolt that parallels the one described in the *Genealogy*.

In *The Birth*, Nietzsche depicts the gifted poet Plato as torn by his infatuation with Socrates, which sets him against his own artistic genius. Socrates criticized the irrational effects of tragic art, and "demanded that his disciples should desist and keep themselves strictly away from such un-philosophical stimulants; so successful was he that the first thing the youthful tragedian Plato did was to burn his poetry so that he could become a pupil of Socrates" (BT 14). While Nietzsche finds tragic art to be "shipwrecked" on the imperative of Socratic rationalism, Plato's artistry could not ultimately be suppressed. In the end, "the Platonic dialogue was a boat on which the older forms of poetry, together with all her children, sought refuge after their shipwreck," being taken under the wing of philosophy as its handmaiden. "This was the new position into which Plato forced poetry under pressure from the daemonic Socrates" (BT 14). Nietzsche makes this same distinction between Socratic rationalism and Plato's artistry in *Beyond*: "What explains such a disease [sc., moral idealism] on the most beautiful plant of antiquity, on Plato? did the evil Socrates corrupt him?" (BGE Preface). And further: "There is something in Plato's morality that does not really belong to Plato, but only exists in his philosophy

despite Plato, so to speak: namely Socratism, for which he was really too noble" (BGE 190), since he lacked "the craftiness of a plebeian," and possessed "the greatest strength a philosopher so far has had available!" (BGE 191).

It is the Socratic kernel of moral idealism — which Nietzsche identifies as a "utilitarianism of morality" (BGE 190) and will eventually connect with Judaism and Christianity — that infects Plato's philosophy, and which Nietzsche attacks under the banner of "Platonism," a pejorative term that is practically interchangeable with "Socratism," and that Christianity finally popularizes "for the 'people'" (BGE Preface). Nietzsche rolls up the triad of Socratic/Platonist, Jewish/Christian, and English/utilitarian idealism into the loaded term *herd morality* that he elaborates in the *Genealogy*. The broad scope of the term makes it difficult to parse, especially as it conflates all of the above moralities. My concern is with the "Socratism" of herd morality and the light it casts on the supposed idealism of scientific optimism and its supposed origin in a dubiously historical slave revolt. The theme of Socratism as a form of cultural decline in Nietzsche's oeuvre, which I have outlined, knots the idealism of science together with a slave revolt in morality. I read this as an implicit theme tying together the First and Third essays of the *Genealogy*.

In the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche mentions Socrates only once in a passing witticism referring to his *ironical* marriage (GM III.7), and references to Plato are, taken together, ambiguous and contradictory. I contend that there nonetheless exists an underlying consistency in these allusions insofar as they highlight Plato's fundamental nobility, on the one hand, while on the other hand remaining critical of his Socratic corruption.

Nietzsche refers favourably to the following traits that characterize Plato's nobility: the low esteem he holds for compassion or pity (GM Preface 5), his greatness as a philosopher (GM III.7), his "*tyrannical* lust" (GM III.18), and his famous espousal of the *noble lie* (GM III.19). He reserves his criticism for Plato solely within the context of the Platonism that characterizes Christianity (GM I.1; III.24) and in regard to Plato's critique of art (GM III.25), which, as we have seen, Nietzsche views as a consequence of Socratic corruption.

This last criticism is worth contrasting with Plato's aristocratic noble lie and illuminates the contradictory quality of Nietzsche's allusions to Plato.

> *Art* . . . in which precisely the *lie* sanctifies itself, in which the *will to deception* has a good conscience on its side, is much more fundamentally opposed to the ascetic ideal than science: this was sensed by Plato's instinct, this greatest enemy of art ever produced by Europe. . . . Therefore an artist's subservience in the service of the ascetic ideal is the truest artist's *corruption* there can be, and unfortunately one of the most common forms: for nothing is more corruptible than the artist. (GM III.25)

While Plato is susceptible to this artistic corruption, he also sanctifies "the authentic lie, the genuine, resolute 'honest' lie [for which modern moralists are too weak]" (GM III.19). Plato appears to have a double standard when it comes to the truth about lying. We may resolve the significance of this inconsistency in light of Nietzsche's characterization of Plato as a corrupted artist, on the one hand, and as a noble aristocrat, on the other. Under the influence of the former Socratic tendency Plato criticizes the deception of art, while under the influence of the latter aristocratic tendency he sanctifies the "honest" deception of the noble ruler.

This leads to the question of how, according to Nietzsche, Socrates's plebeian cure for decadence — fanatical rationalism — infected Plato's nobility and was able to corrupt it. To answer this question, I examine Nietzsche's second major view regarding the problem of Socrates, namely, that Socrates desired his own execution. Like Nietzsche's view of Plato's Socratic corruption, this second view can be found in both Nietzsche's first and final works. His recurring portraits of the dying Socrates are key to understanding the strategic mechanism by which he explains the success of what he calls the slave revolt in morality. This mechanism functions according to a process that I call incorporation, which I argue is embodied by the *pharmakos*, a figure linked in ancient culture with the *pharmakon*.

The *pharmakos* was a scapegoat figure whose ritual sacrifice was understood to cleanse the community of impurities.[93] Innocently bearing the guilt of the community, the *pharmakos* blurred the boundary between the sacred and the impure, thereby manifesting an ambivalent duplicity. At once a healing medicine and a potential poison, the *pharmakon* similarly manifested both sacred and impure qualities. Its religious value stems from the fact that a drug, as a physical entity, also has psychical properties. The *pharmakon*'s power is not merely pharmaceutical in a vulgar sense but is inherently religious; its value is socially mediated and tied to the political structure of communal hierarchy. We see this in Girard's discussion of the relationship between the terms *pharmakos* and *pharmakon* and the double meaning conveyed by these terms.

[93] For a detailed historical study of the scapegoat in antiquity, see J. G. Frazer, *The Scapegoat*, in *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*. 12 Vols. 3rd ed. (London: MacMillan, 1913).

> [T]he *pharmakos* . . . has a dual connotation. On the one hand he is a woebegone figure, an object of scorn who is weighed down with guilt; a butt for all sorts of gibes, insults, and of course, outbursts of violence. On the other hand, we find him surrounded by a quasi-religious aura of veneration; he has become a sort of cult object. This duality reflects the metamorphosis the ritual victim is designed to effect; the victim draws to itself all the violence infecting the original victim and through his own death transforms this baneful violence into beneficial violence, into harmony and abundance. . . . It is not surprising that the word *pharmakon* in classical Greek means both poison and the antidote for poison, both sickness and cure — in short, any substance capable of perpetuating a very good or very bad action, according to the circumstances and the dosage. The *pharmakon* is thus a magic drug or volatile elixir, whose administration had best be left by ordinary men in the hands of those who enjoy special knowledge and exceptional powers — priests, magicians, shamans, doctors, and so on.[94]

By suffering the violence of the community, the *pharmakos* draws out its corrupting poison. The innocent victim transforms the communal social fabric by redeeming it from impurity. In this way, the *pharmakos* functions like a *pharmakon*, a poison whose ritual administration produces healing effects within a religious context rooted in political hierarchy. The intimate link between the *pharmakos* and the *pharmakon* suggests a religious conflation of the pharmaceutical effects of a drug and the social function of ritual sacrifice. Just as priests administer the *pharmakon*, so the *pharmakos* plays a vital social-political role that binds the community together in a shared act of violence, redeeming it as a whole. The exercise of religious authority promotes the cohesion of a community and confers a sacred legitimacy upon its violent outburst. The physical ingestion of a drug is thought to reflect the social process of ritual sacrifice, whereby the community consumes one of its own in order to heal itself. In both cases, the psychical and the physical, the sacred and the impure, coincide in the embodied reality of human

[94] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (New York: Continuum, 2005), 100. See also pp. 303–12.

existence. The community itself incarnates the analogy between *pharmakon* and *pharmakos* in such a way that ceases to be merely metaphorical.

In a corresponding context, Nietzsche identifies priests as "black magic artists" (GM I.14) and "medicine men" (GM III.9) who distribute ascetic ideals as so many *pharmaka*.[95] Accordingly, his critique of culture rejects any clear distinction between the physical and the psychical. In a memorable passage from *Ecce Homo*, he stresses the relationship between diet and spiritual health, linking physical and psychical digestion.[96] We find this link in §1 of the Second Essay of the *Genealogy*. "Whatever we experience, learn, or take in when we are in our digestive state (it could just as well be called 'ensouling' [*Einverseelung*]) is able to enter our consciousness just as little as the whole thousand-fold process with which our physical nourishment takes place, so-called embodying [*Einverleibung*]." Nietzsche refers to an unconscious process of psychical absorption as *digestive* — since "the spirit *is* a stomach!" (Z:III "On Old and New Tablets," 16)[97] — and then applies the term *incorporation* to physical digestion as a process of embodying. *Einverseelung* designates an organism's passive reception of external stimuli, implying the involvement of a permeable membrane by which it instinctively attunes to its environment. The discussion concerns forgetfulness as a "positive faculty of repression" that keeps this process of psychical absorption unconscious, a faculty that manifests a conflation of the psychical and the physical, since someone in whom this faculty is damaged "can be compared to a dyspeptic (*and not*

[95] E.g. GM I.6, III.15–21.
[96] See EH "Clever," §1–3.
[97] Nietzsche repeats this formulation in BGE 230, specifically in the context of discussing "incorporation."

merely compared —)" (italics added, GM II.1). Nietzsche states this point explicitly in the Third Essay, connecting back to his earlier discussion of *Einverleibung*.

> I do not at all recognize the 'psychological pain' itself as a fact, rather only as an interpretation (causal interpretation) of facts hitherto incapable of accurate formulation: thus as something that is still completely up in the air and is scientifically nonbinding — really a fat word standing in for a very spindly question mark. When someone cannot have done with a 'psychological pain,' [*seelischen Schmerz*] then it is *not*, putting it crudely, due to his 'psyche' [*Seele*]; more probably due to his belly (crudely put, as stated; which by no means indicates my desire also to be crudely heard and crudely understood . . .). A strong and well constituted human being digests his experiences (deeds, misdeeds included) as he digests his meals, even when he has to swallow bitter pills. If he cannot 'have done' with an experience, then this kind of indigestion is just as physiological as the other kind — and many times in fact only one of the consequences of that other kind. —With such a conception, speaking among ourselves, one can still be the strictest opponent of all materialism. (GM III.16)

This passage tells us that the morbid rumination characteristic of a depressive is not plainly psychological, but nor is its physiological basis plainly material. Earlier, Nietzsche called such rumination a kind of dyspepsia, making use of an analogy whose metaphorical basis he had denied. In sum, then, the body comprises psychical and physiological attributes whose differentiation collapses into an identical process irreducible to strictly psychological or materialist accounts. To where does this point?

For Nietzsche, the conflation of *Einverseelung* (inpsychation) and *Einverleibung* (incorporation) points to something of a paradigm shift in philosophy. He suggests as much in the note appended to the end of the First Essay, where he advocates a "restructuring . . . [of the] relationship between philosophy, physiology and medicine" that would privilege a "*physiological* illumination and interpretation [of morality], in any case before the psychological kind" (GM I.17). In the Third Essay, he elaborates that "[f]rom the start we can posit as probable that from time to time in certain places on earth

a *physiological feeling of inhibition* must almost necessarily become master over large swathes of the population, but for lack of physiological knowledge it does not enter as such into consciousness, so that its 'cause,' its remedy can only be sought and attempted psychologically" (GM III.17). Nietzsche here describes an "epidemic" of "black melancholy" as a bodily process of unconscious, *communal incorporation* — in this case, a traumatic fluctuation in social instinct within a specific cultural environment — from an explicitly nonmaterialist perspective. I thus argue that Nietzsche's conception of *Einverleibung* conflates the psychical and the physical at the collective level of social process. He conceives of community as a body psychically equipped with its own permeable membrane, digestive system, and faculty of repression. The play between *Einverseelung* and *Einverleibung* highlights the intimacy of these terms, whereby incorporation denotes a communal form of psychophysiological absorption within a social-political process of cultural development, whose analysis would cut across the divisions between philosophy, physiology and medicine.

The entire Second Essay arguably deals with this conflation of the psychical and the physical, specifically as concerns the roles of punishment, sacrifice, and cruelty in the formation of social instinct and political community. Scholars scarcely discuss the specific social-political dimension of incorporation,[98] focusing more on the incorporation of truth within the context of Nietzsche's proto-phenomenological *Lebensphilosophie*.[99]

[98] Blondel briefly discusses it in *Body and Culture*, ch. 9.
[99] See Keith Ansell-Pearson, "The Incorporation of Truth: Towards the Overhuman," in *A Companion to Nietzsche*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson (Malden MA: Blackwell, 2006), 230–249; "Incorporation and Individuation: On Nietzsche's Use of Phenomenology for Life," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 38, no. 1 (2007): 61–89. In this vein, Franck, *Shadow of God*, 69, follows Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. 2, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 75, by emphasizing

Vanessa Lemm traces the significance of incorporation throughout Nietzsche's work, mainly considering its robust formulation in §110 of *The Gay Science*, a passage that Keith Ansell-Pearson also focuses on. Lemm interprets the dual significance of incorporation as referring to a "politics of immunity"[100] characterized either by a negative strategy of social exclusion or an affirmative strategy of social inclusion. However, this binary distinction diminishes the fundamental ambivalence of incorporation, whose negative and affirmative qualities coincide in an uneasy entanglement. The duplicity of incorporation parallels that of the *pharmakos* as well as the *pharmakon*, denoting both a poison and remedy.

In §224 of *Human, All Too Human*, "Refinement through degeneration," Nietzsche formulates the concept of cultural incorporation in social-political terms. He describes the morality of custom as the binding force of enduring political communities and the means by which they incorporate individuals. He highlights the significance of "weaker individuals, upon whom spiritual *progress* depends in such communities," who, failing to perish of their moral non-conformity, "inflict from time to time a wound upon the stable element of a community. Precisely in this wounded and weakened spot, the collective being is *inoculated*, as it were, with something new; but its greatest strength as a whole must be great enough to absorb this new thing into its blood and assimilate it."[101] Nietzsche's description of this social wound evokes the dual characteristics of *pharmakos*

Einverleibung as the key to Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence. See Franck, *Shadow of God*, 298–309.

[100] Vanessa Lemm, "Nietzsche, *Einverleibung* and the Politics of Immunity," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 21, no. 1 (2013): 10.

[101] Cf. NF-1876 19[115], where the term *incorporation* denotes a similar process.

and *pharmakon*. As he points out, the wound inflicted by weaker individuals, by social outsiders and moral innovators, is a form of degeneration that at once ennobles and enhances the greater social body, for "seldom is any degeneration, any mutilation, even a vice or any physical or moral damage whatsoever without an advantage in some other respect" (HH 224). Nietzsche's characterization of Socrates's "superfoetation" (BT 13) of rational instinct, marking him out from the instincts of his fellow Athenians, exemplifies what Nietzsche has in mind by the "weakness" of social-political innovators. I discussed in part one how Socrates incarnates, in an exaggerated and anomalous way, the instinctual trait of rational genius. According to Nietzsche's dubiously historical narrative, rationality in ancient Greece had hitherto been underdeveloped and considered a symptom of instinctual weakness. Socrates transforms the cultural evaluation of reason from a weakness into a strength by inoculating the social instinct of the Athenians with his unprecedented rationality. How is this inoculation accomplished?

I contend that the figure of the *pharmakos* embodies the ennobling social wound inflicted by the "weaker individuals" described in the above passage from *All Too Human*. The *pharmakos*, as Girard notably shows, is a social outsider whose death at the hands of the community has a transformative effect on it. In this instance, the ritual of human sacrifice literally embodies the incorporation of the weaker individual. Girard's discussion of the *pharmakos* engages Derrida's analysis[102] of the "complicity of contrary values"[103] harboured by the *pharmakon*, which Derrida further links to Socrates as a

[102] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 311–12.
[103] Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 125.

pharmakos, that is, a scapegoat. The annual sacrifice of a *pharmakos* was ceremonially performed in Athens. "The date of the ceremony is noteworthy: the sixth day of the Thargelia. That was the day of the birth of him whose death — and not only because a *pharmakon* was its direct cause — resembles that of a *pharmakos* from the inside: Socrates."[104]

Nietzsche's various depictions of the dying Socrates demonstrate the profound power exuded by the *pharmakos*. In *The Birth*, Nietzsche describes how the artist Plato "threw himself down before this image [of the dying Socrates] with all the passionate devotion of his enthusiastic soul." The image of the dying Socrates is an erotic lure that seduces Plato, who is left "to dream of Socrates, the true eroticist" (BT 13). We find this same image in *Twilight*, where Socrates is again described as a "great *eroticist*" (TI "Socrates," 8). Furthermore, "the fact that he was condemned, not just to banishment but to death, is something that Socrates himself, with complete clarity and without the natural dread of death, seems to have accomplished" (BT 13). In *Twilight*, Nietzsche repeats this sentiment: "Socrates *wished* to die: — not Athens, *he* gave himself the poisoned chalice, he forced Athens to the poisoned chalice" (TI "Socrates," 12).[105] In the *Phaedo*, Plato refers to the poisoned drink as a *pharmakon*. In light of Socrates's final words, it also has a healing effect. Derrida clarifies the dual aspect of the *pharmakon* in Plato's dialogue.[106]

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[104] Ibid., p. 134. Derrida cites supporting evidence from Diogenes Laertius. Nietzsche's three studies on Laertius's *Lives of the Philosophers* (c. 3 CE), published from 1868–1870, cemented his eminent reputation as a philologist. On the import of these studies as a whole (Nietzsche's *Laertiana*), see James I. Porter, *Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 116–121.
[105] Daniels, *Birth of Tragedy*, 193, fails to note this parallel between BT 13 and TI "Socrates," 12, giving the false impression that only the latter passage suggests Socrates's intentionality.
[106] Providing context for Derrida's analysis, Catherine H. Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, Strauss, Derrida* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), 221, writes, "the poison

> [T]he hemlock, that potion which in the *Phaedo* is never called anything but a *pharmakon*, is presented to Socrates as a poison, yet it is transformed, through the effects of the Socratic *logos* and of the philosophical demonstration in the *Phaedo*, into a means of deliverance, a way toward salvation, a cathartic power. The hemlock has an *ontological* effect: it initiates one into the contemplation of the *eidos* and the immortality of the soul. *That is how Socrates takes it*.[107]

For Derrida, Socratic dialectic is itself a *pharmakon*, which in the *Phaedo* quells the instinctual fear of death, a point prefigured by Nietzsche when he shows that Socrates immortalizes the *pharmakon* of dialectic in his willingness to die as a *pharmakos*. Derrida thus confirms what is already implicit in Nietzsche, whose account stresses the religious, mythopoetic dimension of Plato's portrayal of Socrates's death. Derrida further stresses the rivalrous quality of Plato's philosophical *pharmakon* in relation to the sophists,[108] another point that Nietzsche makes in *The Birth* when he gently mocks those surprised at how "Socrates should figure in Aristophanes' plays as the first and leading *Sophist*, as the mirror and quintessence of everything the Sophists were trying to do" (BT 13). I will take up this theme in Chapter 4.

In *The Birth*, Nietzsche's discussion of Socrates culminates with his claim that Socrates deified a new instinct — Western faith in science. His self-willed execution amounts to an act of martyrdom that symbolically grounds a new cultural *mythos*. The following passage provides an insight into the real reason that Socrates, according to Nietzsche, desired his own execution.

> Taking this thought to light our way, let us now look at Socrates: he then appears to us as the first man who was capable, not just of living by the instinct of science,

(*pharmakon*) that kills Socrates thus becomes the remedy (*pharmakon*) for his defective ability to learn while his soul is imprisoned in the body." For Zuckert's analysis of Nietzsche's Socrates, see *Postmodern Platos*, ch. 1.

[107] Derrida, *Dissemination*, 126–27.

[108] Ibid., 124.

> but also, and this is much more, of dying by it. This is why the image of the *dying Socrates*, of a man liberated from fear of death by reasons and knowledge, is the heraldic shield over the portals of science, reminding everyone of its purpose, which is to make existence appear comprehensible and thus justified; and if reasons are insufficient to achieve that end, then it must ultimately be served by *myth* — which I have just defined as the necessary consequence, indeed intention, of science. (BT 15)[109]

Plato, the noble young artist who swallowed Socrates's dialectical *pharmakon*, mythologizes the image of the dying Socrates, "the true eroticist." Socrates, the dialectical hero and *pharmakos*, conversely remedies the decadence of Athens by swallowing its poisonous punishment. Connecting the above passage from *The Birth* to the persistent theme of Socrates's plebeian revenge, we may appreciate how the *incorporative power* of martyrdom is for Nietzsche the social-political myth-producing mechanism behind the slave revolt in morality.[110]

I have linked Nietzsche's discussion of social-political incorporation in *All Too Human* to Socrates's corruption of Plato in *The Birth*. This concept encompasses a communal psychophysiological basis for the integration and transmission of cultural values, the process through which new social instincts are formed. I argued that Socrates's genius exemplifies the unsocial type of "weaker individual" who for Nietzsche successfully "inoculates" the social instinct of his community with the hitherto

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[109] Daniels, *Birth of Tragedy*, 129, notes Socrates's resemblance to Christ in this passage. Burnham and Jesinghausen, *Birth of Tragedy*, 96–97, note an implicit comparison between Socrates and Jesus in the section leading up to it (BT 13).

[110] Waite's discussion of *Einverleibung* connects Nietzsche's putative esotericism with Hegel's interpretation of the trial of Socrates. See Waite, *Nietzsche's Corps/e*, 8–10; G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 1, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (New York: Humanities Press, 1974), 447; *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (Kitchener ON: Batoche Books, 2001), 288–9.

underdeveloped and undervalued instinct of rationality. Socrates accomplishes this through his voluntary martyrdom, which I identified as the political mechanism effecting the slave revolt in morality. Socrates's death as a *pharmakos* immortalizes the *pharmakon* of reason, thereby founding the moral, optimistic myth that scientific progress can redeem humanity from suffering, a myth perpetuated in modernity.

III. CHRISTIAN-PLATONIC MORALITY

In the last few sections, I established how the ascetic ideal proper to the scientific method that Nietzsche diagnoses as a Christian but also Platonic phenomenon in the *Genealogy* coincides with the Socratism described in *The Birth*. My point is that the ascetic idealism discussed in the *Genealogy* is a development of the Socratism discussed in *The Birth*, which illuminates the victory of Socratic optimism. I now go on to show how the mechanism of social-political incorporation that Nietzsche holds responsible for this victory recurs in the *Genealogy* with the crucifixion of Jesus. In this context, it is the *pharmakon* of Christian neighbourly love that Jesus, the Jewish *pharmakos*, immortalizes as a new cultural value. Jesus's voluntary martyrdom founds the myth of "god on the cross" (GM 1.8) through which Christianity achieves hegemony in the West. Since Christian neighbourly love is quite distinct from Socratic reason, a question arises: why is the Socratic myth of scientific progress in the *Genealogy* characteristic of Christianity? My discussion of how Nietzsche's account of the Athenian slave revolt in *The Birth* complements that of the Jewish slave revolt in the *Genealogy* underscores the importance of this question and provides a standpoint from which to address it. I show how both Christianity and Platonism originate out of different traditions of cultural incorporation

whose common feature is the mechanism of voluntary martyrdom, the strategic means by which the slave revolt in morality achieves victory. I argue that this common feature leads to the Western synthesis of Christian and Platonic value systems, thereby explaining why in the *Genealogy* the Socratic myth of scientific progress characterizes Christianity.

It remains unclear how the scientific drive for truth is distinctively Christian unless we concede this aspect of Christianity to be fundamentally Platonic. The origin of Christianity, analyzed in the First Essay of the *Genealogy*, is a "Jewish hatred" that blossoms into Jesus's "*new love*, the deepest and most sublime of all kinds of love" as its crowning flower (GM I.8). The truth of Jesus for Nietzsche is clearly one of compassion, not of science. The value of truth is particularly evident in the Gospel of John, as expressed in the words of Jesus: "the truth will make you free" (8:32); "I am the way, and the truth, and the light" (14:6); "For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice" (18:37). This truth is to be found in Jesus's new commandment: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (13:34–35). Jesus's truth is at odds with the Greek philosophical tradition. He is not concerned, like the philosophers, with questions about natural science, metaphysical truth, or dialectical clarity, but with the practise of selfless neighbour love. The pursuit of science instead characterizes the Platonism incorporated by Christianity as its foreign, pagan

element.[111] It turns out that the European fusion of Jewish compassion and Greek science has led to the calamitous self-annihilation of their synthesis in Christian morality. "That is how Christianity *as morality* perished, by its own morality; this is also how Christianity *as morality* must also perish . . . Christian truthfulness . . . will draw the *strongest conclusion*, its conclusion *against* itself; but this will happen when it asks the question: '*What does all will to truth mean?*'" (GM III.27). However, the philosophical problem of science that Nietzsche associates with this question is not really of Jewish origin, as the trajectory in the *Genealogy* would seem to suggest, but of Greek origin. Socrates inaugurates the Western faith in science, which flourishes in the Platonism that Christianity incorporates. Here, too, this faith has a corrupting influence: the moral value of truth itself is philosophically called into question, to the detriment of Christianity. It is necessary to see a parallel between the Socratic slave revolt in *The Birth* and the Jewish slave revolt in the *Genealogy* in order to make sense of the significance of "Christian truthfulness," whose ascetic morality is the product of the European synthesis of Jewish and Greek value systems.

Let us first consider the parallels between Socratic and Christian morality. Nietzsche describes Christian neighbourly love as a *pharmakon* for depression (GM III.18) and Christian happiness as a "tranquilizing medicine" (BGE 200). This theme parallels Nietzsche's description of Socrates as a physician (TI "Socrates," 11) whose

[111] St. Augustine is considered to be a prime example of this historical development, despite his criticisms of the Greek philosophers, which align with his emphasis on neighbourly love. Philo's philosophy synthesizes the Jewish and Greek traditions. See Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, vol. 1 (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 339–47. The Johannine *Logos* distinctly emerges from competing Jewish and Greek conceptions of truth that the development of Christianity brings together over time.

dialectical method is supposed to work as a *cure* for decadence (ibid., 9). Nietzsche further identifies Socrates's dialectical *pharmakon* with that of Christianity insofar as they both coincide with a *morality of improvement* designed to combat the disease of decadence.[112] In both cases, the proposed cure is seen to conceal the disease of *ressentiment* and its corrupting influence on European culture. However, these moralities are for Nietzsche distinct from one another insofar as the morality of early Christianity espouses the value of compassion, whereas the morality of Socratism espouses the value of dialectical reason. What binds these two moralities together is the mythologized martyrdoms of their founding figures.

Socrates's martyrdom mirrors the same political mechanism that Nietzsche identifies in the crucifixion of Christ, which on its own fails to explain how a faith in science originates out of Jewish morality, since the ascetic ideal characteristic of scientific rationalism is clearly Socratic. In §8 of the First Essay of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche points out the strategic mechanism by which Jewish morality achieved hegemony in European culture.

> This Jesus of Nazareth as the incarnate gospel of love, this "redeemer" who brought blessedness and victory to the poor, sinners, and the sick — was he not precisely seduction in its most uncanny and irresistible form, seduction and a detour to precisely those *Jewish* values and revisions of their ideal? Did Israel not achieve the final goal of its sublime revenge using this detour of the "redeemer," this apparent adversary and disintegrator of Israel? Is it not part of the secret black art of a truly *grand* politics of revenge, a far-sighted, subterranean, slow-working and pre-calculating revenge that in front of the whole world Israel itself had to repudiate as its mortal enemy and nail to the cross the actual instrument of its

[112] On the relationship between Socrates and decadence in Nietzsche, see e.g. Conway, *Dangerous Game*, ch. 5; Bruce Ellis Benson, *Pious Nietzsche: Decadence and Dionysian Faith* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), ch. 5; More, "Philosophy of Decadence."

> revenge, so that the "whole world," namely all opponents of Israel could unhesitatingly bite into this very bait? And for that matter could anyone in the total sophistication of their spirit have thought up a more *dangerous* bait? Anything that might equal that symbol of the "holy cross" in alluring, intoxicating, benumbing, corrupting power, that grisly paradox of a "god on the cross," that mystery of an inconceivable, ultimate, most extreme cruelty and self crucifixion of God *for the salvation of humanity*? . . . What is certain is that *sub hoc signo* Israel with its revenge and revaluation of all values has so far triumphed again and again over all other ideals, over all *more noble* ideals. — —

Given Leiter's interest in the question of how the slave revolt in morality proved successful, it is odd that he makes no mention of this passage, to which I point for Nietzsche's answer. Leiter cites the preceding passage (GM I.7) a total of 14 times, while concluding that the First Essay of the *Genealogy* contains no answer to this question. My interpretation thus sheds light on a lacuna in Leiter's analysis, one that is widespread.[113] Ken Gemes argues that this passage makes ironical use of German anti-Semitic conspiracy theorizing in order to expose the hypocrisy of "the secular enlightened humanist,"[114] whose scientific optimism is infected with the ascetic ideal originally promulgated by the Jews. He also claims that this passage demonstrates the "wholesale rejection of a central claim of the typical anti-Semitic rhetoric of the nineteenth century, namely that Jews are incapable of genuine creation."[115] The passage must be read as ironically anti-Semitic in its strategic political explanation of slave revolt,[116] but as anti-

[113] E.g. Anderson, "Nietzsche's Priests," 54 n. 33; Robert Guay, *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morality* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 62. Guay, Anderson, and Hatab, "Master Morality," 202, speculate that master morality diminishes as civilization progresses. Social customs shift due to peacetime conditions, rendering nobles susceptible to the ascetic values that foster communal processes of socialization. But this hardly explains the decline of Epicureanism and Stoicism. Hatab mentions the attraction of St. Paul and the Christian martyrs, without any elaboration.
[114] Ken Gemes, "The Biology of Evil: Nietzsche on Degeneration (*Ertartung*) and Jewification (*Verjüdung*)," *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 52, no. 1 (2021): 11. This point echoes Daniel W. Conway, *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 37.
[115] Gemes, "Biology of Evil," 7.
[116] Ibid., 8–9.

anti-Semitic in the psychological import of value creation. But it remains unclear how we should distinguish an ironical interpretation from a sincere one, when each concerns the same event. It seems arbitrary to characterize the parts of the argument that resemble anti-Semitic stereotypes of the 19th century (such as the widespread idea that Jewish activities are cunning plots that emerge as reactions only and thus lack the genuine spirit of creation) as ironical and Nietzsche's more or less significant digressions as serious.[117] It seems less arbitrary when one recognizes how Gemes's ironical reading defensively detaches genuine Jewish creativity from the gruesome, violent cruelty that accompanies it, sanitizing Nietzsche's argument by means of its neatly inoffensive compartmentalization. I propose instead to read the passage as exemplifying how the concept of incorporation in the *Genealogy* illuminates the strategic political mechanism to which the slave revolt owes its success, something that Gemes's interpretation does not offer. This reading enables us to set the issue of anti-Semitism aside, given that Gemes's ironical reading of the issue could lend itself to the opposite conclusion, namely that this passage honours Jewish creativity for its far-sighted, political shrewdness, which strategically outclasses Roman imperial force.[118] By pursuing an immanent interpretation of the role of this passage in Nietzsche's text, the connection between incorporation, slave revolt, and morality further clarifies a line of continuity throughout his writings, since I show that it parallels the account of Socrates's martyrdom in *The Birth*.[119]

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[117] Note that anti-Semitism was a broad tent in the 19th century that included many diverging views which makes it hard to assess the relation of a single argument to the anti-Semitic corpus of 19th century thought.
[118] The derogatory adjective "subterranean" (*unterirdischen*) could thus be read ironically, given that Nietzsche employs the term as a complement in GM "Preface," 7, I.12, and D "Preface," 1.
[119] Given that Socrates in many respects stands in for the enlightenment humanist that Gemes's ironically anti-Semitic reading targets, his argument could be taken to further support this line of continuity, which

In §8 of the First Essay of the *Genealogy*, what Nietzsche describes is the "incorporation" — the social and psychophysiological absorption — of religious myth at the level of cultural politics. He describes the crucified King of the Judeans (*Basileus ton Ioudaion*) as the "bait" that the enemies of Israel swallow in the form of a *mythical symbol*: "god on the cross." Nietzsche repeats this exact view in §51 of *The Antichrist* and follows it with a discussion of the seductive quality of martyrdom in §53. I note that the Eucharist embodies the cultural mechanism of incorporation, the symbolic ritual of consuming Christ's salvific body — the *pharmakon* of Christianity, whose effects Nietzsche characterizes as those of an intoxicating drug. For Nietzsche, the triumphant sign of the crucifix conquers the "nobler" ideals of the Graeco-Roman tradition by means of a ritual human sacrifice (*pharmak*os) that effectively divinizes the victim *on behalf* of its perpetrators.[120] The martyrdom of Jesus — who revalues the morality of Mosaic law by inaugurating a revolutionary *praxis* of universal compassion — finally triumphs as a mythical symbol that absorbs into the lifeblood of Western culture.

The Athenians punish as their mortal enemy the philosopher who will become the world-historical icon of Athens, just as the Israelites crucify their own king. To what end? In both cases, this act immortalizes the hero of a people in a new social-political myth, ensuring their world-historical legacy for millennia to come. According to Nietzsche's narrative, Jesus incarnates the transmutation of sublime Jewish hatred into *kenōtic agapē*,

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would have ramifications that need not detain us here. Cf. Sarah Kofman, *Socrates: Fictions of a Philosopher*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1998), 237–42, where she discusses the theme of "Socrates as Jew" in her chapter on Nietzsche's Socrates.

[120] On the resemblance between Jesus's crucifixion and the Jewish *pharmakos* ritual, see Frazer, *The Scapegoat*, 412–23.

that is, sacrificial love. His unconditional love of humanity demonstrates the self-emptying of the ego and its narcissistic attachment to divisive worldly appearances like wealth, social status, and moral superiority. Through his death, this messianic message of love proves historically victorious. In the case of Socrates, he incarnates a "superfoetation" (BT 13) of the rational instinct that transcends and dominates the decadent anarchy of the passions. Grounding a similar attack of worldly appearances, this Socratic instinct is not unlike Jesus's unique compassion insofar as it also develops out of its opposite: the Athenian adoration of beautiful if illusory appearances, with its instinctively mythopoetic irrationality. According to Nietzsche's narrative, the religious impulse is already dying in Athens, while Socrates embodies a peculiar reinvention of it — its intellectual transfiguration. Socrates succeeds because he offers a cure for the instinctual decadence plaguing Athens, which, like Israel, executes as its opponent the salvific object of its world-historical success.

The value of Christian compassion embodied by Jesus does not in itself provide a compelling link between Christianity and science. This value diverges significantly from the Platonic value of Socratic reason, which Nietzsche consistently holds responsible for the birth of scientific optimism and whose success is grounded in a slave revolt no less. My argument is that what Christian and Platonic value systems have in common, given their eventual historical synthesis, is the voluntary martyrdom of their founding figures. I argue that this is the social-political mechanism that Nietzsche identifies in his parallel narratives of Athenian and Jewish slave revolt. This mechanism manifests a process of incorporation in which a ritual human sacrifice "inoculates" the community with a new

social instinct that absorbs into its lifeblood and destabilizes existing political hierarchies. Such is the myth-producing process by which the slave revolt in morality successfully cultivates new values that challenge prevailing social customs.

IV. CONCLUSION

My interpretation of the political mechanism by which the slave revolt in Nietzsche's *Genealogy* achieves its success provides insight into the genealogy Nietzsche lays out of the ascetic value of unconditional truth that infects Western science. I traced this value back to Nietzsche's characterization of Socratic optimism in *The Birth*, whose plebeianism he contrasts with the noble pessimism of Attic tragedy, and discussed how the problem of Socrates, in both Nietzsche's early and late works, has as a point of departure his perception of a slave revolt in morality. That is how he sees Socrates's corruption of Plato, which is the initial form by which the corrosive effects of science on art take hold. Socrates's *morality of improvement* aligns with the ascetic ideal discussed in the Third Essay of the *Genealogy*, which exposes the unconditional faith in truth harbored by science.

I identified Nietzsche's concept of social and physical incorporation as the means by which to achieve political progress and linked this concept to the dual significance of the *pharmakos* and *pharmakon*, building on the work of Girard and Derrida. Nietzsche's portrayal of the martyrdoms of Socrates and Jesus identifies the myth-producing mechanism by which the slave revolt in morality triumphs over noble ideals as a process of what I have described as incorporation. This approach addresses the synthetic character of Christian-Platonic morality, which combines the rationalism of Socratic dialectic with

the compassion of Christian selflessness. In Nietzsche's view, this synthesis proves disastrous when the scientific quest for truth finally confronts its religious origins and culminates in ascetic self-abasement.

In the next chapter, we shall see that the ascetic quality of the scientific method may be diagnosed according to its existential consequences, which Nietzsche contends are nihilistic. When we value truths that degrade the apparent worth of human life, we confer a value on scientific truth that is, in a bizarre way, higher than life itself. This reveals the ascetic quality of European faith in scientific discovery: we willingly sacrifice, degrade, and imperil human life in the service of *truth*. If we concede this point then we are confronted with the problem of the value of truth — what good is it?[121] The problem becomes even more challenging when serious questions about the value of truth turn out to be culturally self-undermining, as we are compelled by the value of the very truth that we call into question, and desire the truth about our desire for truth. In order to assess the value of Nietzsche's question, we are compelled to address the veracity of his critique. Finding no escape from the circularity that such an enquiry entails, it becomes clear that there is something uncanny, self-consuming, and nihilistic about this epistemic pursuit. Whence does our unquenchable desire for truth arise? Nietzsche's philosophy heralds the self-consuming consummation of the Socratic evaluation of truth, which finally calls itself into question. An infernal questioner, Nietzsche turns out to be the uncanny heir of

[121] See Barry Allen, "Nietzsche's Question, What Good is Truth?" *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (1992): 225–240.

Socrates no less than Plato was, while strategically heaping muck upon the maieutic origin of his thought.

CHAPTER 2
NIHILISM, THEN AND NOW

> *Finally: what remained to be sacrificed? Didn't people have to ultimately sacrifice all solace, holiness, salvation, all hope, all faith in a secret harmony, in future bliss and justice? Didn't they have to sacrifice their very God and, out of cruelty against themselves, worship stones, stupidity, gravity, fate, nothingness? To sacrifice God for nothingness — this paradoxical mystery of the ultimate cruelty was reserved for the generation that is now emerging: all of us already know something of this.* BGE 55

The gist of nihilism is that life objectively lacks meaning or purpose.[122] Friedrich Jacobi employs the term at the end of the eighteenth century to diagnose an impoverished philosophical conception of God, what he sees as a soulless intellectual abstraction.[123] Nearly a century later, Nietzsche radicalizes the term's polemical bite in his critique of Christian morality. With the advent of modern secularism, nihilism corresponds to the cosmic specter of amoral meaninglessness that emerges from the death of God as a cultural value, "the awe-inspiring *catastrophe* of a two-thousand-year training in truth, that in the end forbids itself the *lie of believing in God*" (GM III.27). The Christian pursuit of truth itself brings about this event as it culminates in secular scientific enlightenment. Nietzsche disparages nineteenth century atheists for failing to recognize the significance that this event has for the type of Christian morality that they continue to endorse. Schopenhauer is the prime example of such hypocrisy; his philosophy inaugurates the atheistic consummation of Western metaphysics that unveils life's purposelessness. Rather than embracing this, however, Schopenhauer has recourse to the

[122] This chapter has been published under the title "Nihilism: Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Now," in *Open Philosophy* 6, no. 1 (2023): 1–17.
[123] Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel* Allwill, trans. George di Giovanni (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 519, 544, 583.

ascetic denial of the will that characterizes his soteriological doctrine of finding transcendent release from suffering. His pessimism remains bound to a Christian moral interpretation of the world that ultimately negates life's senseless cruelty.

In this chapter, I discuss how Nietzsche's critique of nihilism concerns the complicity between Christian morality and modern atheism. I unpack in what sense Schopenhauer's ascetic denial of the will signifies a return to nothingness, what he calls the *nihil negativum*. I argue that Nietzsche's formulation of nihilism specifically targets Schopenhauer's pessimism as the culmination of the Western metaphysical tradition, the crucial stage of its intellectual history in which the scientific pursuit of truth finally unveils the ascetic *will to nothingness* that motivates it. I contend that Nietzsche's critique of Schopenhauer anticipates current scholarly debates around the significance of the *nihil negativum* and offers a compelling objection against contemporary proponents of philosophical nihilism such as Eugene Thacker and Ray Brassier.

I. SCHOPENHAUER'S *NIHIL NEGATIVUM*

Schopenhauer breaks with Kant by designating the will as the thing in itself that animates the individuated realm of phenomenal appearances. The process of becoming mysteriously arises through the will's objectivization in matter, whose temporal structures he models after Plato's Ideas (WWP, 1:168–171). At the same time, the will's endless, irrational striving undermines Plato's conception of a harmonious *Nous* that rationally orders the cosmos. Beyond the will, Schopenhauer posits an apophatic realm that in my view resembles Plato's good beyond being that Plotinus calls the One, attained by means of the will's mystical abnegation. Plato's metaphysics posits an eternal goodness from

which the multiplicity of phenomenal beings emerges, sustaining their unchanging forms. The philosopher's desire for wisdom aims beyond the realm of becoming, comprehending nature's unchanging forms, and finally seeks to return to the unity of goodness by means of spiritual *askesis*. This is taken up in Plotinus's Neoplatonic theory of emanation, which substitutes Plato's good beyond being with the One, which influences the Romantics.[124] In Plotinus's theory of emanation, the distinction between subject and object emerges with the first emanation from the One, that of the Intellectual-Principle (*Nous*), whose unity is paradoxically constituted by the duality of Being and Thinking. "Intellectual-Principle by its intellective act establishes Being, which in turn, as the object of intellection, becomes the cause of intellection and of existence to the Intellectual-Principle."[125] In the context of his aesthetics, Schopenhauer's "*pure*, will-less, painless, timeless, *subject of cognition*" (WWP, 1:222) objectively grasps the eternal Idea of will in a manner resembling the self-intellection of Plotinus's *Nous*, albeit reformulated in terms of the transcendental subject's self-cognizance as will freed from the Principle of Sufficient Ground but not the universal form of representation that pairs subject and object. His ethics, by contrast, evokes Plotinus's conception of the One as a mystical goodness beyond Being and Thinking.

Schopenhauer assimilates Kant's transcendental critique in his pessimistic conception of ascetic resignation. In Buddhistic terms, suffering exists within the realm of *Maya*, that of phenomenal appearances. Only the denial of the will's fettering desire,

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[124] See M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971), 146–54.
[125] Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (Burdett NY: Larson, 1992), V.1.4.

thereby returning it to a state of primordial nothingness or *Nirvana*, liberates one from the cyclical suffering of *Samsara*, or the cosmic manifestation of the noumenal will.[126] He interprets the Buddhist conception of *Nirvana* vis-à-vis the tradition of Christian-Platonic mysticism, which reduces the illusory world of appearances to nought in light of what transcends it. Taking up and reformulating Kant's thesis of the *Ding an sich* and the unattainability of transcendent or metaphysical knowledge, Schopenhauer transforms the optimism of science into ascetic self-denial, culminating in the will's return to nothingness, as the instinct of life-affirmation turns against itself. This moment signifies the negation of appearances alongside the negation of the will, but a negation that is the basis of a religious idealization since Schopenhauer pronounces nothingness to be *holy*.[127] The religious horizon of metaphysics is for Nietzsche most readily apparent in Schopenhauer's apophatic account of the *nihil negativum*, the transcendent Absolute that the saint attains by means of her ascetic denial of the will. Didier Franck remarks on this. "'How is the denial of the will *possible*? How is the saint possible? This really seems to have been the question over which Schopenhauer became a philosopher and began' [BGE 45]. That is to say that the metaphysics of the will and German Idealism, whose inheritor

[126] See Moira Nicholls, "The Influences of Eastern Thought on Schopenhuaer's Doctrine of the Thing-in-Itself," in *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*, ed. Christopher Janaway (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 184–85, 188–90. Raj R. Singh, *Death, Contemplation and Schopenhauer* (London: Routledge, 2007), ch. 4, discusses Schopenhauer's relationship to Indian thought and challenges Nicholls's periodization of it.

[127] David Berman, "Schopenhauer and Nietzsche: Honest Atheism, Dishonest Pessimism," in *Willing and Nothingness: Schopenhauer as Nietzsche's Educator*, ed. Christopher Janaway (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 186, denies the religious aspect of Schopenhauer's ethics. "[T]here is no possible salvation or redemption. This has been cut off by Schopenhauer's atheism. All that seems to remain is nihilism and the ascetic quest for nothingness." But Schopenhauer employs the terms blessed (*selig*), blessedness (*Glückseligkeit*), and holiness (*Heiligkeit*) in the context of achieving spiritual salvation (*Heil*) or redemption (*Erlösung*) through ascetic self-denial, mainly accomplished by saints.

is Schopenhauer, belong to the horizon of revealed religion."[128] Nietzsche exposes this religious tendency as what grounds the scientific *will to truth* that culminates in nihilism. Schopenhauer's pessimism denies the value of phenomenal existence as he paints his godless picture of an eternally suffering world. Only against the backdrop of a world emptied of meaning does his portrait of the saint become meaningful, unveiling the soteriological aim of Kantian philosophy, namely, the construction of an ideal at once religious and ethical.

Along these lines, Schopenhauer's pessimism culminates in his conception of absolute nothingness (*nihil negativum*), which he distinguishes from mere negation (*nihil privativum*). The *nihil privativum*, as a privation of being, designates the negation of the world of appearances, their non-existence relative to being. In this sense "nothingness" functions as a relative concept. "That which is generally assumed as positive — what we call *that which is* and whose negation the concept *nothing* in its most general meaning expresses — is precisely the world of presentation, which I have demonstrated to be the objectivization of will, its mirror" (WWP, 1:475). While the *nihil privativum* inverts this positive presentation of the world, which now appears as nothing, the *nihil negativum* corresponds to the personal state of salvation that results from the denial of the will. The two go hand in hand, since one witnesses the world's nullity only through the will's denial. "[W]hat remains over after the nullification of the will, for all those who are still full of will, is indeed nothingness. But also conversely, for those in whom the will has turned and denied itself, this our so very real world with all its suns and galaxies — is

[128] Franck, *Shadow of God*, 70.

nothing" (WWP, 1:478). Simone Weil formulates an identical insight in the context of a Buddhistic "extinction of desire" that, like Schopenhauer, she interprets through the lens of Christian mysticism. "The good seems to us as a nothingness, since there is no *thing* that is good. But this nothingness is not unreal. Compared with it, everything in existence is unreal."[129] This perspective nullifies phenomenal existence; nothingness, in the sense of the *nihil negativum*, designates the truly real, in contrast to which the phenomenal world manifests a privation of reality. Hence, "a reversal of standpoint, if it were possible for us, would allow the signs to be switched, and display that which has being for us as nothing and the former nothing as that which has being" (WWP, 1:476). We can consider the relative nothingness of the *nihil privativum* in two different ways. From the perspective of "those who are still full of will," the will-lessness of the ascetic appears as a privation of reality, while from the perspective of the will-less ascetic, this privation applies to the world as will and representation. The saint attains this latter perspective in relation to the *nihil negativum* that she experiences through the denial of the will, but there is little scholarly consensus concerning its exact status.[130]

Schopenhauer formulates his conception of the *nihil negativum*, over against the *nihil privativum*, in relativistic terms, while seemingly referring to a non-relative concept.

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[129] Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (New York: Routledge, 2002), 13. Weil desires to exit the imaginary "dream world" (p. 95) of Maya by being "carried beyond the will" through "penal suffering" (p. 88). Gustave Thibon stresses Weil's "abrupt and final refutation" (p. xx) of a pessimism like Schopenhauer's, though the passage to which he refers claims that "we must attain to a knowledge of a still fuller reality in suffering which is a nothingness and a void" (p. 84), which aligns with Schopenhauer's mystical conception of redemptive suffering. See Gerard Mannion, "Schopenhauer and Christianity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Schopenhauer*, ed. Robert L. Wicks (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 401–424.

[130] For a detailed discussion, see Gerard Mannion, *Schopenhauer, Religion and Morality: The Humble Path to Ethics* (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2003), ch. 7.

While we can think of the concept of nothingness only in the privative sense as what *is not* relative to *what is*, we cannot properly *think* of the concept of a nothingness that transcends the distinction between being and nonbeing in a non-relative, absolute sense, since it ceases to have any communicable meaning. Julian Young clarifies that while the *nihil negativum* refers to the transcendent Absolute, as a communicable concept it still always operates in a relative sense, a point that Schopenhauer states explicitly in the Second Volume of *Will and Presentation*.[131] "If will were the thing in itself simply and absolutely, then this nothing would also be something *absolute*, instead of turning out for us precisely there as expressly *relative*" (WWP, 2:224). Indeed, Schopenhauer contextualizes the concept in relation to Plato's argument in the *Sophist*, according to which nothingness refers to the relative difference between beings rather than to anything in itself.[132] This supports Young's view that Schopenhauer refers us to what lies beyond the will, which accounts for the possibility of the will's abolition, and we can only conceive negatively in terms of its difference from the will. The *nihil negativum* designates the relative nothingness of the will in relation to a more deeply hidden essence and thus functions as the *nihil privativum* of the will itself.

[131] Young, *Willing and Unwilling*, 35. "Salvation . . . demands that one should have 'stepped outside the phenomenon', that one should have transcended, 'abolished', the self and the world 'as will'. But if the thing in itself were will, then to have transcended the will would be to have 'passed over into empty nothingness': 'If the will were positively and absolutely the thing in itself, then this nothing would be *absolute*'. As it is, however, the nothingness that is beyond the will is only a '*relative* nothingness': only relative to 'our knowledge' can it be said that there is nothing beyond the will."

[132] "Since we showed that the nature of *the different* is, chopped up among all beings in relation to each other, we dared to say that *that which is not* really is just this, namely, each part of the nature of the different that's set over against *that which is*" (*Sophist*, 258e).

In Young's surprising view, we must no longer regard the will as the true thing in itself,[133] which now resembles an indefinable Absolute that Schopenhauer construes as nothingness only relatively in relation to the will. On my reading, Schopenhauer's conception of this Absolute — the will's return to which "is designated by the terms ecstasy, rapture, illumination, union with God" (WWP, 1:476), transcending the distinction between subject and object, knower and known — aligns with the "demonic excess" of Plato's good beyond being (*epekeina tes ousias*, Republic 509b–c). Many passages support this mystical-Platonic interpretation.

> All this is accordingly finite existence whose opposite would be conceivable as infinite, as exposed to no attack from without [in other words, indestructible], or as requiring no help from without, and therefore as . . . in eternal rest and calm . . . without change, without time, without multiplicity or diversity, the negative knowledge of which is the keynote of Plato's philosophy. *Such an existence must be that to which the denial of the will-to-live opens the way*.[134]

This position further aligns with the negative theology of Pseudo-Dionysius.

> [T]his [theology] consists merely in the explanation that all the predicates of God can be denied but not one can be affirmed, because he resides above and beyond all being and all knowledge, what Dionysius calls *epekeina*, 'on yonder side' and describes as something wholly and entirely inaccessible to our knowledge. This theology is the only true one; but it has no substance at all. Admittedly it says and

[133] My discussion concentrates on the metaphysical-ethical status of Schopenhauer's *nihil negativum*, rather than contributing to the ongoing debate concerning the status of the will as the thing in itself, on which see e.g. Onur Vasfi Özen, "The Ambiguity in Schopenhauer's Doctrine of the Thing-in-Itself," *The Review of Metaphysics* 74, no. 2 (2020): 251–288, who highlights Schopenhauer's overall inconsistency. "I believe any attempt to give a coherent, consistent account of Schopenhauer's thought as a whole is inevitably bound to encounter difficulties because Schopenhauer's writings are riddled with irreconcilable passages concerning the thing-in-itself. This is why, I suggest, Schopenhauer's multiple contrary views about the thing-in-itself leave any effort to reconcile them and reach a univocal representation of his thought a doomed task" (pp. 253–54).

[134] Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, vol. 2, trans. Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 257. Cited with italics from Özen, "Ambiguity in Schopenhauer's Doctrine," 273.

> tells us nothing, and it consists merely in the declaration that it is aware of this and cannot be otherwise.[135]

In his interpretation of the *nihil negativum*, Young seems implicitly to adopt a Platonic conception of the one, eternal goodness that aligns with an ontology of Absolute Presence. He refers to the in-itself beyond the will as an "ultimate level of being,"[136] "the transcendent plane of being" that is finally one:

> the mystic is right in believing that the ultimate reality is "one." And he is right, too, in believing that it offers genuine salvation. The reason for this is that since willing, the cause of suffering, requires a distinction between the subject and object of willing it requires plurality. Hence, at the ultimate level of reality, there can be no willing — another nail in the coffin of the view that Schopenhauer claims to know the world in itself to be will — and hence no suffering.[137]

However, Young's characterization of the ultimate reality beyond the will remains ambiguous as it also seems to depart from a Platonic model of transcendence. In the passage above, Young refers to the mystic's "consciousness of the identity of one's essence with that of all things, or with the core of the world" (WWP, 2:683), an experience designated by what Schopenhauer troublingly calls "pantheistic consciousness" (WWP, 2:682). Such consciousness parallels the religious insight into the universal *will for life* in its oneness, since the road to perfect will-lessness entails one's compassionate cognizance "that the in-itself of [one's] own phenomenon is also that of others, namely, the will for life that constitutes the essence of every single thing and lives in all of them, indeed that this extends even to animals and the whole of nature" (WWP, 1:432). While Schopenhauer describes the mystic's union with God in terms of a

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[135] Arthur Schopenhauer, *Manuscript Remains*, vol. 3, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Berg, 1988), 376. Cited from Mannion, "Schopenhauer and Christianity," 407–08.
[136] Young, *Willing and Unwilling*, 131.
[137] Ibid., 133.

"pantheistic consciousness," his rejection of pantheism furthermore limits this descriptor to the unity of the will for life that the *nihil negativum* transcends (WWP, 2:719–20). It is unclear where this leaves us, since he also dismisses the fanciful flight of idealists who have recourse to "such bare negations" as the *Absolute*, the *Infinite*, and the *Supersensible*, referring to "the dark ground [*Grund*], primal ground [*Urgrund*], Unground [*Ungrund*]" as mere "twaddle" (WWP, 1:324). Schopenhauer is thus inconsistent on whether the unity of all things refers to the will for life or that which transcends it, especially since the latter aligns with the idealist notion of a primal ground. Patrick Gardiner anticipates Young's account of Schopenhauer's mysticism, of which he distinguishes two distinct aspects.

> One of these, mystical awareness, involves simply a true insight into the inner nature of the phenomenal world considered as a whole, and into our own natures as elements of and participants in that world. . . . On the other, while mystical awareness presupposes and springs from insight of the sort just described, it is itself to be understood as comprehending some 'deeper' apprehension, about which, however, nothing can be significantly thought or said.[138]

Mysticism in the first sense refers to cognizance of the *will for life*, though Schopenhauer does not consistently distinguish this from mysticism in the second sense. Young fails to account for this confusion and seems to replicate it.[139] The conflation continuously mars

[138] Patrick Gardiner, *Schopenhauer* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), 299. Cited from John E. Atwell, *Schopenhauer on the Character of the World*: *the Metaphysics of Will* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 215 n. 58

[139] Young's description of mystical oneness remains unchanged in *Schopenhauer* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 198; *Philosophical Biography*, 84–86. In *Schopenhauer*, 97–99, 201–203, he addresses the confusion by distinguishing two unique senses of the thing in itself, but this only compounds the problem. See Özen, "Ambiguity in Schopenhauer's Doctrine," 261–67.

Young's account as he incoherently equates the "'pantheistic' vision of the unified divinity of all things"[140] with a reality transcendently beyond the world.[141]

Eugene Thacker proposes a different conception of Schopenhauer's *nihil negativum*, whereby this term refers not to something beyond the will, but rather to its absolute, non-phenomenal essence. While the *nihil privativum* refers to the nullity of phenomena relative to the will, to the transience of the world as representation, the *nihil negativum* refers to the will in itself apart from representation.

> Schopenhauer suggests that the Will-to-Life is nothingness for a further reason, which is that, in itself, the Will-to-Life indicates that which is never manifest, that which is never an objectification of the Will, that which is never a Will for a Representation. To the relative nothingness of the *nihil privativum* there is the absolute nothingness (*absolutes Nichts*) of the *nihil negativum*. While Schopenhauer is himself opposed to the post-Kantian Idealists, he is united with them in his interest in the concept of an Absolute, albeit one paradoxically grounded in nothingness. His contribution is to have thought the Absolute without resorting to the ontology of generosity and its undue reliance on romantic conceptions of Life, Nature, and the human. To the negative ontology of life, it would seem, therefore, that there is a kind of *meontology* of life.[142]

For Thacker, the nothingness of the will is paradoxical in its transcendence, for it immanently nullifies the will to life. It seems to me that this emptiness permeates existence in a way comparable to the atomist's void, manifesting the "cosmic indifference" of "that which is fully immanent yet absolutely inaccessible."[143] The Absolute, that is, the nonrepresentational basis of representation, divorces life from within life, evoking a vantagepoint that is "radically unhuman"[144] and anti-anthropocentric, and

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[140] Young, *Schopenhauer*, 201.
[141] Ibid., 203.
[142] Eugene Thacker, "Darklife: Negation, Nothingness, and the Will-to-Life in Schopenhauer," *Parrhesia* 12 (2011): 23.
[143] Ibid., 20.
[144] Ibid., 21.

also anti-Platonic, since the Absolute is "grounded in nothingness" rather than Platonic goodness. In this sense, for Thacker, Schopenhauer offers a *meontology* of life. This interpretation initially clarifies the confusion surrounding the obscure distinction between the *nihil privativum* and *nihil negativum* in a more satisfying way than Young's interpretation, since it avoids undermining Schopenhauer's central conception of the will as the thing in itself.[145] Instead, the will is the sole true substance, whose reality at once reveals and conceals itself under two distinct aspects. Under the aspect of its objectivization in the realm of phenomenal appearances the will amounts to the *nihil privativum*, while under the aspect of its nonrepresentational, inconceivable essence the will amounts to the *nihil negativum*.

Thacker attempts to strip Schopenhauer's *nihil negativum* of its moral fundament by situating it in the context of his godless metaphysics. Thacker's defence of Schopenhauer's *nihil negativum* highlights the will's unfathomable persistence, which blatantly contradicts Schopenhauer's ethical-religious conception of its extinction, instead explaining his mysticism in metaphysical terms. In doing so, Thacker cleverly obscures the moral basis of Schopenhauer's pessimism.[146] While Thacker's specific emphasis on the will's scientific impenetrability aligns with Schopenhauer's critique of *morphology*

[145] See e.g. WWP, 1:9, 149–50, 2:262–63, 68, where he stresses the importance of his use of the term will to designate the thing in itself, as opposed to Kant's obscuration of the concept. He explicitly rejects the unknowable character of Kant's thing in itself as an object independent of a subject and denies that the will is an "object" at all (WWP, 1:33, 43, 217), further contradicting Young's argument.

[146] See David E. Cartwright, "Nietzsche's Use and Abuse of Schopenhauer's Moral Philosophy," in *Willing and Nothingness: Schopenhauer as Nietzsche's Educator*, ed. Christopher Janaway (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 118–128; Christopher Janaway, "The Moral Meaning of the World," in *The Oxford Handbook of Schopenhauer*, ed. Robert L. Wicks New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 271–283.

and *etiology* that supports his metaphysics of the will (WWP, 1:131–36),[147] Schopenhauer's conception of the *nihil negativum* refers to the mystical transcendence of the will from an explicitly ethical standpoint. Similarly, we cannot easily square the anti-anthropocentric implications of Thacker's argument — its "radically unhuman aspect"[148] — with Schopenhauer's anthropic vision of the world as the "macrohuman" (*Makranthropos*): "it is obviously more correct to teach an understanding of the world in terms of the human being than of the human being in terms of the world; for we have to explain what is given in a mediate way, hence the given of external perception, in terms of what is given immediately, hence self-consciousness" (WWP, 2:719). It is worth noting that this position critically undermines Schopenhauer's own metaphysics, according to which self-consciousness emerges with the brain, accidentally from matter.[149] However, the crucial distinction between the phenomenal realm of appearances, conditioned in space and time, and the causally unconditioned realm of noumenal will, exists only for the consciousness that represents reality. In §4 of "On Schopenhauer," Nietzsche points out that the will must then already possess an intellect that distinguishes

[147] Thacker takes extremophiles (e.g. microbes that flourish without sunlight or oxygen) as examples of life's enigma, whose discovery increases the likelihood of extra-terrestrial life of this sort. Another Schopenhauerian, Michel Houellebecq, *Interventions*, 62–63, contemplates the potential discovery of fossilized microbes on Mars (almost verbatim from *Elementary Particles*, 102–104), though he considers the extinction event as a boon. For him, the discovery would not display life's enigma so much as its banality. On Houellebecq's indebtedness to Schopenhauer, see Houellebecq, *In the Presence of Schopenhauer*, trans. Frank Wynne (New York: Random House, 200o); Christopher A. Howard, "The Next Metaphysical Mutation: Schopenhauer as Michel Houellebecq's Educator," in *The Oxford Handbook of Schopenhauer*, ed. Robert L. Wicks (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 556–575.
[148] Thacker, "Darklife," 21.
[149] "Will, as the thing in itself, constitutes the inner, true, and indestructible essence of a person; yet in itself it is without consciousness. For consciousness is determined by the intellect, and the latter is a mere accident with respect to our essence… [W]e find will as the enduring substance, the intellect by contrast, conditioned by its organ [brain], the variable accident" (WWP, 1:xxix [2:227, 2:280]). Hence, "the world as presentation emerges merely *per accidens*" (WWP, 2:720). See also WWP, 1:194, 2:310–332.

it from phenomena — contradicting both the will's irrational blindness and the accidental origin of consciousness — or no phenomena could exist from which the intellect might emerge, since only the will as pure thing in itself would exist.[150] "But an intellect exists: consequently it could not be a tool of the world of appearance, as Schopenhauer would have it, but it would be the thing-in-itself, i.e. the will." Indeed, Schopenhauer can only explain the world in human terms, as *Makranthropos*, to the detriment of his metaphysical will, indelibly stamped by the intellect that conceives it.

Against Thacker's anti-anthropocentric speculations, I contend that the transcendence of the *nihil negativum* is on Schopenhauer's account only a possibility for human beings, since one achieves it by means of the will's immanent self-emptying into nothingness. How else could one deny the will, if not in the world, through the human agony of its crucifixion? "'Its self-cognizance and consequent decisive affirmation or denial is the single event in-itself'" (WWP, 1:227). Human consciousness mediates the single ethical event of the will's affirmation or denial that corresponds to "the crucified Savior, or else the crucified thief, depending on how it decides; consequently, my ethics is also altogether in agreement with Christian ethics, to the extent of its highest tendencies, and no less with that of Brahmanism and Buddhism" (WWP, 2:721). Schopenhauer introduces the *nihil negativum* within the religious framework of his ethics and for this reason it poses problems for his atheistic metaphysics of the will where Thacker attempts to allocate it. The road to salvation begins with a recognition of the *nihil*

[150] See Christopher Janaway, "Schopenhauer as Nietzsche's Educator," in *Willing and Nothingness: Schopenhauer as Nietzsche's Educator*, ed. Christopher Janaway (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 19; Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 70.

privativum, which one achieves through the consciousness of life's nullity, and transitions into a realization of the *nihil negativum*, which one achieves through the immanent movement of the will's ascetic self-transcendence.[151] This latter formulation is paradoxical insofar as the will's self-annulment seems to imply, as Young argues, something beyond the will, which the *nihil negativum* only designates in a relative sense. Thacker clarifies that the will's self-transcendence is paradoxically immanent to the cosmic will itself, and rather than pointing somewhere beyond it, points to the nothingness of will without representation, what seals itself off from human experience.[152] This initially seems promising. But if will were already in itself will-lessness, if the world were saturated with the immanence of its own transcendence, then the cosmos would be blessed and there would be no reason to deny it, and consequently, no reason to be a pessimist.[153] Thacker attempts to assimilate Schopenhauer to his own contemporary brand of nihilism, but only distorts Schopenhauer's ethics in the process, and compounds the incoherence of his metaphysics.

I agree with Young that the *nihil negativum* corresponds to something beyond the will, referring on closer inspection to a relative rather than absolute nothingness. Given Schopenhauer's references to Plotinus and Erigena (WWP, 2:691),[154] the

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[151] More precisely, recognition of life's nullity compels one to the asceticism that further intensifies such recognition. It is useful to distinguish these stages of mystical insight even if they do not conform to a rigid sequence.

[152] Young, *Schopenhauer*, 200, clarifies his position. "To put the point in philosopher's jargon, that which transcends empirical reality is an *epistemological* but not an *ontological* nothing," whereas for Thacker it is precisely *meontological*.

[153] This would correspond to a more Buddhistic disposition, which Schopenhauer did not adopt, according to Eugene Thacker, "Introduction," in *On the Suffering of the World*, ed. Eugene Thacker (New York: Repeater, 2020), 7.

[154] See Thacker's discussion of these thinkers in *After Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 25–75.

incomprehensibility of blessed nothingness approximates Plato's good beyond being and Plotinus's One. Contra Thacker, Schopenhauer confirms that the *nihil negativum* is not "absolutely nothing," since it must not "be nothing from every possible standpoint and in every possible sense," but only appears so due to the "limitation of our standpoint," through which we can only achieve "a wholly negative cognizance of it" (WWP, 2:681). Thacker's interpretation runs up against passages that support Young's, wherein the *nihil negativum* points to "the essence of things before or beyond the world, and consequently *beyond will* (italics added)" (WWP, 2:718), referring to "the infinitely preferable repose of blessed nothingness" (WWP, 2:716). Here Schopenhauer confirms Young's view that since willing entails a distinction between the subject and object of willing, no will exists before or beyond the world, that is, without representation. This clarifies his earlier statement that "the [world] will accompany will as inseparably as its shadow accompanies a body; and if will exists, so too life, the world will exist" (WWP, 1:326). Schopenhauer suggests not only that the will cannot be objectified without representation, but that the world as representation necessarily accompanies the will's existence.[155] But this undermines his overall conception of the will as the thing in itself,[156] whose vacillating incoherence poses different dilemmas for both Thacker and Young. Young's interpretation contradicts Schopenhauer's explicit formulation of the will as the thing in

[155] For a defence of this reading that refines Young's position, see Atwell, *Character of the World*, ch. 5. For example, in passages such as *Will and presentation*, 1:193, we see how the mirror of representation reflects the will's darkest, most impenetrable striving, while Schopenhauer's description of the *nihil negativum* conversely foregoes this schema.

[156] Schopenhauer clearly postulates the will's independence from the world. For example, discussing music as a direct copy of the will, he writes that it "is also entirely independent of the phenomenal world, completely ignores it, could even to a certain extent *exist if the world were not there* (italics added)" (WWP, 1:307–08).

itself, and Thacker's interpretation incoherently conflates the *nihil negativum* — which Schopenhauer explicitly associates with the denial of the will — with the *will to life*. We also saw that Young inadvertently falls prey to this conflation himself. In the next section, I offer an explanation for why this type of confusion emerges from Schopenhauer's philosophy, specifically in light of Nietzsche's interpretation of it.

II. NIETZSCHE CONTRA SCHOPENHAUER

While Thacker embraces Schopenhauer's bleak, enigmatic, and revolutionary worldview as a form of "cosmic pessimism,"[157] Nietzsche famously points out the Christian morality that underpins it as part of his critique of nihilism. In my view, this critique remains valid against anyone who would attempt to appropriate Schopenhauer's pessimism without acknowledging its moral foundation. On my reading of Nietzsche, the saint's perspective of the world as a privation of being pushes the ascetic logic of Christian morality to its most extreme conclusion, since Schopenhauer views the world as essentially something evil.[158]

> [I]f one would conduct the most stubborn optimist through hospitals, infirmaries, and chambers of surgical martyrdom, through prisons, torture chambers and slaves' quarters, over battlefields and scenes of execution, then open up to him all the dark dwellings of misery where it shuns the glances of cold curiosity, and finally let him glance into the tower of Ugolino's starvation, then surely he too would in the end see what sort of *meilleur des mondes possible* this is. Where else, after all, did *Dante* get the material for his hell than from this our actual world? . . . By contrast, when he came to the task of depicting heaven and its pleasures, he was confronted with an insuperable difficulty; for our world simply offers no materials at all for such a thing. (WWP 1:380)[159]

[157] Thacker, "Darklife," 21.
[158] Cartwright, "Schopenhauer's Moral Philosophy," 120, and Young, *Schopenhauer*, 101, 201, both emphasize the fundamentally evil character of the world for Schopenhauer, as does Nietzsche (HH 28).
[159] Nietzsche perhaps alludes to this passage in GM III.14, when he likens European culture to "an insane asylum or a hospital."

The development of Christian theology deprives evil of ontological value by reducing it to nothingness, a mere privation of the goodness that grants being. Georges Bataille helps to clarify the link between asceticism and nothingness.[160] For Bataille, the ascetic sublimation of erotic instinct intensifies the primeval logic of taboo that produces the religious myth of transcendence. This intensification emerges in the form of Christian-Platonic morality, which deprives moral transgression of its immanent sacred quality by positing a transcendent antithesis between good and evil, being and nothingness. Consider, for instance, Augustine's identification of evil as nothingness in Book Seven of *Confessions*.[161] As a privation of goodness, evil lacks being altogether. This directly influences Descartes's *Meditations*, whose references to nothingness closely attend his defence of divine transcendence. Descartes follows Augustine's Platonic conception of evil as a privation of the good, which corresponds to ignorance as a privation of knowledge. In the Fourth Meditation, Descartes identifies the cause of human error as a kind of nothingness.[162] We see how the positive value of transcendence, its absolute

[160] See Georges Bataille, *Eroticism*, trans. Mary Dalwood (New York: Penguin Classics, 2012), ch. 11, which complements his equation of evil with nothingness in *On Nietzsche*, trans. Bruce Boone (St. Paul MN: Paragon House, 1994), 143–46.

[161] "[A]ll things that are corrupted suffer privation of some good. If they were to be deprived of all good, they would not exist at all. . . . Therefore as long as they exist, they are good. Accordingly, whatever things exist are good, and the evil into whose origins I was inquiring is not a substance, for it if were a substance, it would be good" (Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 124–25).

[162] "I notice that there is present in my thought not only a real and positive idea of God, or rather of a supremely perfect being, but also, so to speak, a certain negative idea of nothingness, or of what is infinitely removed from every kind of perfection. And I see that I am, as it were, a mean between God and nothingness, that is, so placed between the supreme Being and not-being that, in so far as a supreme Being has produced me, there is truly nothing in me which could lead to error; but if I consider myself as somehow participating in nothingness or not-being, that is, in so far as I am not myself the supreme being and am lacking many things, I find myself exposed to an infinity of defects, so that I should not be astonished if I go wrong" (René Descartes, *Discourse on method* and *Meditations*, trans. Laurence J. Lafleur (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1960), 110).

presence, casts the shadow of nothingness, the total privation of being. Such is the antithesis between good and evil conceived within a Platonic framework of Absolute Presence. While neither Augustine nor Descartes take this to mean that the world is essentially evil, since God creates it out of his immutable goodness, Schopenhauer considers the world as a privation of being insofar as it lacks goodness altogether.[163] Considered alone, the world as will and representation is a godless realm of suffering, a view that supports the common assumption of Schopenhauer's atheism. Conversely, Schopenhauer's soteriology imbues life with a religious meaning that transcends the world. Are these opposing viewpoints fundamentally irreconcilable?

I propose a synthesis of these competing interpretations of Schopenhauer that I have outlined in relation to the *nihil negativum*. Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will retains an anti-Platonic conception of nothingness vis-à-vis the nullity of life and the absence of a harmonious *Nous*, since the world is irrational and ultimately lacks a telos. This privative picture of the world (what Thacker calls negative ontology) follows consistently from a Christian-Platonic devaluation of appearances, albeit taken to a paradoxical extreme that accords with atheism. The ascetic denial of the will reveals the world's nothingness and coincides with the saint's mystical union with an absolute, radiating Presence, the Beyond that Schopenhauer obscures with apophatic language.

[163] Han-Pile, "Nietzsche's Metaphysics," 401 n. 37, suggests otherwise. "Schopenhauer criticizes the privative understanding of nothingness inherited from Descartes, and hints that true nothingness is a positive state (a Hinduist idea which comes from his reading of the *Vedantas*)." I emphasize instead Schopenhauer's assimilation of Christian-Platonic mysticism as it taints his understanding of Eastern philosophy. Schopenhauer, *Will and Presentation*, 1:470–71, credits St. Augustine for expounding the complementary doctrines of original sin and divine grace that inform his conception of worldly evil and ascetic redemption.

Schopenhauer's atheistic, anti-Platonic conception of nature coalesces ambivalently with his ethical-religious framework. This ambivalence explains how his conception of the *nihil negativum* gives rise to such antipodal interpretations. For Nietzsche, these opposing viewpoints attain a level of consistency in Schopenhauer's philosophy, as I now show.

The distinctive implications of these two conflicting readings of Schopenhauer, one religious and the other atheistic, find expression throughout Nietzsche's oeuvre. On the one hand, Schopenhauer is guilty of a recidivistic form of Christian morality to which he erroneously submits his philosophy, "thus, the whole medieval Christian way of viewing the world and perceiving humanity could once again celebrate its resurrection in Schopenhauer's teaching, despite the long-since achieved annihilation of all Christian dogmas" (HH 26). "As surely as we can gain a great deal for the understanding of Christianity and other religions from Schopenhauer's religious-moral interpretation of human beings and the world, just as surely was he in error concerning *the value of religion for knowledge*" (HH 110). On the other hand, Schopenhauer envisions the horrifying, dehumanized godlessness of nature, given his honest, "horrified look into a de-deified world that had become stupid, blind, crazed, and questionable."

> As a philosopher, Schopenhauer was the *first* admitted and uncompromising atheist among us Germans . . . The ungodliness of existence counted for him as something given, palpable, indisputable . . . This is the locus of his whole integrity; unconditional and honest atheism is simply the *presupposition* of his way of putting the problem, as a victory of the European conscience won finally and with great difficulty; as the most fateful act of two thousand years of [Christian moral] discipline for truth that in the end forbids itself the *lie* in faith in God. . . . *Schopenhauer's* question immediately comes to us in a terrifying way: *Does existence have any meaning at all?* (GS 357)

Nietzsche recapitulates this passage from *Gay Science* in the penultimate section of his *Genealogy*, where Schopenhauer's atheistic question as to whether life has any meaning paradoxically marks the cumulative expression of Christian morality and its *will to truth* (GM III.27).[164] Nietzsche's diagnosis of nihilism on the one hand refers to life's meaninglessness as the culmination of ascetic morality and on the other refers to Schopenhauer's ascetic response to suffering that imbues it with mystical meaning.[165] "*That* the ascetic ideal has meant so much to man reveals a basic fact of human will, its *horror vacui*; *it needs an aim* —, and it prefers to will *nothingness* rather than *not* will [das Nichts *wollen*, *als* nicht *wollen*]" (GM III.1).[166] In response to the prospect of life's meaninglessness as a cyclical process of perpetual, irredeemable suffering, Schopenhauer has recourse to his soteriological doctrine of ascetic transcendence, which culminates in his apophatic notion of the *nihil negativum*. Similar to Weil, Schopenhauer envisions an earthly nihilism whose godless monstrosity dovetails with his redemptive account of unearthly saintliness. Nietzsche's diagnosis of nihilism makes the point that we cannot isolate Schopenhauer's atheistic metaphysics from his religious ethics, given the moral value of unconditional truth that unites them.[167] The scientific *will to truth* places the

[164] This ties into Nietzsche's critique of Kant as one for whom the rational pursuit of truth amounts to a form of ascetic self-denial.

[165] In TI "Reason," §6, Nietzsche similarly attacks Kant for being "a *deceitful* Christian, when all is said and done." Like Kant, Schopenhauer gives back with one hand what he takes away with the other, a move that Nietzsche attacks in GS 335. "I am reminded of old Kant, who helped himself to (*erschlichen*) the 'thing in itself' — another very ridiculous thing! — and was punished for this when the 'categorical imperative' crept into (*beschlichen*) his heart and made him stray back to 'God', 'soul', 'freedom', 'immortality', like a fox who strays back into his cage. Yet it had been *his* cleverness that had *broken open* the cage!" See GS 335, n. 27.

[166] On Schopenhauer as subtext here see Janaway's discussion in "Nietzsche's Educator," 27–36.

[167] "We see that science, too, rests on a faith; there is simply no 'presuppositionless' science. The question whether *truth* is necessary must get an answer in advance, the answer 'yes', and moreover this answer must be so firm that it takes the form of the statement, the belief, the conviction: '*Nothing* is *more* necessary than

value of truth in a transcendent sphere beyond life that ascetically negates life's value. Schopenhauer's religious conception of the *nihil negativum* displays the asceticism of science insofar as it expresses the same negational quality as the *will to truth* that ultimately proclaims life's nullity. In this way, Nietzsche's critique of nihilism targets the ascetic correspondence between the *will to truth* and the *will to nothingness* (GM III.28), the abyssal point where Schopenhauer's religious and atheistic tendencies converge in their uncanny identity.

Nietzsche communicates this convergence in his ultimate characterization of Schopenhauer's philosophy as "hostile to life" (A 7),[168] specifically given the Christian morality of compassion that infects it.[169] He stresses this point in Preface §5 of the *Genealogy*, indicating its importance for his polemic. We see in the Third Essay how the marriage between "great *disgust* for humans, likewise great *compassion* [Mitleid]" would "inevitably [*unvermeidlich*]" give birth to "something most uncanny [*Unheimlichsten*]," namely the "will to nothingness, nihilism" (GM III.14).[170]

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truth; and in relation to it, everything else has only secondary value.' This unconditional will to truth — what is it?" (GS 344). On Nietzsche's critique of the unconditional value of truth in GM, see Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness*, 229–39.

[168] He repeats this expression from GM II.24, III.11.

[169] Cartwright, "Schopenhauer's Moral Philosophy," 140, also emphasizes that "Nietzsche clearly articulates a connection between the nihilism of Schopenhauer's *Mitleids-Moral* and his higher metaphysical-ethical perspective," which informs Nietzsche's account of the death of God and the hypocrisy of modern secular morality. Cartwright appears to contradict himself when he goes on to assert that Schopenhauer's saint and Nietzsche's *Übermensch* likewise "transcend altruistic morality, the *Mitleids-Moral*, and both figures are beyond good and evil" (p. 148). But for Schopenhauer the saint displays altruism in its purest form as a mystical compassion that empties itself into the world by means of ascetic self-sacrifice. Cartwright's characterization of the saint, which corresponds more accurately to what Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, 2:183, dubs "the antichrist" (see Christopher Janaway, "Introduction," in *Willing and Nothingness: Schopenhauer as Nietzsche's Educator*, ed. Christopher Janaway (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 6; "Nietzsche's Educator," 25), actually echoes Nietzsche's provocation from BGE 164: "Jesus said to his Jews: 'The law was for servants, — love God as I love him, as his son! What do we sons of God care about morality!'"

[170] Nietzsche links pity with the death of God in Z, "Retired"; "Ugliest Human."

> Here, Schopenhauer was within his rights: life is denied through compassion, made more *worthy of denial* — compassion is the *praxis* of nihilism. To repeat: this depressive and contagious instinct cancels out those instincts that are bent on supporting and raising the value of life: both as *multiplier* of misery and *conservator* of all that is miserable, it is a major instrument in the increase of *décadence* — compassion persuades us to *nothingness*! . . . One does not say "nothingness": instead, one says "the beyond"; or "God"; or "the *true* life"; or nirvana, redemption, bliss. (A 7)

In this passage from *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche reverses Schopenhauer's statement that we must confront nothingness *as* nothingness, "instead of avoiding it, like the Indians, through myths and meaningless words such as reabsorption in *Brahman*, or in the *Nirvana* of the Buddhists" (WWP, 1:477–78). While Schopenhauer's religious conception of will-lessness is purportedly heuristic, Nietzsche implies that his use of language like "salvation" (*Heil*) and "holiness" (*Heiligkeit*) contradicts his attempt to conceive of nothingness in atheistic terms when he rejects its evasive description as nirvana.[171] The above passage presents the overall consistency of Schopenhauer's nihilistic evaluation of life, given the convergence of his atheistic and religious sensibilities in his denial of life's value.[172] "Schopenhauer was hostile to life: *therefore* compassion became a virtue for him" (A 7).[173] His religious estimation of compassion consistently follows from his despairing evaluation of life's value insofar as his atheistic

[171] Mannion, *Schopenhauer, Religion and Morality*, 217–19, supports this reading. "[T]his notion of the denial-of-the-will and 'complete will-lessness' is . . . what Schopenhauer figuratively describes as the 'Highest Good' [*Will and Presentation*, 1:421]. Even if such a concept *is* employed only figuratively, it nonetheless serves as a postulate and resembles certain religious concepts of the 'real' or ultimate" (p. 227).
[172] Dale Jacquette, *Philosophy of Schopenhauer* (London: Routledge, 2005), 121, supports this reading. "The proper religious and philosophical attitude, in so far as religion and philosophy converge . . . is to have compassion for every suffering being," which expresses Schopenhauer's doctrine of salvation as a form of "metaphysical nihilism" that aligns with Plato's devaluing of appearances.
[173] On compassion as a response to life's senselessness, see Robert Guay, "Schopenhauer's Moral Philosophy: Responding to Senselessness," in *The Oxford Handbook of Schopenhauer*, ed. Robert L. Wicks (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 299–310.

glimpse into life's horror — itself an ascetic insight — produces delight in the mystical prospect of its extinction. For Nietzsche, the curious collusion between atheism and Christian morality characterizes modern European nihilism.

III. NIETZSCHE CONTRA CONTEMPORARY NIHILISM

Nietzsche's critique of modern nihilism appears to posit two successive phases of its historical development. Schopenhauer's pessimism characterizes the first phase, while the complete annihilation of Christian morality characterizes the second phase. This movement displays the progress of the scientific *will to truth* that finally destroys Christian morality and leaves Schopenhauer's asceticism behind as an obsolete artifact. So far, I have discussed the first phase of modern nihilism, wherein the *will to truth* and the *will to nothingness* converge in Schopenhauer's ascetic denial of the will. Nietzsche advances the second phase of nihilism's godless consummation in his thought of eternal recurrence.[174] "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: '*the eternal recurrence*.' This is the most extreme form of nihilism" (WP 55). Contemporary nihilism falls somewhere in between the two phases that Nietzsche distinguishes. As a form of atheism, it embraces life's purposelessness, though unlike Nietzsche's thought of eternal recurrence, which he calls "the most *scientific* of all possible hypotheses" (WP 55), this version of nihilism retains Schopenhauer's emphasis on the cosmic finale of

[174] This distinction corresponds roughly to what Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 172, calls *incomplete* and *complete* nihilism. The former encompasses three stages of nihilism, negative, reactive, and passive, that cover the course of Western history (pp. 150–75); the latter corresponds to active nihilism (pp. 69–71), the fourth and final stage that transmutes into life-affirmation.

nothingness that nullifies life's value, though importantly stripped of Schopenhauer's moral-religious language.

Distinguishing these two versions of nihilism clarifies the difference between contemporary nihilism and Schopenhauer's pessimism, a distinction that Thacker obviates, in my view misrepresenting Schopenhauer's philosophy by ignoring the ethical significance of his *nihil negativum*. Setting historical qualms aside, let us ponder the direction Thacker's move takes us. If we consider the heat death of the universe, a hypothesis that became prominent in the early 1850s[175] and dominates contemporary cosmology,[176] it appears that science vindicates Schopenhauer's *nihil negativum*, translated from a mystical conviction into what is today "the most *scientific* of all hypotheses" that encapsulates the ultimate horizon of human knowledge. Ray Brassier, another advocate of nihilism, sums it up. "[A]ll the stars in the universe will stop shining in 100 trillion years . . . [E]ventually, one trillion, trillion years from now, all matter in the cosmos will disintegrate into unbound elementary particles."[177] In Schopenhauerian terms, this hypothesis reduces the religious significance of life's soteriological aim — its return to nothingness, "which hovers as the final goal behind all virtue and saintliness" (WWP 1:477) — to a cosmological fact about the expanding universe, resembling what Brassier describes as a *naturalization of eschatology* and a *theologization of*

[175] Following Carnot's theorem, William Thomson published "On a Universal Tendency in Nature to the Dissipation of Mechanical Energy" in 1852. See *Mathematical and Physical Papers: Volume 1* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 511–514. For a point of reference in Lange, see *History of Materialism*, 2:308, 3:11.
[176] Lee Smolin and Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *The Singular Universe and the Reality of Time: A Proposal in Natural Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 407.
[177] Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 49–50.

cosmology.[178] Brassier embraces this scientific achievement that corresponds to the nihilistic outcome of Nietzsche's *will to truth* as it supposedly transcends Christian morality and confronts us with *horror vacui*. "[A]s Nietzsche provocatively suggested, the will to *know*, in its antagonism with the so-called will to live, is driven by the will to nothingness, understood as the compunction to become equal to the in-itself," which today culminates in the knowledge that, following the eventual extinction of atoms, "'dark energy' . . . will keep pushing the extinguished universe deeper and deeper into an eternal and unfathomable blackness."[179] Hence, "[t]he will to know is driven by the traumatic reality of extinction . . . through which [it] is finally rendered commensurate with the in-itself."[180] Since the universe expands according to the arrow of time advancing toward thermodynamic equilibrium, the "in-itself" of endless cosmic nothingness not only dooms life's anomaly to the lifelessness from which it briefly emerged, but likewise nullifies any value we might mistakenly ascribe to present existence.

Brassier is at his most compelling when discussing the trauma of extinction in the context of Freud's death drive, which he brilliantly expounds.[181] More often than not, however, Brassier treats universal extinction as a trump card to invalidate the type of vitalism that he takes as his polemical opponent, failing to acknowledge that the hypothetical heat death of the universe is purely speculative and indeed is but a common

[178] Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, 231–32.
[179] Ibid., 227–28. In this context, he rejects Nietzsche's conception of eternal recurrence as the consummation of nihilism that finally transmutes into life affirmation (pp. 205–223).
[180] Ibid., 239.
[181] Ibid, 234–38.

belief among scientists. Brassier reports large-scale astronomical observations about the known universe, which, contrary to what he suggests, do not support a coherent cosmological theory, given how much of the universe we cannot observe. Thus, for example, physicist Lee Smolin systematically demonstrates[182] how the heat death hypothesis is not only incoherent[183] but also based on a metaphysical extrapolation beyond the limits of the known universe.[184] He calls this the "transcendental folly,"[185] a turn of phrase that readily applies to Brassier's conclusion to the effect that "everything is dead already."[186] Given Brassier's vehement atheism, his dogmatic attachment to the heat death hypothesis ironically (but from a Nietzschean perspective unsurprisingly) displays a Christian need for some unconditional truth that undermines life's value, not to mention its tangible empirical potency. It is fair to suggest that his philosophical prejudice derives from his own moral disposition as an advocate of nihilism. Brassier validates his interpretation of the correspondence between the scientific *will to truth* and the *will to nothingness* at the expense of ignoring, or recklessly tabooing, Nietzsche's critique of nihilism's moral and metaphysical fundament, according to which the soteriology of ascetic morality taints any finale of cosmological nothingness.

Nietzsche's rhetoric confutes this type of dogmatism, exposing its moral and metaphysical fundament by parodying its philosophical perspective, as I will now show. We have seen how Brassier's defense of nihilism effectively translates Schopenhauer's

[182] See Smolin, *Singular Universe*, 393–413.
[183] Smolin, *Singular Universe*, 407–410.
[184] Ibid., 405, 410–411.
[185] Ibid., 366.
[186] Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, 239.

nihil negativum into a cosmological fact. For this reason, he commends Nietzsche's formulation of nihilism in his 1873 essay "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense."

> In some remote corner of the universe, flickering in the light of countless solar systems into which it had been poured, there was once a planet on which clever animals invented
> [*erfanden*] cognition. It was the most arrogant and most mendacious minute in the 'history of the world'; but a minute was all it was. After nature had drawn just a few more breaths the planet froze and the clever animals had to die. [—] Someone could invent [*erfinden*] a fable like this and yet they would still not have given a satisfactory illustration of just how pitiful, how insubstantial and transitory, how purposeless and arbitrary the human intellect looks within nature; there were eternities during which it did not exist; and when it has disappeared again, nothing will have happened. (TL, p. 141)

Brassier praises this fable as a distillation of nihilism, while criticizing Nietzsche's endeavour to overcome it.[187] Yet Brassier misses the self-reflexive irony by which this fable undermines the purportedly objective picture of reality that it presents. That the apex of cognition paradoxically amounts to the recognition of its sheer nullity presumably pleases him, despite the ironical implication that nihilism may be the ultimate manifestation of anthropocentric arrogance rather than its anti-anthropocentric overturning. After all, the fable does not distinguish the mendacious invention of cognition from the subsequent recognition of its purposelessness, a temporal differentiation that collapses into the cosmic indifference, rendering our minute of world history meaningless. In this light, intellectual hubris and humiliation go hand in hand — its vanity hides best under the conceit of its defeat, in the moment of its self-proclaimed nullity. Such is the disguise under which the intellect disavows its anthropocentrism. Nietzsche goes on to emphasize that "this intellect has no further mission that might

[187] Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, 205–206.

extend beyond the bounds of human life. Rather, the intellect is human, and only its possessor and progenitor regards it with such pathos, as if it housed the axis around which the entire world revolved" (TL, p. 141). The nihilist notion that *nothing will have happened* arises for the intellect that originally takes itself as the center of the world and corresponds to the cry of self-laceration as it apparently deflates this arrogant presumption, but actually reproduces it. The claim that *nothing will have happened* extends the bounds of the human intellect to encompass all that it is incapable of grasping by reducing this to nought. Nihilism thus inversely mirrors the same anthropocentric delusion as before, displaying an intellectual vanity that only masquerades as its overturning. Hence, I highlight Nietzsche's repetition of the verb *erfinden* to characterize both the emergence of cognition and the fable of its destruction, the former nesting in the latter as an invention within an invention or dream within a dream.

Nietzsche's distinction between the fable he invents and its supposed scientific credentials — separated by a modest dash — becomes merely rhetorical. Notice how the fable's inventor quietly calls attention to himself in the third person as a discreet "someone" who disavows his fictional invention, furthermore, imbuing his own existence with the unreal character that all life now appears to have. However, the fable's inventor cannot accomplish the self-erasure that he presents as a cosmic phenomenon; his attempt ironically conceals the perspective of a timeless subjective consciousness whose presence bears witness to the fabular event, imbuing Nietzsche's thought experiment with the mytho-metaphysical significance that we are supposed to be left without. In other words, the fable implies a god's eye view of the world that beholds the spectacle of universal

extinction, an imaginary perspective that, in circular fashion, verifies the human judgement about how pitiful, insubstantial, and transitory the intellect is, since the judgement itself entails the cosmic spectator for whom this is a banal fact. Schopenhauer succinctly explains the Kantian foundation for this insight. "[When] we attempt to *imagine an objective world without a knowing subject*, then we become aware that what we are imagining at that moment is in truth the opposite of what we intended, namely nothing but just the process in the intellect of a knowing being who perceives an objective world, that is to say, precisely that which we had sought to exclude" (WWP, 2:5). Christopher Janaway suggests that Nietzsche's fable parodies the opening of *Will and Presentation*, Volume Two[188] (where we also find the above statement), though the parallel between them is more ambiguous. I contend that Nietzsche tacitly evokes Schopenhauer in order to parody nihilism.[189]

Nietzsche's formulation of nihilism in this case belies the claim of scientific objectivity that Brassier admires and instead stresses the anthropic limit of human subjectivity. Nietzsche states the foundation for this approach in another writing from the same year as "Truth and Lying." '"It is absolutely impossible for the subject to want [and hence, to be able] to see and know something beyond itself: knowledge and being are the most contradictory spheres there are.' The 'subjective concept' is 'eternal': we can never accede to a region 'beyond the wall of relations' by which we are conditioned, for beyond

[188] Janaway, "Introduction," 5.
[189] On nihilism's incoherence as a philosophical position for Nietzsche, see James I. Porter, "Nietzsche and the Impossibility of Nihilism," in *Nietzsche, Nihilism and the Philosophy of the Future*, ed. Jeffrey Metzger (New York: Continuum, 2009), 143–157.

these lies merely 'a mythical primordial ground of things" (PTAG 11).[190] While Brassier contends that only an "objective, third-person perspective is equipped with conceptual resources sensitive enough to map consciousness' opaque, sub-linguistic reality," one that undermines any "first-person phenomenological description or linguistic articulation,"[191] Nietzsche shows how these perspectives are inextricable. The fable from "Truth and Lying" effectively posits a cosmic first-person perspective *for which* nothing will have happened, which is an inevitable anthropomorphism, since "a representing agency cannot 'not represent' itself, cannot represent itself away" (NF-1873 26[11]).[192] His self-reflexive narrator lurks behind the "objective, third-person perspective" that would give us an accurate account of reality, one limited by the subjective features of representation. Conceiving the intellect's purposelessness in nature simply inverts its anthropocentric pathos, producing yet another delusive appearance.

In sum, rather than presenting a type of knowledge that Brassier declares to be "commensurate with the in-itself,"[193] Nietzsche presents the specter of cosmic nothingness within the context of a fable that not only shocks our moral-intellectual sensibilities, but, more profoundly, communicates the protean vanity hiding in the pleasure of our humiliation. Hence, already in *The Birth*, Nietzsche formulates the nihilistic wisdom of the satyr Silenus — better "not to *be*, to be *nothing*" — in direct

[190] Cited from Porter, *Philology of the Future*, 21. For Porter's engagement with speculative realism, see James I. Porter, "Hyperobjects, OOO, and the eruptive classics—field notes of an accidental tourist," in *Antiquities Beyond Humanism*, eds. Emanuela Bianchi, Sara Brill, Brooke Holmes (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 189–210.
[191] Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, 29.
[192] Cited from James I. Porter, "Untimely Meditations: Nietzsche's *Zeitatomistik* in Context," *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 20 (2000): 59, which analyzes Nietzsche's early rhetorical innovations.
[193] Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, 239.

association with the ascetic rapture of a martyr (BT 3). As we shall see in the next chapter, scholars scarcely note that Nietzsche ironically inflects this "piece of popular wisdom" with the wily satyr's "shrill laughter" that announces it, accentuating the satyr's parodic character.[194] Nietzsche further targets the narcissistic basis of ascetic self-humiliation in §137 of *All Too Human*. "This shattering of oneself, this mockery of one's own nature, this *spernere se sperni* [answer contempt with contempt] of which the religions have made so much is really a very high degree of vanity." Finally, the masochistic denial of life's value decisively characterizes the ascetic gratification that Nietzsche elucidates in the Third Essay of his *Genealogy*. We can thus appreciate the overall consistency of Nietzsche's critique of nihilism, which in his early work takes the remarkable form of a duplicitous parody.

IV. CONCLUSION

I began this chapter by discussing Schopenhauer's ascetic denial of the will, its mystical return to nothingness (the *nihil negativum*). I compared Young and Thacker's accounts of the *nihil negativum* — neither of which proved wholly satisfactory — in order to highlight the ambiguous relationship between Schopenhauer's atheistic metaphysics and his ethical-religious doctrine of salvation. Next, I argued that Nietzsche's critique of nihilism targets this ambiguity in Schopenhauer's philosophy, whose overall consistency is presented in the denial of life's value, at which point the scientific *will to truth* and the ascetic *will to nothingness* converge on the horizon of nineteenth century European culture. Nietzsche's critique of nihilism thereby exposes the

[194] On the comical dimension of the satyr figure in BT, see Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 113–14.

complicity between modern atheism and Christian morality. I concluded that his critique still challenges contemporary advocates of nihilism such as Thacker and Brassier, whose anti-anthropocentric conceptions of cosmic nothingness resonate with Nietzsche's memorable fable from "Truth and Lying." Pointing out Brassier's in my view misguided appropriation of the fable, I interpreted it as a parody of nihilism that exposes the vanity hiding in the pleasure of our moral-intellectual humiliation, what Nietzsche will later diagnose as a form of ascetic self-laceration. As we shall see in the next chapter, he implicitly makes this diagnosis already in *The Birth*.

CHAPTER 3
TRAGIC AFFIRMATION

Even the clearest figure still trailed a comet's tail after it which seemed to point into the unknown, into that which cannot be illuminated. BT 11

The Birth contrasts the dying Socrates's cheerful optimism to the pessimistic wisdom of the Dionysian satyr Silenus: what is best in life is "not to have been born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. However, the second best for you is: to die soon" (BT 3).[195] Such is the opposition between scientific optimism, which imbues life with rational meaning, and Schopenhauerian pessimism, which denies the value of life.[196] In this chapter I argue that Nietzsche overcomes this opposition in his image of the music-making Socrates,[197] who symbolizes the affirmation of life as an aesthetic phenomenon. On my reading, the explicit opposition between optimism and pessimism in *The Birth* conceals an implicit antagonism between teleological and antiteleological worldviews. This latter antagonism, which informs the pessimistic insight that Nietzsche's music-making Socrates transforms into aesthetic affirmation, remains unresolved. Indeed, such affirmation embraces only an illusion whose subsequent demystification undermines the metaphysical solace that it provided. Unlike Schopenhauer, Nietzsche accepts and even amplifies the contradictory dissonance of human existence, without succumbing to pessimistic resignation or

[195] This wisdom is most famously formulated by Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, in *Sophocles I*, eds. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), ll. 1224–26; Theognis, *Elegiac Poems*, in *Greek Lyric: An Anthology in Translation*, trans. Andrew M. Miller (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), ll. 425–28.
[196] This chapter has been submitted as an article for peer review.
[197] For discussions of this figure, see e.g. Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 88–119; Benson, *Pious Nietzsche*, 166–70; Daniels, *Birth of Tragedy*, 141–47.

subscribing to a metaphysical system. Such is the position that he calls tragic, presenting us with a juxtaposition of appearances deprived of any intelligible ontological ground.

While recent commentaries similarly contest the pervasive Schopenhauerian reading of *The Birth*, most still support the view that tragic myth communicates some fundamental truth about nature or the meaning of life. By contrast, I contend that Nietzsche presents any such truth as a cultural fiction that emerges from the poetic staging of reality. The chapter divides into four parts. The first section considers the Hellenic antagonism between teleological and antiteleological worldviews that informs Schopenhauer's pessimism, which Nietzsche challenges. In section two, I argue that Nietzsche's early portraits of the pre-Socratics overcome the Platonic opposition between myth and metaphysics, leaving us only with appearances. I elaborate this in section three, wherein Nietzsche's image of the music-making Socrates symbolizes the moment that scientific optimism wrecks upon pessimism and transforms into aesthetic affirmation, while section four delineates how this ideal ultimately remains fraught with contradiction.

I. TELEOLOGICAL AND ANTITELEOLOGICAL WORLDVIEWS

The Birth poses an opposition between Socratic optimism, which treats suffering as a logical problem to solve, and aesthetic affirmation, which embraces the necessity of suffering in a world devoid of rational laws. To understand Nietzsche's depiction of Socratism, I briefly outline its historical basis. Socratic optimism characterizes Plato's teleological account of nature wherein human life is purposively created for a rational end. In comprehending the final good that orients life one may achieve happiness. Virtue follows from the wisdom that comprehends the rational structure of the universe.

Encapsulating this scientific optimism is Plato's view that "[the cosmos] is a work of craft, modeled after that which is changeless and is grasped by a rational account, that is, by wisdom" (*Timaeus*, 29a). Socrates finds this teleological account lacking in Anaxagoras,[198] an account that grounds his final argument for the immortality of the soul (*Phaedo*, 96a–106e). On this view, death is a boon because it releases the immortal soul from the appetitive snares of the body. Socrates's final words concluding the *Phaedo* seem to characterize death as a doctor releasing her patient (the soul) into the divine realm of eternal goodness.

The philosophy of Democritus, to whom Nietzsche dedicates his philological studies from 1867–69,[199] starkly opposes this teleological worldview. Nietzsche's early lectures on *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers* sum up Democritus's antiteleological view. The eternal flux of atoms in the void is governed by a "'*purposeless causality*, an *anagkē* [necessity] *without aims*,' conformable to the 'most rigorous lawlike behaviour, *only not according to rational laws*'" (PPP, p. 126).[200] Such is the *vortex of being* that Nietzsche alludes to in the 1871 draft Forward for *The Birth*, concerning "the origin and purpose [*Ursprung und Ziel*] of the tragic work of art" (NF-1871 11[1]), a phrase that Nietzsche

[198] In his lecture on Socrates in PPP, Nietzsche remarks that "Socrates never came to know physics, since that which Plato narrates concerning the studies of Anaxagoras at *Phaedo* and so on is certainly only Plato's own historical development" (pp. 143–44). He then characterizes Socrates as "the first philosopher of *life* (*Lebensphilosoph*)" (p. 145). Nietzsche's discussions of ancient philosophy are consistently anachronistic, projecting the philosophical landscape of nineteenth century German philosophy back into classical antiquity. In contrast to the above passage, BT clearly links Socrates with the broad development of science and Enlightenment optimism.

[199] See Porter, *Philology of the Future*, ch. 2. On Democritus's attitude towards suffering in connection with Nietzsche's, see Jessica N. Berry, "Nietzsche and Democritus: The Origins of Ethical Eudaimonism," in *Nietzsche and Antiquity: His Reaction and Response to the Classical Tradition*, ed. Paul Bishop (Boydell & Brewer: 2013), 98–113.

[200] Translated with italics by Porter, *Philology of the Future*, 108.

used as a draft title for the book.[201] In Nietzsche's 1873 manuscript *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, this "vortex" (*dinos*) corresponds to the cosmic "whirl" initiated by Anaxagoras's *nous*, a conception of *physis* that Nietzsche further links with Heraclitus's divine "game" of becoming ruled by *Dike* (PTAG 19). Nietzsche avails himself of philological accuracy when he writes that Anaxagoras's *nous* is "far removed from a direct purposive end for all individual things" (PPP, p. 98), but "on the contrary, suggests that the order and efficiency of things are but the direct result of blind mechanical movement," originating out of the "irrational free random choosing that lies in the artist's depths" (PTAG 19). This is the purported reason for Plato's criticism of Anaxagoras in the *Phaedo* (PPP, p. 98). Taking creative liberties, Nietzsche reconciles what he deems the original free choice of Anaxagoras's *nous* with the blind necessity of Democritean flux, the former setting the latter in motion. Nietzsche retroactively projects Democritus's antiteleological worldview into his portrait of Anaxagoras. The primordial chaos of nature is transformed by the random whirling motion initiated by *nous*, whose unconditioned freedom explains the transient configuration of the natural order in which human life chances to flourish. Along these lines one could, however perversely, interpret the following fragment from Heraclitus. "The fairest order in the world is a heap of random sweepings."[202] This antiteleological worldview informs Nietzsche's conception

[201] More exactly, "The Origin and End of Tragedy [*Ursprung und Zeil der Tragödie*]." See Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche and Tragedy*, 51–53.
[202] Charles H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 85.

of "tragic knowledge [*tragische Erkenntniss*]" (BT 15) and which he finds in varying forms with Heraclitus, Anaxagoras, and Democritus.[203]

The contrast between teleological and antiteleological worldviews crucially frames Schopenhauer's pessimistic view that "nothing other can be stated as the purpose of our existence than cognizance of the fact that it would be better had we not existed" (WWP, 2:674).[204] This is because life amounts to suffering, and the cosmos lacks any rational aim that would justify it. "In fact the absence of all goals, of all boundaries, belongs to the essence of will in itself, which is an endless striving" (WWP, 1:208). While he posits the *will for life* (*Wille zum Leben*) as the teleological principle governing all organic matter, he denies that the cosmos as a whole has any final end, resulting in the "nullity and futility of the striving of phenomena in their entirety. . . . The multiplicity of organizations, the ingenuity of the means by which each is adapted to its element and its prey, contrasts distinctly here with the absence of any tenable final purpose" (WWP, 2:404). The will, an unquenchable drive for life, is altogether deluded about life's value. In light of such knowledge, Schopenhauer advocates the ascetic denial of the will and resignation to suffering as the path to salvation. Tragic art aesthetically provokes the

[203] This view reflects the antiteleological insight dominating modern biology, elucidated in Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity: An Essay on the Natural Philosophy of Modern* Biology, trans. Austryn Wainhouse (New York: Knopf, 1971). "Randomness caught on the wing, preserved, reproduced by the machinery of invariance and thus converted into order, rule, necessity. A *totally* blind process can by definition lead to anything; it can even lead to vision itself" (p. 98). "Pure chance, absolutely free but blind, at the very root of the stupendous edifice of evolution: this central concept of modern biology is no longer one among other possible or even conceivable hypotheses. It is today the *sole* conceivable hypothesis, the only one that squares with observed and tested fact" (pp. 112–113). Organic life emerges as a result of pure chance and evolves accordingly along an irreversible course through which it establishes necessity. Thus conceived, Nietzsche's pre-Socratic antiteleological worldview projects this general law, holding strictly within the biosphere, into the cosmos.

[204] See Chrisopher Janaway, "Schopenhauer's Pessimism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*, ed. Christopher Janaway (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 318–343.

philosophical pathos of pessimism; its wretched spectacle disposes us to renounce our desire for life by practising detachment (WWP, 2:479–94).[205] While his conception of a directionless cosmos aligns with an antiteleological worldview, his ascetic response to suffering imbues existence with a moral significance that Nietzsche paraphrases in his citation from Anaximander: "Where the source of things is, to that place they must also pass away, according to necessity, for they must pay penance and be judged for their injustices, in accordance with time" (PTAG 4).[206]

Nietzsche associates each of these three worldviews with different philosophical remedies for the experience of suffering. Socratic optimism locates the cause of suffering in ignorance, which can be eliminated by means of rational understanding. This coincides with Plato's teleological interpretation of our moral perfectibility. In contrast, aesthetic affirmation embraces suffering as a natural necessity without any inherent moral meaning, following an antiteleological interpretation of nature. Finally, Schopenhauer's pessimism proposes the cure of ascetic self-denial as his moral response to life's senseless cruelty. Nietzsche's aesthetic affirmation of life emerges from the depths of Schopenhauer's pessimism, which espouses the wisdom of Silenus. Nietzsche appraises Schopenhauer's pessimism as a historical moment in Western philosophy. However, the existential question it confronts — *does existence have any meaning at all*? (GS 357)[207] — is hardly distinctive of modernity. The wisdom of Silenus already indicates the

[205] See Christopher Janaway, "Knowledge and Tranquility: Schopenhauer on the Value of Art," in *Schopenhauer, philosophy, and the arts*, ed. Dale Jacquette (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 39–61.
[206] See Janaway, "Moral Meaning of the World," 271–283.
[207] Nietzsche evokes this existential crisis in his portrait of Hamlet (BT 7).

despairing attitude that would answer this question with a resounding No, though none of the ancient schools of philosophical thought, nor the aesthetic affirmation exemplified in tragic myth, advocate this type of pessimism.[208] What makes Schopenhauer's pessimism distinctly modern is the way he envisions nature's purposeless monstrosity, deprived of Platonic harmony, as the dramatic backdrop for an extreme asceticism whose goal is moral enlightenment.

A dominant mood characterizes each of these three philosophical worldviews, be it optimism, pessimism, or the joy of aesthetic affirmation. We see that Nietzsche grounds philosophical judgements about life in distinctive affective states. A philosopher's dominant mood comes to dictate his intellectual judgement, as a pathos that solidifies into an ethos, a point Nietzsche will make into a principle in §8–9 of *Beyond*. Irrespective of how we might distinguish the aforementioned moods, what Nietzsche calls the *pathos of truth* informs each of them, which stems from the philosopher's belief in the absolute value of eternal truth and refers to the illusory conviction of having grasped it. In the next section, I argue that Nietzsche understands philosophical activity to transform reality through the imagination in a way that 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 seemingly stripped of poetic artifice. I further my interpretation of Nietzsche's early philosophical portraits of the pre-Socratics, showing how these

[208] E.g., Epicurus explicitly rejects antinatalism. "Much worse is he who says that it is good not to be born, 'but when born to pass through the gates of Hades as quickly as possible' [Theognis, *Elegiac Poems*, ll. 425, 427]. For if he really believes what he says, why doesn't he leave life? For it is easy for him to do, if he has firmly decided to do it. But if he is joking, he is wasting his time among men who won't welcome it" (*Letter to Menoeceus*, in *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*, 2nd ed., trans. Brad Inwood and L. P. Gerson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), §126–27).

illuminate his non-Schopenhauerian position. This contextualizes my reading of *The Birth* and links Nietzsche's early philosophy with poetry in ways that have been unexamined.

II. THE PATHOS OF TRUTH

Nietzsche clearly formulates his challenge to pessimism in *Tragic Age*, which anachronistically portrays Anaximander as a forerunner to Schopenhauer and Heraclitus as a forerunner to Nietzsche's tragic philosophy.[209] In contrast to Schopenhauer's pessimistic characterization of Heraclitus as one who "bemoaned the eternal flow of things" (WWP, 1:36), Nietzsche consistently characterizes him as "the opposite of a pessimist because he does not deny away sorrows and irrationality" (PPP, p. 74), being one for whom existence "may only be grasped as an aesthetic phenomenon" (PPP, p. 70). This is not a view that Schopenhauer endorses, embracing instead the experience of tragedy for its power to induce the ascetic renunciation of life, in contrast to the *affirmation of the will for life* that he links with the worship of Dionysus (WWP, 1:326–37), which Nietzsche glorifies. Given this contrast (broadly construed), it is no longer controversial to claim that *The Birth* challenges both Schopenhauer's pessimism and his metaphysics, features that have commonly been attributed to this work.[210] Most recently, Han-Pile and Gemes both equate Nietzsche's metaphysics in *The Birth* with a life-

[209] See PTAG 4–8.

[210] E.g., Young, *Philosophy of Art*, ch. 2, argues that Nietzsche's position is Schopenhauerian because the philosopher's aesthetic ideal remains an otherworldly illusion, thereby re-instating a pessimistic vision of earthly life that is consistent with Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will. Martha Nussbaum exemplifies the type of anti-pessimistic reading that Young generally challenges. Emphasizing the value of aesthetic self-creation, Nussbaum still holds that Nietzsche endorses a version of Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will. See "The Transfigurations of Intoxication: Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Dionysus," in *Nietzsche, Philosophy, and the Arts*, eds. Salim Kemal, Ivan Gaskell, and Daniel Conway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 36–69.

affirming myth, whose illusory status poses a similar problem for each of them: how or why would one affirm an illusion that one recognizes as such?[211] I argue that Nietzsche intentionally poses this dilemma without resolving it, thereby provoking suspicion of the life-affirming myth that he rhetorically endorses.

On my reading, Nietzsche's early tragic philosophy is anti-metaphysical insofar as it coincides with his rejection of any systematic account of our relationship to nature, as evidenced throughout his early unpublished writings, which consistently allude to the "anthropomorphic" character of our knowledge about the world.[212] In "Truth and Lying," Nietzsche argues that no truth exists "really and in a generally valid sense, regardless of mankind" (p. 147). He asks, "what, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms . . . truths are illusions of which we have forgotten that they are illusions" (p. 146). He articulates a similar view in §109 of *Gay Science*. "The total character of the world . . . is for all eternity chaos, not in the sense of a lack of necessity but a lack of order, organization, form, beauty, wisdom, and whatever else our aesthetic anthropomorphisms are called." The ordered, unified whole beheld by the philosopher originates from the rational, moral, and aesthetic qualities of human experience that we project onto nature. The significance of this view relates to Nietzsche's reading of Lange, under whose influence he questions the existence of Kant's thing in itself (the transcendent object = x), which he understands to be imaginary. This argument extends to Kant's distinction between the phenomenal realm of appearances,

[211] Han-Pile, "Nietzsche's Metaphysics," 395–96; Gemes, "Nietzsche's Illusion," 103.
[212] See NF-1872 19[35, 37, 115–116, 125, 134, 236–237, 248].

conditioned in space and time, and the unconditioned ground of reality, posited by reason. The antithesis between appearance and reality is itself a product of our psychophysiological organization, rather than a rational standard by which we judge existence. Nietzsche assimilates this insight into a revised Kantianism. In his early notebooks he makes the radical claim that "all constructions of the world are anthropomorphisms; indeed, all sciences, if Kant is right." Of course, this is not Kant's conclusion. Nietzsche skeptically infers that since we cannot scientifically substantiate this claim, "we must then say against Kant that, even if we agree with all his propositions, it still remains perfectly *possible* that the world is as it appears to us," which we cannot prove either, resulting in an aporia. Nietzsche concludes that "this whole position is useless. Nobody can live with this kind of skepticism. We must transcend this skepticism, we must *forget* it!" (NF-1872 19[125]).[213] The thing in itself need not exist at all,[214] but may be regarded as the product of a cognitive antithesis through which we structure the meaning of our experience, a creative task that we should passionately embrace.

Matthew Meyer distinguishes Nietzsche's skeptical views in early essays like "Truth and Lying" and "Pathos of Truth" — where he purportedly "denies the possibility of knowledge on the grounds that the way we perceive the world and the way we conceptualize our basic sensations distort an inaccessible reality in the form of a thing-in-

[213] Nietzsche links skepticism with the emergence of tragic knowledge. "We do not know the true nature of *a single causality*. Absolute skepticism: the necessity of art and illusion" (NF-1872 19[21]). For an analysis of Nietzsche's early skepticism, see Jessica N. Berry, *Nietzsche and the Ancient Skeptical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), ch. 2.
[214] Nietzsche consistently critiques the idea of the thing in itself throughout his career. See e.g., GS 54, 354; TI "True World"; NF-1887 9[91, 106].

itself"[215] — from his supposed endorsement of Heraclitus's philosophy in *Tragic Age*, according to which "we have the real world of dynamic relations of force . . . and an apparent, commonsense world that *seems* to be populated with self-identical subjects and objects that exist and persist through time."[216] However, in §11 of *Tragic Age*, Nietzsche espouses the type of view that Meyer claims he has left behind.[217]

> [I]f the existence of things themselves cannot be proved, surely the inter relationship of things, their so-called being or nonbeing [sc., what Meyer calls the "dynamic relations . . . [that] only exist insofar as they are continuously affecting something they are not, and therefore [which] are in a constant state of change or becoming"[218]] will advance us not a step . . . [W]e shall never reach beyond the wall of relations [that condition us], to some sort of fabulous primal ground of things. . . . It is absolutely impossible for a subject to see or have insight into something while leaving itself out of the picture, so impossible that knowing and being are the most opposite of all spheres.

Not only does Nietzsche deny the possibility of knowing what exists in-itself, including the dynamic "inter-relationship of things" that would exist in a process of cosmic becoming — "the fundamental 'stuffs' of the Heraclitean world"[219] according to Meyer — but he denies our ability to prove whether a world in-itself exists at all, thus designating noumena as a limit concept,[220] for, since Kant, the "subjective concept" is

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[215] Meyer, *Through the Ancients*, 40.
[216] Ibid., 48.
[217] Meyer arbitrarily introduces a series of extremely abrupt shifts into Nietzsche's early thinking, from BT's metaphysics through skepticism to Heracliteanism in the span of one year, only to remain roughly consistent over the next fifteen. He argues that Nietzsche remains a Heraclitean flux theorist — a position that entails the deception of the senses insofar as they demonstrate the relative permanence and durability of commonsense objects — from PTAG onwards. But in a crucial piece of evidence for this view from TI, "Reason" 2, Nietzsche writes that "the senses do not lie the way the Eleatics thought they did, *or* the way Heraclitus thought they did, — they do not lie at all."
[218] Meyer, *Through the Ancients*, 37.
[219] Ibid., 35.
[220] In the first edition of his *History of Materialism*, Lange sees himself moving beyond Kant by undermining the concept of the thing in itself as a causal *Urgrund* standing behind the phenomena. Lange implicates the thing in itself as a concept already caught within the realm of phenomenal representation and therefore as yet another appearance. He modifies this position in the second edition. "Whatever we announced as a correction of the system is, in fact, exactly Kant's own view; the 'thing-in-itself' is a mere

"eternal" (PTAG 11),[221] beyond which the in-itself becomes a mythical *Urgrund*, the mere *appearance* of a world behind appearances.[222]

On my reading, Nietzsche's mythopoetic rhetoric entails no sincere metaphysical commitments. He urges us beyond skepticism toward a view that embraces the artistic shaping of the world of appearances, which he identifies as *tragic*. "For the tragic philosopher the *image of existence* is completed by the fact that the metaphysical only appears in anthropomorphic form. He is not a *skeptic*. Here a concept must be *created*: for skepticism is not the goal. . . . One must *want* even *illusion* — that is where the tragic lies" (NF-1872 19[35]). We come to recognize that the aesthetic construction of reality is constitutive of our psychological experience, whose reality is conditioned by a cultural process producing only illusions.[223] In *The Birth*, Nietzsche treats Kant's notion of the unconditioned ground of nature as one such mytho-metaphysical illusion, the primordial

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idea of limit" (*History of Materialism*, 2:216). Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, unabridged ed., trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), A258–59/B315. On the distinction between appearances and things in themselves in Lange, see Frederick C. Beiser, *Hermann Cohen: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), ch. 5; Scott Edgar, "The Limits of Experience and Explanation: F. A. Lange and Ernst Mach on Things In Themselves," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 21, no. 1 (2013): 100–121.

[221] Meyer, *Through the Ancients*, 43, refers us to Nietzsche's use of von Baer's scientific investigation to illustrate Heraclitean flux as evidence of his commitment to this position. However, Nietzsche's discussion only demonstrates the relative perceptual quality of time for human beings, which could be used to defend a Parmenidean conception of Being as much as a Heraclitean conception of Becoming, since "if we could think of the indefinitely fastest — while still of course human — perception, then all motion would cease, and everything would be eternally fixed . . . For the indefinitely fastest perception stops all Becoming, because we always mean only human perception," while at a slower rate, everything would "vanish in the superhaste of events and would be devoured by the wild storm of Becoming" (PPP, p. 62). In this context, von Baer's study demonstrates how our perception of duration constitutes a subjective continuum between Parmenidean Being and Heraclitean Becoming if taken to extreme hypothetical limits, neither of which is objectively *true* given that their contradiction exists only for human beings.

[222] Han-Pile, "Nietzsche's Metaphysics," 380–82, similarly associates Nietzsche's metaphysics with Heraclitus's, which, though formulated as a myth, symbolically corresponds to a real ontological ground (pp. 380–82, 386, 390, 395–96), a "metaphysical assumption" (p. 400 n. 32) that for Han-Pile remains problematic given Nietzsche's early critical stance towards metaphysics (p. 396), a problem that he purportedly resolves only from 1882 onwards (p. 402 n. 55).

[223] See Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 20.

womb from which appearances are born. This myth, according to which reality is constituted by the generation of appearances out of a noumenal void, is an "anthropomorphic" construction. It results from translating the human experience of finitude and becoming into a cosmic, metaphysical realm of existence. While Nietzsche locates the derivation of metaphysics from the experience of dreaming (HH 5), as we shall see, or from an evolutionary history of sensation (HH 18),[224] he knows that these primeval processes immanently condition the consciousness that would feign to objectively understand them. We cannot therefore trace the metaphysical plane back to its mythless origin; no such origin exists.

This implicates *The Birth*'s metaphysical will as a mere mythical appearance, a fabulation that exemplifies how "man imagines the existence of other things by analogy with his own existence, in other words anthropomorphically and in any event, with non-logical projection" (PTAG 11). In *Tragic Age*, Nietzsche is not interested in the conventional truth value of philosophy, but in the personality type whom he imagines to engender philosophy: the solitary thinker who pits his vision against another's. "Philosophical systems are wholly true for their founders only. For all subsequent philosophers they usually represent one great mistake" (PTAG Preface).[225] The philosopher creates a personal universe in which to dwell. "A universe — in other words

[224] We can trace this back to his early notebooks. See e.g., NF-1872 19[146, 149, 156, 159, 161, 165–66, 209–10].

[225] Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos*, 16, sums up Nietzsche's early reading of the pre-Socratics. "The philosopher does not so much lose himself in contemplating the cosmos, as he finds his own distinctive identity as the sum or abbreviation of the whole. Taken in themselves, all philosophic 'truths' or doctrines constitute errors; they merely represent one man's vision or experience of his own existence. They are true only of and for him."

a metaphysic and an attitude of mind," as Camus puts it.[226] The tragic conception of the cosmos that Nietzsche associates with Heraclitus is nothing but a mythopoetic projection, the work of an artist that epitomizes his intuitive vision of nature. Nietzsche links Heraclitus's philosophy with Attic tragedy in §24 of *The Birth*, "which reveals to us the playful construction [and destruction] of the world of individuality as an outpouring of primal pleasure and delight [characteristic of a child at play]," and gives his most detailed version of it in *Tragic Age*. Here, the eternal "game" of Heraclitean becoming is a drama "of *law in becoming* and of *play in necessity*."[227] The coincidence of necessity and chance in this cosmic spectacle, "this greatest of all dramas" (PTAG 8), resembles the deception produced by the tragic poets. "Aeschylean-Sophoclean tragedy used the most ingenious artistic means to place all the threads needed to understand events in the spectator's hands in the opening scenes and, to some extent, by chance. This feature demonstrates the value of the kind of noble artistry which masks, as it were, things which are formally *necessary*, so as to make them appear fortuitous" (BT 12).[228] The poet stages a series of events pregnant with symbolic meaning, whose inner necessity the audience intuits as if by

[226] Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 17.
[227] On the importance of Nietzsche's Heraclitus, see Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 23–29. Matthew Meyer, like Deleuze and many others, holds the Heraclitean view that "nothing stands outside the flux and flow of eternal becoming" to be "the cornerstone of [Nietzsche's] tragic philosophy" ("*Human, All Too Human* and the Socrates Who Plays Music," *International Studies in Philosophy* 36, no. 3 (2004): 117). Further evidence from BT attests that this too is a metaphysical illusion. Discussing Aeschylus's conception of eternal justice, Nietzsche writes that "the artist's delight in Becoming, the serenity of artistic creation in defiance of all catastrophes, is merely a bright image of clouds and sky reflected in a dark sea of sadness" (BT 9). Such is the "metaphysical solace that eternal life *flows on* [*weiterfliesst*] beneath the turmoil of appearances" (emphasis added, BT 18). This delusion, whose formulation troublingly collapses the "greedy Will" into the very "illusion" that it "spread[s] over things" (ibid), applies no less to Schopenhauer than to Heraclitus.
[228] See Peter J. Euben, *The Tragedy of Political Theory: The Road Not Taken* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 111–12 n. 45, for what I read as Sophoclean examples of the "ingenious artistic means" that Nietzsche describes.

chance. Only by this achievement does the drama appear spontaneously to provoke a tragic pathos without being recognized for the manipulation that it is. Nietzsche's interpretation of Heraclitus's philosophy similarly represents the poetic staging of reality in this way. The paradoxical combination of necessity and chance infuses Heraclitus's mythopoetic conception of the cosmos, wherein the haphazard contingencies of becoming harmonize with the eternal principle of divine justice, analogous to the unpredictable but strictly regulated play of a sporting competition. This feature of poetic narrative incarnates the psychological artifice of the imagination and implicitly mirrors the primordial structure of belief through which human beings instinctively stage the meaning of their experience by projecting meaning into life and onto nature. The poet, like the philosopher, authors a seductive dreamworld, and "every human being is fully an artist when creating the worlds of dream" (BT 1).

Nietzsche's Heraclitus flees into an imaginary world that he sees everywhere reflected in nature, delighting in the "truth" of the dreamworld that surrounds 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!" (PT, p. 251). What Nietzsche calls the *pathos of truth* is the philosopher's sublime feeling of beholding the primordial unity of nature and refers to the joy experienced in this fantastical state of illusion. Nietzsche undermines the distinction between the phenomenal world of appearances (*Erscheinungen*) and the causal ground (*Urgrund/Untergrund*) of nature insofar as he identifies this philosophical

comprehension of nature as rooted in the imagination. He repeats this insight throughout his early notebooks.

> *The description of the philosopher's nature.* He knows through creating poetry, and he creates poetry through knowing [*Er erkennt, indem er dichtet, und dichtet, indem er erkennt*]. . . . Heraclitus can never become obsolete. It is poetic creation beyond the limits of experience, the continuation of the *mythical drive* [mythischen Triebes] . . . Overcoming knowledge through *mythopoeic forces* [mythenbildende Kräfte]. (NF-1872 19[62])

This is why it is "very instructive when Heraclitus compares his language with Apollo and the sybil" (NF-1872 19[99]). Nietzsche apprehends the desire for knowledge, culminating in the pathos of truth, as instinctively linked with the philosopher's artistically creative, mythopoetic capacity. Nietzsche's note "About the lie" from the summer of 1872 describes Heraclitus's teaching as an "anthropomorphism" and considers the philosophical "pathos of truth" as having an "accidental origin." He understands Plato's noble lie in this context, which I touch on in the next section and elucidate in the next chapter. The note concludes: "[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 [*dem Anthropomorphischen aller Erkenntniß*]" (NF-1872 19[180]). Once the experience of arriving at the truth is recognized as sheer pathos, its illusory value presumably ceases to be a source of metaphysical consolation. Nietzsche affirms in a single impossible stroke both the pathos of truth and the demystification of truth as a seductive illusion. He builds this vacillation into his neologism *the pathos of truth*, communicating how truth is nothing but an illusion that we affirm as real. Nietzsche's vision of the tragic philosopher, who paradoxically

affirms truth as an illusion, suggests that we cannot be freed from this irresolvable tension between appearance and reality.

Nietzsche's contrast between Anaximander and Heraclitus highlights opposing interpretations — pessimistic versus tragic — of an eternal justice that is entirely fictional. We find this same mytho-metaphysical phantasm in Schopenhauer's Kantian formulation of eternal justice as the "unification of freedom with necessity" (WWP, 1:339). Nietzsche suffuses the modern insights of Kant and Schopenhauer with his unified presentation of the pre-Socratic philosophers, who form a dialectical harmony of dissonant voices. Together, the pre-Socratic philosophers embody the instinctual *agon* of a single subjectivity as it undergoes a process of cultural-historical conditioning reflected in the development of scientific knowledge. The defining feature of this subjectivity is its self-contradiction. The identity of Heraclitus, whose tragic philosophy is given a privileged status, exists at the level of an imaginary, cultural representation. In *Pathos of Truth*, one cannot distinguish the man from the myth or myth from *logos*. With this background in mind, we can appreciate the relationship between optimism and pessimism in *The Birth*, which contextualizes the significance of Nietzsche's music-making Socrates.

III. THE MUSIC-MAKING SOCRATES

Nietzsche overcomes the opposition between optimism and pessimism in the synthesis of the Apollonian and Dionysian elaborated in the second half of BT (16–25). This discussion takes as its point of departure the figure of the music-making Socrates

(14–15), whose appearance marks the culmination of the first half of the book.[229] Nietzsche illuminates the transformation of optimistic theoretical knowledge into pessimistic resignation within the mythological framework of the two art impulses, the Dionysian and the Apollonian, whose coupling manifests an aesthetic affirmation of life. Passionate intoxication, moral transgression, and orgiastic loss of self characterize the Dionysian, while dream-like imagination, moral self-awareness, and the principle of individuation characterize the Apollonian. In physiological terms, the Dionysian expresses the form-dissolving, procreative instinct sublimated into music, and the Apollonian expresses the form-giving, imaginative instinct sublimated into the plastic arts. Metaphysically speaking, the Apollonian and the Dionysian together represent the duality of phenomenal appearances and their primordial ground, of will and representation.[230] Nietzsche opposes the synthesis of these two deified instincts in Attic tragedy to Socratism, which he holds responsible for the degeneration of tragic art. However, this opposition is caught within a circularity insofar as Nietzsche will

[229] Walter Kaufmann, "Nietzsche's Admiration for Socrates," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 9, no. 4 (1948): 474, and Daniels, *Birth of Tragedy*, 153, note that the original manuscript ended with Nietzsche's discussion of Socrates in BT 15, to which the second half was later added. Scholars consistently divide the book into two halves. E.g., Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, ch. 4; Burnham and Jesinghausen, *Birth of Tragedy*, 12–13, 93, 102, 117, 134, 136; Daniels, *Birth of Tragedy*, 4, 6.

[230] James I. Porter, "Nietzsche, Tragedy, and the Theory of Catharsis," *SKENÈ Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies* 2, no. 1 (2016): 211, clarifies the significance of their artistic synthesis, whose nuance is often misrepresented. "The Dionysian 'Urgrund' of existence, transmitted through music (the most immediate representation of this metaphysical region) is filtered through the screen of Apolline appearances: art, through its forms, shapes, and myths, gives the spectator access to this subterranean ground while also protecting her from its otherwise destructive power." He argues that the sublime, intoxicating *effect* of music is what characterizes the Dionysian, an effect produced by means of a refined Apollonian deception whereby music, as a representation of the primordial will, *appears* to grant us access to this "one, true reality" (BT 22), without actually doing so. Though Staten, "*Birth of Tragedy*," 13–20, agrees with Porter concerning the Apollonian status of music, he still interprets the Dionysian as the transcendent ground of reality, whereas for Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 99, this in itself is an Apollonian illusion.

ultimately argue that Socratic optimism leads to pessimism, whose dialectical sublation, like that of Dionysus and Apollo, manifests life's aesthetic affirmation, as I will show.

The surface of Nietzsche's narrative is deceptive. While the Socratism that opposes tragic art clearly infects Plato's metaphysical idealism, Nietzsche nonetheless uses the Platonic distinction between reality and appearance, between "the 'idea' as opposed to the 'idol,' or copied image," in describing the synthesis of Dionysus and Apollo. Dionysus, "entangled in the net of the individual will," represents the Idea of Platonic being, the metaphysical reality that the Apollonian "idol" — the individuated image of the tragic hero on stage — conceals as the mask of Dionysus (BT 10). To a certain degree, this reflects Schopenhauer's metaphysics, which combines the Kantian *Ding an sich*, designated by the will, with Plato's Ideas,[231] through which the will phenomenally objectivizes itself (WWP, 1:170). In Schopenhauer's account of tragic drama, the hero, as a phenomenal figure, is an image of the Idea of humanity, a representation of its collective suffering (WWP, 1:302–3). By contrast, music represents reality beyond the realm of universal Ideas, as a copy of the noumenal will prior to its objectivization. "Thus music is in no way, like the other arts, an image of Ideas, but *an image of the very will* of which Ideas are also the objectivization" (WWP, 1:308). Nietzsche's synthesis of the Apollonian and Dionysian thus overcomes the distinction in Schopenhauer's aesthetics between (in Nietzsche's terms) the Apollonian Idea embodied by the tragic hero and the Dionysian will represented in music.[232] Tragic myth offers us a

[231] See Young, *Philosophy of Art*, 33, 43; Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 97. Oddly, Han-Pile, "Nietzsche's Metaphysics," 375, fails to account for this passage, stating that "there is no indication that [Nietzsche] wants to take up Schopenhauer's revival of Platonism."
[232] See Young, *Philosophy of Art*, 46.

presentiment of the end of individuation in the return of phenomena to the primordial unity (*das Ur-Eine*), represented by the hero's Dionysian self-destruction. In *The Birth*, the role of the chorus's musical accompaniment to the drama highlights what Nietzsche envisions in the destruction of the tragic hero, namely, the Platonic Idea's absorption into the noumenal will prior to its objectivization.

To complicate things further, Porter notes that beneath this Platonic terminology lies a materialist, physiological reduction, indicated by Nietzsche's allusion to Lucretius, who states that "it was in dream that the magnificent figures of the gods first appeared before the souls of men" (BT 1).[233] Nietzsche's insight in §5 of *All Too Human*, "Misunderstanding of dreams," illuminates the connection he sees between Lucretius's atomism and Plato's metaphysics.

> In the ages of raw, primordial culture, people believed that in dreams they came to know a *second real world*; here is the origin of all metaphysics. Without dreams, there would have been no reason to divide the world. The separation into soul and body is also connected to the oldest view of dreams, just like the assumption that the soul can appear in bodily form, hence the origin of all belief in ghosts, and probably also the belief in gods. "The dead live on; for they appear to the living in dreams": that was the conclusion one previously drew, throughout millennia.[234]

When read continuously with §1 of *The Birth*, this passage highlights the Dionysian realm as that "second real world" that results from the Apollonian experience of dreaming, as the deceptive appearance of a metaphysical Beyond that imbues empirical reality with the uncanny quality of mere semblance. That "the soul can appear in bodily form" is the primordial, religious *belief* that Nietzsche describes in his Platonic analysis of Attic

[233] Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 36–37.
[234] See Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 18.

tragedy in §10 of *The Birth*, concerning the appearance of the tragic hero as an embodiment of Dionysus. The drama reflects how the experience of empirical reality itself mirrors the quality peculiar to oneiric consciousness — the *semblance of semblance* [*Schein des Scheins*] (BT 4). Bearing this in mind, let us turn back to Lucretius, for whom the soul is a rarefied body of very fine particles. The appearances of the gods are, on this view, phantasms, that is, psychical projections of atomic simulacra.[235] Nietzsche finds the metaphysical distinction between reality and appearance to originate from the power of dreaming; we project the difference between waking and dreaming states into phenomenal existence, which then appears as an illusion concealing a world beyond the empirical one. He assumes that this distinction is inescapable, for it is rooted in our own psychophysiological perception of reality. Insofar as our conception of the "real" is bound up with the obscure physiology of dreaming, the veracity of the distinction between appearance and reality is sublated.[236] It arises from the experience of dreaming and is itself nothing but a dream.

In passages such as §10 of *The Birth*, in which Nietzsche, following Schopenhauer, establishes a Platonic interpretation of tragic myth, the distinction between myth and metaphysics is sublated (*aufgehoben*): both demolished and preserved. We must wonder whether tragic myth is supposed to signify the aesthetic materialization of Platonic metaphysics, or whether Platonic metaphysics signifies a theoretical, abstract reduction of tragic myth. Elsewhere in *The Birth*, Plato's rationalism opposes tragic myth

[235] See Porter's analysis of the atomistic subtext of BT in *Invention of Dionysus*, 36–46, 137–39.
[236] Nietzsche plays with the polyphony of this term (BT 4, 7), which means to demolish, to preserve, and to raise up. See Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 6–16.

and his metaphysics heralds the optimism of Socratic science. In Nietzsche's aesthetics, Plato's opposition between poetry and philosophy oscillates in a process of ambivalent self-inversion. On the one hand, Platonic metaphysics designates a logical theory, while on the other a religious myth; on the one hand, the optimism of Socratic dialectic characterizes it, while on the other it characterizes Attic tragedy.

For Nietzsche, Plato's division between *logos* and *mythos* demonstrates how these two spheres arise inseparably together.[237] He criticizes Plato's hierarchical judgement that privileges the former. Plato provides rational justifications for the use of *mythos* as a means of moral (e.g. *Phaedo*, 107c–115a; *Republic*, 377a–d) and civic instruction, most notably in his discussion of the noble lie in *Republic*, 413d–15d , wherein he later banishes the tragic poets from his perfect state (605b). The thesis of Nietzsche's essay on "The Greek State" is that Plato's noble lie is a sign of his innate artistic strength, which, had his nobility not been corrupted by Socrates, would have been put into the service of the aesthetic, rather than merely intellectual, flourishing of culture. One can understand why Nietzsche considers Plato's noble lie as a sign of his native artistic strength, for it is a manipulation whose effect resembles the one produced by the tragic poet, which transforms human artifice into something that appears at turns fortuitous, natural, or divinely ordained. For Plato, the poet's *mythos* supposedly operates far below the lucid heights from which the philosopher employs it. For Nietzsche, Plato dismisses the *mythos* of the tragic poet because it originates unconsciously out of his creative instinct. This is

[237] "The theoretical genius pushes for the unleashing of artistic-mystical drives in two ways: on the one hand through its sheer existence, which demands its immortal twin, like one colour the other, in accordance with a certain allopathy of nature; on the other hand through the abrupt transformation of science into art every time its limits are reached" (NF-1870 7[125]).

attested in "what Sophocles said about Aeschylus, namely that he did the right thing, although he did it unconsciously." In contrast, "the divine Plato . . . is usually being ironical when he speaks of the poet's creative ability, except when it takes the form of conscious insight, and he equates it with the gift of soothsaying and interpreting dreams; the poet, he says, is unable to compose poetry until he has lost consciousness and reason no longer dwells in him" (BT 12). Nietzsche reverses Plato's evaluation of the tragic poet by implicating the philosopher in the art of dream interpretation and hence as one who is no less subject to unconsciously creative forces.

> A person with artistic sensibility relates to the reality of dream in the same way as a philosopher relates to the reality of existence: he attends to it closely and with pleasure, using these images to interpret life, and practising for life with the help of these events. . . . We take pleasure in dreaming, understanding its figures without mediation; all forms speak to us; nothing is indifferent or unnecessary. Yet even while this dream-reality is most alive, we nevertheless retain a pervasive sense that it is *semblance* [*Scheins*]. (BT 1)

For Nietzsche, poetic narrative mimics the deception of dreams, a deception that also infects the philosopher's waking perception of reality, imbuing it with metaphysical significance.

Precisely this insight marks the transition from Socratic to tragic culture, from scientific optimism to aesthetic affirmation. Nietzsche contextualizes his critique of Socratic optimism with the modern innovations of Kant and Schopenhauer that herald its tragic counterpart.

> The hardest-fought victory of all was won by the enormous courage and wisdom of *Kant* and *Schopenhauer*, a victory over the optimism which lies hidden in the nature of logic and which in turn is the hidden foundation of our culture. Whereas this optimism once believed in our ability to grasp and solve, with the help of the seemingly reliable *aeternae veritates*, all puzzles of the universe, and treated time, space, and causality as entirely unconditional laws of the most general validity,

> Kant showed that these things actually only served to raise mere appearance, the work of maya, to the status of the sole true and supreme reality and to put this in the place of the innermost and true essence of things, thereby making it impossible to understand this essence — putting the dreamer even more deeply to sleep, as Schopenhauer put it (*World as Will and Representation*, I, p. 498). This insight marks the beginning of a culture which I now dare to describe as tragic culture. Its most important feature lies in putting wisdom in place of science as the highest goal. (BT 18)

This passage provides the modern context for Nietzsche's vision of the rebirth of tragic culture, whose "symbol" is the music-making Socrates (BT 17), representing the value of "putting wisdom in the place of science as the highest goal." The Dionysian wisdom of tragic culture amounts to "the metaphysical solace that eternal life flows on indestructibly beneath the turmoil of appearances" (BT 18). How can this type of wisdom — whose bizarrely "Buddhistic" characterization I will clarify — remain convincing as a culture's *highest goal*, given that the above passage dismisses the desire to penetrate beyond the realm of appearances as an optimistic delusion, leaving us only with appearances, having no access to "the innermost and true essence of things," reducing Dionysian wisdom to the comfort of an illusion, though one that undermines itself in being recognized as such and thereby ceases to be comforting? Contrary to Gemes and Sykes's claim that tragic art protects us from life's objective meaninglessness by virtue of an illusion,[238] I argue that the *highest goal* of culture is no less illusory than the antiteleological, cosmic meaninglessness that it is supposed to redeem us from,[239] whose antagonism equates to the juxtaposition of mythical appearances beyond which lies an incomprehensible void.

[238] Gemes and Sykes, "Nietzsche's Illusion," 81, 85, 104.
[239] The "turmoil of appearances [*dem Wirbel der Erscheinungen*]" (BT 18) parallels the "vortex of being [*Wirbel des Seins*]" (NF-1871 11[1]), implicating the latter as another appearance.

Nietzsche's tragic philosophy confronts the abyss of nature, its impenetrability. In the above passage from §18 of *The Birth*, we see that his engagement with Schopenhauer's pessimism withholds any dogmatic assertion about the true nature of reality. Whereas Schopenhauer denies the value of life by virtue of an ascetic wisdom that transcends it, the satyr Silenus calls into question the value of the pessimistic wisdom that he conveys to the humans who entrap him. "'Wretched, ephemeral race, children of chance and tribulation, why do you force me to tell you the very thing which it would be most profitable for you *not* to hear?'" (BT 3). In Nietzsche's account of Silenus's story, the satyr rebukes his human captors, who receive the truth that their possessive lust for it deserves — with "shrill laughter," he ironically punishes their assault, rather than communicating something unconditional. Unlike Schopenhauer, Nietzsche pursues the satyr's wisdom as something inherently questionable, since he accepts that suffering taints knowledge, spoils its pretension to truth, and deprives it of the salvific power that he reinvests in art. In *The Birth*, Silenus's "piece of popular wisdom" entwines the "ecstatic vision" of the Olympian gods that it mythopoetically propagates (BT 3). Likewise, Nietzsche's tragic philosopher confronts nature's unfathomable abyss only to transform it into a metaphysical unity, an imaginary instance of aesthetic reconciliation whereby "all that is real is dissolved in semblance, and behind it the unified *nature of the Will* manifests itself, completely cloaked in the glory of wisdom and truth and blinding radiance. *Illusion, delusion at its peak*" (DW 3). Such is the process by which the music-making Socrates transforms the optimistic pursuit of truth that produces pessimism into the aesthetic affirmation of life, which reaches its peak in a blinding, "mystical sense of

oneness" (BT 2). This pathos negates nature's unfathomability in the illusion of grasping its real essence "with the certainty of something directly apprehended (*Anschauung*)" (BT 1).

The music-making Socrates symbolically embodies the aesthetic sublation of optimism and pessimism that coincides in what Nietzsche calls *tragic knowledge*, which is discovered when optimistic science, led on by the "sublime metaphysical illusion [*erhabene metaphysische Wahn*]" that existence can not only be rationally comprehended but also corrected, reaches its limit and ends in an abyss, for "logic now curls up around these limits and bites its own tail" (BT 15). At this point, art or myth emerges to remedy science, whose optimism leads through pessimism to aesthetic affirmation. The sublime metaphysical illusion of scientific optimism, which drives science onward in its pursuit of truth, leads scientific knowledge to the point at which "it must transform itself into *art* [*in* Kunst *umschlagen muss*]*; which is actually, given this mechanism, what it has been aiming at all along*" (ibid). Within the framework of a dialectical sublation of opposites, Nietzsche envisions "the *most illustrious opposition* to the tragic world view, by which I mean science, optimistic to its deepest core, with its ancestor Socrates at the head of it" (BT 16), leading through pessimism to the very tragic knowledge it opposes.[240] Tragic myth thereby "leads the world of appearances to its limits where it negates itself and

[240] The antithesis between the optimistic Socrates's anti-Dionysianism and the music-making Socrates's Dionysianism collapses. Porter argues that "Socrates cannot embody the fusion of these radically opposed impulses and neither would it suit Nietzsche's purposes to allow their differences simply to collapse into a convenient (if still troubling) identity. What Socrates can only embody is, rather, the impossibility of keeping these two stories straight" (*Invention of Dionysus*, 91). But he goes on to say that Socrates instances "the collapse of structural opposites (of structure pure and simple)" (ibid., 119). While Porter's vacillating formulations follow an obscure dialectic, my reading avoids their opacity by identifying the collapse of structural opposites with mystical-artistic rapture.

seeks to flee back into the one, true reality" (BT 22). Such is the point at which tragic myth "seems to sing . . . its metaphysical swan-song" (BT 22). The language harkens back to Nietzsche's image of the music-making Socrates and alludes to the metaphysical swan song sung by Socrates in the *Phaedo* (84e-85b). While the limits of the world of appearances, in Plato, give way to a vision of the good beyond being — a metaphysics of morality — tragic myth undermines this morality in an amoral, life-affirming moment of aesthetic rapture (*Rausch*). This moment coincides with the destruction of the tragic hero on stage, through which the spectators feel themselves united with the noumenal realm beneath appearances, a mere imaginary projection. In *Tragic Age*, Nietzsche describes this experience as "the mystic absorption into *one* all-sufficing ecstatic state of mind [*das mystische Versenktsein in* eine *allgenügende entzückende Vorstellung*] which is the enigma and vexation of ordinary minds" (PTAG 11). In Kantian terms, Dionysian rapture takes place at the limit of human experience, at "the spot where the occupied space (namely, experience) touches the void (that of which we can know nothing, namely *noumena*)."[241] In a moment of purest bliss, the mind empties into the void of its own subjectivity.

IV. *ASKESIS* AND *EKSTASIS*

The next chapter significantly expands on my discussion of the music-making Socrates, symbolizing a tragic wisdom whose contradictory basis I will first briefly clarify. Nietzsche's portrait of Hamlet evokes the horror of life's meaninglessness that

[241] Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, ed. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1950), 103.

this wisdom attempts to assuage. "Now no solace has any effect, there is a longing for a world beyond death . . . existence is denied, along with its treacherous reflection in the gods or in some immortal Beyond" (BT 7). Such is the ascetic longing for nothingness that coincides with cognizance of life's nullity and that Nietzsche associates with Buddhism.

> The orgiastic experience leads a people in just one direction, along the road towards Indian Buddhism which, if its longing for nothingness is to be borne at all, requires those rare, ecstatic states with their elevation above space, time, and the individual, while these in turn demand a philosophy which teaches one how to overcome the indescribable apathy of their intervening moods by means of a representation. (BT 21)

This passage undergirds the redemptive power of Greek myth with a Schopenhauerian vision of Buddhistic asceticism, interweaving Eastern-Dionysian and Western-Apollonian cultures. Strangely, cognizance of life's nullity follows from the experience of ecstasy while also fueling its cultural production. Ecstatic states both provoke and react against the Dionysian nausea that accompanies the wisdom of the "wood-god" Silenus, that it is best "not to *be*, to be *nothing*" (BT 3), which, to repeat, Nietzsche formulates in direct association with the ascetic rapture of a martyr.[242] §21 of *The Birth* introduces a troubling vicious circle between apathy and ecstasy, which are culturally advanced sublimations of pleasure and pain. This mirrors the vicious circle of pleasure and pain that Socrates discusses in the *Phaedo*, wherein these seeming opposites mutually aggravate one another in an endless, self-consuming loop. "What a strange thing that which men call pleasure

[242] I thus interpret the satyr's wisdom in BT as an ironical reprimand that in turn grounds an ascetic attitude, whereas for Katie Brennan, "The Wisdom of Silenus: Suffering in *The Birth of Tragedy*," *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 19, no. 2 (2018): 186–87, it sincerely corresponds to a fundamental truth about suffering.

seems to be, and how astonishing the relation it has with what is thought to be its opposite, namely pain! A man cannot have both at the same time. Yet if he pursues and catches the one, he is almost always bound to catch the other also, like two creatures with one head" (*Phaedo*, 60b). For Plato this illogical circularity refutes hedonism and supports idealism. However, §21 of *The Birth* demonstrates the incoherence of Plato's refutation insofar as this vicious circle afflicts even the ascetic denial of the body, an insight that undermines Plato no less than Schopenhauer's ethics. The ascetic longing for nothingness results from one's exposure to the life-affirming *ekstasis* of Dionysian orgy. We are then told that this asceticism (*Askese*) can only be endured by means of a second type of ecstasy, closely resembling that of the Dionysian orgy, which in turn produces apathy. The process of ecstasy's cultural sublimation proceeds from ritual orgy to religion to art. However, the apathy that precedes ascetic mysticism is indistinguishable from the apathy that it produces. Is it ecstasy that excites apathy, or apathy that excites ecstasy? In *The Birth*, both conclusions bite their own tail, "like two creatures with one head. I think that if Aesop had noted [the circularity of pleasure and pain] he would have composed a fable that a god wished to reconcile their opposition but could not do so, so he joined their two heads together, and therefore when a man has one, the other follows later" (*Phaedo*, 60b–c). Nietzsche sees tragic art as the tentative solution that reconciles pleasure and pain, accomplishing what Aesop's god could not, since tragedy transforms their circularity into an aesthetic phenomenon, wherein "things which are ugly and disharmonious [and hence painful to behold] . . . induce aesthetic delight" (BT 24). At the same time, this development compromises the idealistic purity of *askesis* insofar as

apathetic withdrawal produces the very life-affirming art that supposedly opposes it. For this reason, Nietzsche links the saint and the tragic artist in *Dionysiac World View*. "Disgust at the continuation of life is felt to be a means of creation, either saintly creation or artistic. The terrifying or absurd is uplifting because it is only *seemingly* terrible or absurd" (DW 3). Life-denying asceticism reveals itself for what it is, namely, a longing for ecstasy, whose sensual circularity manifests the contradiction between pleasure and pain that undergoes various permutations in the forms of its cultural sublimation.

We find this circularity in how the Greeks alleviate Dionysian nausea by means of an aesthetic representation. Tragic myth mediates a contemplation of the Platonic Idea and its musical absorption into the primordial will prior to its phenomenal objectivization, the "eternal life" that "flows indestructibly beneath the turmoil of appearances" (BT 18). Nietzsche identifies "metaphysical solace" with Buddhistic or tragic culture (BT 18), referring to the mediation of an aesthetic representation that sublimates the *unio mystica* with the primordial unity, namely,

> the ecstasy of the Dionysiac state, in which the usual barriers and limits of existence are destroyed. [This] contains, for as long as it lasts, a *lethargic* element in which all personal experience from the past are submerged. . . . But as soon as daily reality re-enters consciousness, it is experienced as such with a sense of revulsion; the fruit of those states is an ascetic, will-negating mood. (BT 7)

He associates this with Hamlet's despair, whose insight into the "true essence of things . . . prompts [him] to see only what is terrible or absurd in existence wherever he looks." While this insight poses the "danger of longing to deny the will as the Buddhist does" (BT 7), it is itself delusional, since "it is an arrogant delusion to believe that we can

penetrate to the innermost essence of things" (BT 18).[243] Dionysian ecstasy produces the nausea that yields but another culturally mediated appearance, namely, the putatively objective insight into the truth about suffering as a reflection of nature's abysmal essence,[244] which circularly fuels the need for an aesthetic representation capable of producing metaphysical solace.

For Plato's Socrates, the will's irrational hedonism signifies a falling out of tune with the rational harmony that characterizes his optimistic ideal, while Schopenhauer elevates the will's unharmonious irrationality to the cosmic, metaphysical reality characteristic of his pessimism. Plato conceives of a cosmic purposiveness whose loss coincides with Schopenhauer's denial of life's value. In section one, I discussed how the tension between optimism and pessimism in *The Birth* conceals the antagonism between teleological and antiteleological worldviews. Nietzsche attempts to resolve the antagonism by affirming Dionysian wisdom as a cultural *goal* that justifies and redeems human existence from the pessimistic sense of life's purposelessness, an accomplishment that he associates with the figure of a music-making Socrates. However, we have seen how the contrast between purposiveness and purposelessness is relative to human experience and inexorably persists insofar as it derives from the cultural sublimation of pleasure and pain. Nietzsche collapses the distinction between ascetic self-denial and

[243] Nietzsche follows Lange, *History of Materialism*, 2:218, who states that "we find everywhere nothing but the usual empirical opposition between appearances and existence [sc., the true essence of things]. What at this stage of consideration is existence, appears again at another, in relation to a deeper concealed existence, as appearance." On the connection between Nietzsche's portrait of Hamlet and his reading of Lange, see Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 84–86.
[244] E.g. Christopher Janaway, "Beauty is False, Truth Ugly: Nietzsche on Art and Life," in *Nietzsche on Art and Life*, ed. Daniel Came (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 39–56, thinks this is the truth about nature that tragedy imparts in BT.

hedonistic intoxication, exposing the repressed irrationalism of both Plato and Schopenhauer's ethics. Tragic wisdom results from a process of cultural sublimation rooted in ascetic instinctual repression that produces intoxication. As the symbol of tragic wisdom, Nietzsche's music-making Socrates exposes the repressive, irrational basis of cultural production, taking the form of a mythical ideal whose believability Nietzsche strains to the point of bankruptcy, since its protective function reacts against a purely imaginary horror, the mere appearance of it. By undermining itself in this way, Nietzsche's mythopoetic rhetoric collapses myriad cultural oppositions — between optimism and pessimism, myth and metaphysics, asceticism and hedonism — into a circularity that bites its own tail like the mythical ouroboros.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the metaphysical *Urgrund* of nature, the noumenal, unconditioned ground of phenomenal appearances, not only cannot be grasped, but is produced fictively by the subject's very attempt to do so. This is to say that metaphysical inquiry produces a conviction of the inaccessible object that it pursues. In seeking out the cause of consciousness, one finally confronts the constitutive limit of subjectivity, beyond which no cause can be found other than the consciousness of appearances one seeks to explain. The skeptical, demystifying tendency of critical theoretical inquiry at this point turns against and consumes itself, biting its own tail, for the mythopoetic instinct against which philosophy fights finally infects its own intellectual grasp of objective reality. In place of religious myth, metaphysicians posited a realm of being in order to explain the realm of ephemeral becoming, which they considered illusory, whereas Nietzsche treats the

contradiction between being and becoming as no less imaginary than the myth that metaphysics was supposed to replace. He suffuses *The Birth* with this contradiction at the heart of appearances, whose aesthetic manipulation produces the pathos of mystical transcendence, a phantasmal representation that one comes to recognize as such. However, when we appreciate the deceptive quality of all metaphysics and discard the dichotomous understanding of reality in terms of phenomena and noumena, we are not thereby freed from illusion, for such dichotomous thinking (and such deception) ineluctably structures the meaning of human experience and imbues it with value. The solution is not to try futilely to overcome this contradiction — exciting an unquenchable thirst for Dionysian intoxication — but to learn the tragic necessity of coming to live with it. Since we cannot get beyond the play of appearances, Nietzsche's early tragic philosophy leaves us with the agonistic dissonance of human existence that it only amplifies.

CHAPTER 4
DIONYSUS, PHILOSOPHER

Cebes laughed and said: 'Assuming that we are afraid, Socrates, try to change our minds, or rather do not assume that we are afraid, but perhaps there is a child in us who has these fears; try to persuade him not to fear death like a bogey.'

You should, said Socrates, sing a charm over him every day until you have charmed away his fears.

Where shall we find a good charmer for these fears, Socrates, he said, now that you are leaving us? Plato, *Phaedo* 77e–78a

In this chapter, I examine the importance that Plato's portrait of the dying Socrates has in connection with Nietzsche's counter-image of a music-making Socrates. I analyze this connection in relation to the association, made by both Plato and Nietzsche, between Socrates and Dionysus. In light of this association, we shall see that the "Problem of Socrates" constitutes a single line of thematic continuity that develops from Nietzsche's first to last works. Portraits of the dying Socrates recur throughout Nietzsche's oeuvre. We find the most well-known of these in *The Gay Science* (340) and *Twilight of the Idols* ("The Problem of Socrates," 12). In these passages Nietzsche interprets Socrates's final words, "Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius" (*Phaedo*, 118a), to convey the pessimism of Silenus that in *The Birth* he opposes to Socratic optimism, strikingly inverting the crucial opposition of Nietzsche's first work — *the Dionysiac versus the Socratic* (BT 12). In Nietzsche's later work, the pessimism of Silenus shows up precisely where, from the perspective of *The Birth*, it would seem most out of place — in the mouth of Socrates.[245] I

[245] In Plato's *Symposium*, 215a, 221d, Alcibiades describes Socrates as *atopia*, referring to the strangeness of what is out of place. See Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1995), 158; David Sansone, "Socrates, Satyrs,

guide my analysis of Nietzsche's volte-faced inversion by a hermeneutical principle that hides in plain sight: that the head of his corpus finally bites its own tail. The thematic culmination of his mature writing is a circular movement that returns to the crucial opposition of his first work. This return — mirroring the mythical ouroboros alluded to in §15 of *The Birth* — is decidedly paradoxical, but I contend that such a Dionysian unity of opposites structures Nietzsche's first and last treatments of Socrates.

This chapter divides into four sections. In the first section, I shall argue that the music-making Socrates first discussed in §15 of *The Birth* can be regarded as an elaboration of the earlier image of the dying Socrates in that same section, which is linked in turn to the Socrates of Plato's *Symposium*. I contextualize this development with my discussion of "The Greek State," which illuminates Nietzsche's interpretation of Plato's noble lie. I interpret *The Birth* as an immanent critique of culture that plays upon the role-reversing quality of Plato's Socrates in the *Symposium*. In the second section, I analyze the role that Plato's *Symposium* plays throughout *The Birth*, focusing on the imagery of satyrs, sirens, and the Sphinx. I discuss the Dionysianism that is implicit in both Nietzsche and Plato's depictions of Socrates, which centers around the play between optimism and pessimism. Next, I discuss the significance of the inversion of the opposition between Schopenhauerian pessimism and Socratic optimism as found in *The Birth*, and then demonstrate the continuity between this inversion and Nietzsche's later portraits of the dying Socrates. I connect Nietzsche's early "optimistic" and later

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and Satyr-Play in Plato's *Symposium*," *Illinois Classical Studies* 43, no. 1 (2018): 81; Maria Luisa Catoni and Luca Giuliani, "Socrates Represented: Why Does He Look like a Satyr?" *Critical Inquiry* 45 (2019): 700.

"pessimistic" portraits of the dying Socrates, which seem to me to form a Janus head of perspectival opposites. This symbolism is already evident in the two-faced mask of Nietzsche's music-making Socrates. Finally, I connect this Dionysian unity of opposites to Nietzsche's tragic philosophy, which he promulgates as a cure for modern cultural decadence, but which I argue functions as a dramatic, immanent critique of Enlightenment values.

I. THE NOBLE LIE

Nietzsche's image of the music-making Socrates builds on that of the dying Socrates, which of course alludes to the famous death scene in Plato's *Phaedo*. Nietzsche views the cheerfulness of the dying Socrates to characterize scientific optimism prior to its eventual collapse into pessimism when confronted with the nonrational abyss of nature. The failure of Socratic dialectic to penetrate the causal depths of nature is, for Nietzsche, visible in Socrates's oneiric calling to practice music (BT 14).[246] While Nietzsche's artistic Socrates offers an aesthetic justification for existence, Plato's Socrates attempts to justify existence by means of reason. In the *Phaedo*, this justification is unsuccessful insofar as he is obliged to introduce an optimistic myth, employed as a healing balm to allay the fears of his companions. Nietzsche understands this within the context of modern science, which he contends is infected with moral-rational optimism. The scientific explanation of reality alone does not justify existence and for this reason Plato supplements his logic with a mytho-metaphysical consolation whose moral basis is

[246] Plato depicts this in the *Phaedo*, 60e, where Socrates recounts how he was advised in a dream to "practice and cultivate the arts."

supposed to be rational and universally valid. Nietzsche contends that the scientific explanation is rooted in a metaphysical need for meaning but fails on its own to fulfill this need, which, contra Plato, he recognizes as a need for illusion that scientific explanation fails to dispel.

Plato's myth resembles one of those state-approved tales told to children in his *Republic*, the sort of salutary fiction designed as a guide for moral education (377a-d). Such is the character of Plato's noble lie, which has the quality of a beneficent drug (382c-d) prescribed by the ruler as a doctor to the citizenry (459c-d) and put in the service of a breeding program implementing a caste system (459d-60a). By means of a noble lie espousing the fictitious cosmological doctrine of a hierarchy of souls, citizens are expected to accept their allotted caste (413d-15d). In *Phaedo*, Plato has Cebes characterize Socrates as a seductive charmer, who *sings charms* against his companions' childish fear of death. Nietzsche links Socrates's musical charm with Plato's noble lie in his characterization of music as a "noble deception" that "bestows on myth a moving and convincing metaphysical significance to which word and image alone, without that unique source of help, could never attain" (BT 21). Why are Socrates's arguments proving the immortality of the soul insufficient? Why must he have recourse to the myth of an afterlife? On my reading, Nietzsche's music-making Socrates exposes not only the myth, but the Socratic dialectic itself, as part and parcel of the doctor's pharmacological lie.

By Plato's own standard of philosophical enlightenment, the ignorant, childish citizens subjected to the ruler's lie would inhabit nothing less than the realm of

phantasmagoria depicted in the cave allegory, knowing nothing about who they are or the true nature of their reality, being brainwashed by the deceptive shadow-play of shifting appearances. Nietzsche's "Greek State" delineates the social-political implications of Plato's noble lie, to which he alludes throughout his career.[247] The noble lie, as a religious belief, is used to coerce a body of citizens into submission to a ruling caste and preserve the hierarchy of the state. Nietzsche links the necessary coercion of citizens to slavery as a requirement of cultural flourishing: "*This truth* is the vulture which gnaws the liver of the Promethean promoter of culture. The misery of men living a life of toil must still increase in order to make the production of a world of art possible to a small number of Olympian men" (GSt, p. 166). This insight also informs the pessimistic wisdom of Silenus, who in this context comprehends the senseless agony of life that underlies the cultural phantasmagoria promulgated by the ruling caste. On the one hand, this phantasmagoria consists of the false world that is constructed and founded upon the noble lie, which justifies the existence of the state hierarchy to the citizens whom it rules. The phantasmagoric tool of political domination makes possible a second level of illusion enjoyed by the ruling class: the world composed of artistic production. Taken together, these two levels form the cultural phantasmagoria that justifies existence through the creation of a world, which is divided between the ruling and servile classes, each with its own realm of appearances. One is the vulgar realm of the subjugated citizenry, yoked with the burden of material necessity and the low culture administered to them. The other

[247] E.g., UM, *History for Life*, 10; GM III.18–19; TI "Improvers," 5; WP 428. Cf. D 496. For further discussions of Nietzsche's response to Plato's noble lie, see Rosen, *Ancients and the Moderns*, ch. 10; Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos*, ch. 1; Lampert, *Strauss and Nietzsche*, 20–23, 30; "Nietzsche and Plato," in *Nietzsche and Antiquity: His Reaction and Response to the Classical Tradition*, ed. Paul Bishop, 205–19.

is the noble realm of the ruling class, whose leisure enjoyment produces a higher aesthetic sphere. The interpenetration of lower and higher culture belies the hierarchical opposition between these two realms, for in their economic interdependence neither is imaginable in isolation from the other.[248]

In this light, the illusory realm of Apollonian appearances refers to the Olympian world of art that emerges from a Dionysian realm of pitiless cruelty, corresponding to the harsh reality of material necessity, while the former realm corresponds to its idealistic justification. Prometheus represents this tension. He demonstrates how "the very first philosophical problem [the human possession of divine fire] presents a painful, irresolvable conflict between god and man, and pushes it like a mighty block of rock up against the threshold of every culture" (BT 9). Humans achieve knowledge only by "committing an offence" against the natural hierarchy that distinguishes humans from gods. Humanity commits an offence against nature by creating its *own* hierarchy in defiance of the gods. The antagonism between humans and gods thus reflects humanity's own inner conflict, its dominating hubris that elevates the few above the many. Tragic art represents humanity's self-conflict and supplies an aesthetic antidote to assuage its painful spectacle, as we have seen with the music-making Socrates. It seems that

[248] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno formulate a similar point in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 107–08. "The purity of bourgeois art, hypostasized as a realm of freedom contrasting to material praxis, was bought from the outset with the exclusion of the lower class; and art keeps faith with the cause of that class, the true universal, precisely by freeing itself from the purposes of the false. Serious art has denied itself to those for whom the hardship and oppression of life make a mockery of seriousness and who must be glad to use the time not spent at the production line in being simply carried along. Light art has accompanied autonomous art as its shadow. It is the social bad conscience of serious art. The truth which the latter could not apprehend because of its social premises gives the former an appearance of objective justification. The split between them is itself the truth: it expresses at least the negativity of the culture which is the sum of both spheres."

dialectics, not unlike the power of tragic myth, only offers a brief respite from the cruelty of life, produced by the self-inflicted wounds of humanity's own cultural domestication and domination. Tragic art calls into question the value of cultural phantasmagoria — the aesthetic world (both vulgar and noble) that humans create to justify their existence — and the political hierarchy it serves to preserve; it confronts the abyss of nature that belies the production of culture and that rises up like a monster, threatening to devour the artifice of the human-made world. However, this abyss is but the imaginary dissolution of culture, the artistic image of its negation. Far from undermining the cultural world of artistic representation, the abyss of nature is produced from within that world as its negative self-image. In relation to Schopenhauer's terms, the metaphysical will is thus a by-product of phenomenal representation, being no less illusory. Nietzsche brilliantly inverts Schopenhauer's metaphysics, whose pessimism, as a reaction against Enlightenment optimism, is no less suspect than the optimism it denounces.

I read Nietzsche's conception of tragic art as a profound critique of Enlightenment values, which disavow the woundedness of human existence by attempting to explain reality and thereby eliminate suffering. Such is the Socratic "delusion" by means of which science attempts to "heal the eternal wound of existence" (BT 18). Plato banishes the tragic poets from his perfect state (*Republic*, 605b) because their art holds up a mirror to the ineliminable cruelty at the basis of cultural production.

> In that *necessity* [of slavery] lies the horrifying, predatory aspect of the Sphinx of nature who, in the glorification of the artistically free life of culture (*Kultur*), so beautifully presents the torso of a young woman. Culture (*Bildung*), which is first and foremost a real hunger for art, rests on one terrible premise: but this reveals itself in the nascent feeling of shame. (GSt, p. 166)

We must again bear in mind that Nietzsche directs his critique of Plato and Socrates against modern bourgeois values. Optimistic science, by Nietzsche's time failing to deliver on its redemptive promise that knowledge overcomes suffering, finally despairs in the face of its own "terrible premise," namely that this redemptive promise flourishes on the concealed foundation of slavery. Nietzsche holds up a mirror to the hypocrisies of secular enlightenment by exposing its optimistic faith in the panacea of scientific progress, which he diagnoses as a symptom of cultural denial, a denial of humanity's agonizing lust for domination, its cruel subjugation of one part to another that perpetuates an eternal strife. He exposes the wound of human existence at the extreme limits of shame, arising from the disavowal of its instinctual, predatory violence, while ironically concealing this shame with another pharmacological illusion — the rapture (*Rausch*) experienced in aesthetic affirmation.[249] In *The Birth*, the highest task of art is "to free the eye from gazing into the horrors of night . . . with the healing balm of semblance" (BT 19). The power of tragedy, "the essence of all prophylactic healing energies" (BT 21), is that of a *pharmakon*.

[249] The transient experience of *Rausch* resembles Faust's fantastical encounter with the spirit of the earth (*Erdgeist*). "I, image of godhead that began/ To dream eternal truth within reach,/ Exulting on the heavens' brilliant beach/ As if I had stripped off the mortal man;/ I, more than cherub, whose unbounded might/ Seemed even then to flow through nature's veins,/ Shared the creative joys of God's domains—/ Presumptuous hope for which I pay in pains:/ One word of thunder swept me from my height" (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: RandomHouse, 1961), ll.614–22). See Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, 353–54; Adrian Del Caro, "Zarathustra vs. Faust, or Anti-Romantic Rivalry among Superhumans," in *Nietzsche on Art and Life*, ed. Daniel Came (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 143–162.

"The Greek State" elucidates the social-political significance of Nietzsche's rhetoric in *The Birth*, which aims to manipulate the sensibilities of modern readers.[250] His rhetorical descriptions of Attic tragedy produce intoxicating effects; his arguments are sensually persuasive. Bearing this essay in mind, we find that Dionysian delight serves to mask the shameful, exploitative basis of cultural production. Nietzsche's rhetorical seduction aims to sweep his readers into an intoxicated frenzy of aesthetic affirmation, their passions blinding them to the bleak world of slavery and exploitation that such affirmation both presupposes and underhandedly justifies. We might naturally conclude that Nietzsche's rhetoric is Machiavellian and his political vision aristocratic. While Nietzsche does attack the socialistic, emancipatory ideal that he rather anachronistically associates with Socratism, this ideal nonetheless emerges in an uncanny Dionysian form, already at the beginning of *The Birth*.

> Now the slave is a freeman, now all the rigid, hostile barriers, which necessity, caprice, or "impudent fashion" have established between human beings, break asunder. Now, hearing the gospel of universal harmony, each person feels himself to be not simply united, reconciled or merged with his neighbour, but quite literally one with him, as if the veil of maya had been torn apart, so that there shreds of it flutter before the mysterious primordial unity. (BT 1)

The Dionysian here tempts us with the prospect of a "naïve" return to nature that Nietzsche disparagingly associates with Rousseau's character Emile (BT 3) and the faith in "man in his original goodness" (BT 19). While Sarah Kofman characterizes this faith as "no more than a caricature of Dionysianism,"[251] which in a certain sense it is, how

[250] The essay vitiates the type of claim made by Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, 181, that Dionysus and Apollo are "classless, and this is because they are entities that exist beyond the realm of socio-political stratification and (as far as possible) beyond socio-political significance of any kind."
[251] Kofman, "Metaphor, Symbol, Metamorphosis," 204.

exactly does one distinguish this type of optimism from the Dionysian "gospel of universal harmony" that would liberate all of humanity from the hierarchical rank-ordering of society? Nietzsche's contradictory rhetoric plays on the Romantic desire for a return to nature and the familiarity of this kind of metaphysical comfort, thereby manipulating the sentimental sympathies of his educated audience. Those readers drawn to passionate, musical excess are the ones Nietzsche has in mind, desiring the mystical state of unity that aesthetic pleasure affords, a pleasure that transcends the realm of individuation. On a cultural level, Nietzsche links this with the desire to be transported back to a world of happiness, harmony, and primeval innocence. The Dionysian in this sense represents an artistic ideal of universal emancipation, seducing those prone to intoxication with the illusion of being liberated from the psychical malaise of social alienation, the painful distance produced by the hierarchical rank-ordering of society that isolates human beings from one another. These intoxicating effects blind its adherents to the fact that the Dionysian ethos serves to justify slavery, social-political hierarchy, and the violent powers of state domination.[252] Dionysian rapture tempts one blindly to affirm this bleak reality by creating the illusion of having escaped it. In this way it functions as a form of psychological repression, whereby one unconsciously affirms what one cannot bear to see. "[C]itizens are in the dark about what nature intends for them with their state instinct, and follow blindly," (GSt, p. 170) blinded "by a charitable power so that, almost crushed by the wheels of the chariot, they still shout, 'dignity of work!', 'dignity of

[252] Like Young and other commentators, Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, 181, fail to note the social-political intent behind the manipulation of "a *mass* of worshippers 'whose civic past and social status have been totally forgotten' (§§1, 8)," as Nietzsche outlines it in GSt.

man!'" (ibid., p. 167). Nietzsche depicts the self-professed haters of the state who sloganize these emancipatory sentiments as unknowingly blind to the shackles that enslave them, deluded by the "charitable power" of Dionysian seduction. Citizens futilely flee the cruelty of the state by hallucinating its reversal in the form of a phantasmal state of nature, all the while obeying their unconscious "state instinct." If we recognize this illusion for what it is, we may no longer find it seductive, whether in the form of Rousseauian sentimentalism or Schopenhauerian pity. As evidenced in §1 of *The Birth*, Nietzsche's Dionysianism strikingly incorporates elements of both, parodically presenting them as two sides of the same cultural illusion.

Optimistic affirmation and pessimistic resignation are finally found to be two sides of a single mask. Behind this mask we discover the face of Nietzsche's music-making seducer, who produces the shame resembling that of Alcibiades in Plato's *Symposium*, when he compares himself to Socrates. As I have shown, the music-making Socrates can be regarded as an elaboration of the earlier image of the dying Socrates, who Nietzsche links in turn to the Socrates of the *Symposium*: "he went to death with the same calm as he had shown when, according to Plato's account, he left the symposium as the last drinker in the grey dawn to begin a new day" (BT 13). In this dialogue, Alcibiades, intoxicated by Socrates's spiritual virtue, is filled with shame in falling short of the Platonic ideal. This undermines his aristocratic stature. At once seduced and spurned by Socrates, he suddenly feels himself to be no better than a slave. In the ancient pederastic relationship between an older male lover (*erastes*), who erotically transmits his wisdom to a beloved male youth (*eromenos*), the wise Socrates resembles an *erastes* pursuing the

beautiful *eromenos* Alcibiades (216d–e), or so it would seem, yet when Alcibiades joins Socrates in bed, attempting to give himself over as the beloved youth, Socrates shamefully spurns him (219b–e). Socrates's seduction exposes Alcibiades's vanity and moral inconsistencies by ironically reversing the roles of *erastes* and *eromenos*. The *Symposium* plays up the comedy of Socrates's unrecognized identity, which tragically exposes the distorted projections of Alcibiades's desire.

Nietzsche's music-making Socrates similarly exposes the hypocrisies of his bourgeois cultural milieu through a process of shifting identities and ironical reversals.[253] In this context, it is Wagner who at first resembles an *erastes* pursuing the young Nietzsche as his devout young follower, an *eromenos* who reveres Wagner's noble stature. As Silk and Stern note, "the relationship smacks of a Platonic love-affair — in the fullest sense of that word, with the young man learning wisdom at the feet of the older."[254] Nietzsche's Forward to *The Birth* undoubtedly displays this dynamic, and in his *Attempt at Self-Criticism* he names Wagner as "the great artist to whom it addressed itself, in a kind of dialogue" ("Attempt," 2) — on my reading, a Platonic dialogue modelled after *Symposium*.[255] From this perspective, the music-making Socrates represents a glorified portrait of Wagner, given the book's dedication to him, and

[253] Nietzsche's considerable time spent at Wagner's Tribschen villa familiarizes him with the grandiose lifestyle of the bourgeois cultural elite, vividly described in Prideaux, *I am Dynamite*, 52–56. In an 1872 letter to Gersdorff, Nietzsche claims to have "petrified that Tribschen world for myself in my book" (BVN-1872 214). See Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, 111, 219.
[254] Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, 29.
[255] Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, do not make a Platonic connection between Nietzsche and Wagner's "Platonic love-affair" and the type of dialogue that Nietzsche engages him in, instead characterizing Wagner as a kind of modern-day Aeschylus (p. 195), while also identifying him with Dionysus (pp. 202, 214), an association that parallels the Dionysian imagery of *Symposium*.

resembles Socrates as Alcibiades sees him at first, playing the role of an *erastes*. This dynamic would suit Young's characterization of *The Birth* as, at least in part, a piece of Wagnerian propaganda.[256] However, Young's characterization presupposes that *The Birth* is fundamentally Schopenhauerian, a presupposition without which we are left with the "perverse" conclusion that "Nietzsche wrote *The Birth* as *pure* Wagnerian propaganda, and, at bottom, didn't believe a word he said."[257]

Young does not draw what should be the only possible conclusion from Nietzsche's break with Schopenhauer, that of his simultaneous break with Wagner, which displays the dissembling rhetoric of *The Birth*. A second possibility subverts the first association of Nietzsche's music-making Socrates with Wagner, namely, that the music-making Socrates is a self-portrait,[258] in which case the *erastes* depicted above becomes the *eromenos*. Now Wagner unwittingly resembles Alcibiades as the victim of Socrates's ironical role-reversal. What could Nietzsche, playing the role of an ironical Socrates and disguised as Wagner's unabashed flatterer, in fact be exposing about Wagner? Ruehl's discussion of the "Greek State" sheds light on the political significance of Nietzsche's early discord with Wagner. He shows how the political undertones of *The Birth* attack the revolutionary, emancipatory idealism of Wagner's Left Hegelian, Anarcho-Socialist

[256] Young, *Philosophy of Art*, 25.
[257] Young, *Philosophy of Religion*, 36 n. 3.
[258] Many commentators interpret the music-making Socrates as a self-portrait, building on Kaufmann, "Admiration for Socrates," 476. E.g., Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, p. 193, read him as "the archetype of what Nietzsche himself aspires to be;" Martha K. Woodruff, "The Music-Making Socrates: Plato and Nietzsche Revisited, Philosophy and Tragedy Rejoined," *International Studies in Philosophy* 34, no. 3 (2002): 182, reads him as Nietzsche's "alter-ego;" Kofman, *Socrates*, ch. 4, reads Nietzsche's Socrates as his "double."

politics.[259] I agree that Nietzsche directs his aristocratic rhetoric against Wagner's socialist politics, though I interpret its aim differently than Ruehl, who takes it at face value as a sympathetic nod to Burckhardt's aristocratic realism. While Wagner premises his art upon the emancipatory ideals of Anarcho-Socialism, it in fact flourishes on the basis of capitalist exploitation, as became excruciatingly obvious to Nietzsche with the opening of the festival theater at Bayreuth. Wagner's ideals are symptomatic of the bourgeois hypocrisy that Nietzsche tacitly exposes. The intoxicating rhetoric of Nietzsche's Dionysianism, which mimics Wagner's celebratory call for cultural renewal, conceals the true object of Dionysian affirmation — not the primordial unity of nature, not the emancipatory fraternity of universal harmony, but the systemic cruelty of the German nation-state and the complicity of the academic and cultural elite. The Dionysian, as an escapist fantasy, is a form of moral self-deception that Nietzsche exposes by means of a rhetorical seduction, putting the dupes of Dionysus to shame.

II. SATYRS, SIRENS, AND THE SPHINX

In the last section, we saw that the Dionysian intoxication characteristic of aesthetic affirmation is a futile *pharmakon* that would heal humanity's self-inflicted suffering but only masks its inexorable bondage, the inextricable dependence of cultural production on slavery and mass deception. Nietzsche's music-making Socrates exposes the bourgeois hypocrisy embodied by the emancipatory ideals of social-political progress, whose seductive radicalism flourishes on the back of capitalist exploitation. In this section, I continue to examine how Nietzsche's development of the images of the dying

[259] See Ruehl, "*Politeia* 1871." Geuss touches on this tension in his introduction to BT, pp. xv–xvi.

and music-making Socrates allude to an elusive dialogue with Plato, above all with the *Phaedo* and *Symposium*. The latter text was Nietzsche's favorite as a student at Pforta, and one that Porter suggests provides a "virtual leitmotif" of *The Birth*.[260] The key images that resonate with Nietzsche's music-making Socrates are those of satyrs and sirens, and I begin by discussing their significance in the *Symposium*.

Alcibiades likens Socrates's dialectical powers to the flute songs of a satyr, which "make it seem that my life is not worth living! . . . So I refuse to listen to him, I stop my ears and tear myself away from him, for, like the Sirens, he could make me stay by his side till I die" (216a–b). Socrates not only possesses the musical virtuosity of the satyr, but also resembles one in his ugliness. The two satyrs referred to in the dialogue are Silenus and Marsyas, and there is a point to make about each of them. That Socrates induces in Alcibiades the pessimistic insight that his life is not worth living alludes specifically to the wisdom of Silenus.[261] This pessimism is preceded by a state of Dionysian passion rivalling that of the "frenzied Corybantes" (215a), worshippers of the nature goddess Cybele. As Pierre Hadot writes, "we are thus brought back to the figure of that purely natural being, Silenus, with his primitive strength, more primal than culture and civilization."[262] Plato also likens the seductive, siren-song quality of Socrates's dialectic to the melodious virtuosity of Marsyas, who was flayed alive for having challenged Apollo to a musical duel. Socrates resembles Marsyas in his impudence

[260] Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 111. See also David N. McNeill, "On the Relationship of Alcibiades' Speech to Nietzsche's 'Problem of Socrates,'" in *Nietzsche and Antiquity: His Reaction and Response to the Classical Tradition*, ed. Paul Bishop (Boydell & Brewer: 2013), 260–275.
[261] See Catoni and Giuliani, "Socrates Represented," 707–09.
[262] Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of Life*, 161.

(215b), the same impudence, associated with *hýbris*, that gets Socrates into trouble with the law.[263] Resembling a tragic hero who transgresses the boundary between mortals and gods, Socrates pays for this hubris with his life. Nietzsche characterizes Socrates as a "deity" (BT 12) and "demi-god" (BT 13), alluding to the "godlike" quality of Socrates's wisdom, as Alcibiades describes it (217a), and which Plato links to Marsyas, who suffers for his transgression against Apollo.[264] This connection illuminates Socrates's conscience-stricken obedience to Apollo in the *Phaedo* (61a–b), being commanded, Nietzsche suggests, by his *daimon* (*Euthyphro*, 3b, *Apology*, 31d, 40a) — the "divine voice" that "always *warns* him to *desist*" (BT 13) — to practice the *mousikê* of poetry. "Whatever urged these exercises on him was something similar to his warning voice; it was his Apolline insight that, like some barbarian king, he did not understand the noble image of some god and, in his ignorance, was in danger of committing a sin against a deity" (BT 14). Socrates's philosophical *mousikê* in effect rivals, rather than honors, Apollo, to whom he concedes victory and pays tribute before his death.

Plato's imagery throughout the *Symposium* links Socrates with Dionysus, the god of wine and the rival of Apollo, whose frenzied votaries include the satyrs and maenads. Dionysus is also the god of theatre and masks, a significance Hadot underscores in connection with the dialogue, which employs an array of Dionysian imagery in its praise of Socrates, the great eroticist. Like Socrates, Eros is both atopic and daimonic — caught

[263] Catoni and Giuliani, "Socrates Represented," 708–09, note that this comparison alludes to the charges laid against Socrates. Socrates, like Marsyas, is punished for his transgression. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 162, writes, "Alcibiades had called [Socrates] an impudent Silenus, and Agathon had bestowed upon Socrates the epithet of *hybristes*."
[264] Marsyas, like Socrates and Oedipus, bears the traits of a Dionysian *pharmakos*.

between humans and gods.[265] His genealogy reflects the dual character of Eros (203a–e), who is the son of Penia ("Poverty") and Poros ("Wealth"). As the god of both tragedy and comedy Dionysus shares this dual quality.

> In the final scene of the *Symposium*, we find Socrates alone with the tragic poet Agathon and the comic poet Aristophanes, gradually convincing them that one and the same man should be able to be both a tragic and a comic poet. Agathon, in his praise of Eros, had said that love was the greatest of poets. Thus, Socrates, who excels in the field of Eros, also excels in that of Dionysos.[266]

Insofar as Socrates's dialectic induces in Alcibiades a passionate vacillation between pessimism and optimism, he excels in the field of Dionysus, provoking Alcibiades to characterize Socratic philosophy as a "Bacchic frenzy" (*Symposium*, 218b).

Socrates's philosophical seduction thus has a distinctively Dionysian connotation, corresponding to his notorious ugliness that contrasts ironically and even comically with his inner beauty. The contrast between Socrates's outer ugliness and inner beauty (216d–217a) extends to the role-reversing character of Socrates's seduction. To repeat, in the ancient pederastic relationship between an older male lover (*erastes*), who erotically transmits his wisdom to a beloved male youth (*eromenos*), the wise Socrates resembles an *erastes* pursuing the beautiful *eromenos* Alcibiades (216d–e), or so it would seem. When Alcibiades joins Socrates in bed, attempting to give himself over as the beloved youth, he is shamefully spurned (219b–e). Socrates ironically inverts the conventional relationship between lover and beloved: it is he who seduces Alcibiades with his inner beauty, rather than Alcibiades, who had taken himself to be the seducer, and provoking Alcibiades to

[265] See Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of Life*, 160–62.
[266] Ibid., 169.

say that for Socrates, "life is one big game — a game of irony" (216e). While Socrates bears the outer appearance of an ugly satyr-like *erastes*, this mask conceals the divine beauty of a seductive *eromenos* (222a).[267] Alcibiades, peering behind the deceptive mask of Socrates's outward appearance, is filled with shame (216b–c, 219d), which reduces Alcibiades's noble status to that of a slave (215e, 219e), further illuminating Socrates's ironical reversal of opposites. I take it that Alcibiades likens his life to that of a destitute slave insofar as this resembles one that is not worth living (216a-b). He all at once feels that his life lacks any purpose, as if enslaved by the nauseating wisdom of Silenus.

In *The Birth*, Nietzsche links Dionysus with both the pessimism of Silenus, communicating the miserable impoverishment of individuated existence, and the ecstatic enjoyment existing beyond the bounds of individuation, communicating the continuity of life's overabundance. In this way, Dionysus appropriately manifests aspects of both tragedy and comedy, a duality resembling that of Eros in the *Symposium*. Nietzsche writes that "Dionysos himself was given this divided character" as a god who vacillates between "the sublime and the comical" (DW 3). In Plato's dialogue, the comic poet Aristophanes communicates a pessimistic understanding of Eros, rooting the human desire for erotic unity in the primal wound of individuated existence, the result of a divine punishment that violently separates human beings from one another and leaves them tragically longing for their lost half to heal the psychophysical pain of a split selfhood. "Love is born into every human being; it calls back the halves of our original nature

[267] See ibid., 163; Sansone, "Socrates, Satyrs, and Satyr-Play," 77–80; Catoni and Giuliani, "Socrates Represented," 711–13.

together; it tries to make one out of two and heal the wound of human nature" (191d). This wound is nevertheless permanent. Love and loss are irrevocably tethered together. The ideal unity of humanity's mythical, primordial condition remains elusive. Agathon, the tragic poet, follows up this speech with its dialectical counterpart. He communicates an optimistic vision of love untouched by violence (196c). What for Aristophanes remains a lost ideal is for Agathon realized through the morally elevating quality of love's harmonious perfectibility. "Love fills us with togetherness and drains all our divisiveness away" (197d). Comparing these two speeches, we find the contrast between optimism and pessimism exemplified in Plato's intentional mismatch between the comic poet's pessimistic message and the tragic poet's optimistic one. This theme culminates in Socrates's conversation with Agathon and Aristophanes at the end of the dialogue. "Socrates was trying to prove to them that authors should be able to write both comedy and tragedy: the skillful tragic dramatist should also be a comic poet" (223d). The contrasting messages found in Aristophanes and Agathon's speeches are supposed to be unified in the grand perspective of the great dramatist who succeeds in uniting tragedy and comedy, resolving their dialectical antagonism. Perhaps this poet is Plato himself, who, associating comedy with optimism and tragedy with pessimism, evokes the interpenetration of these moods throughout his dialogue. However, this reconciliation, following Hadot's insight, is for Plato manifested in the Dionysian expansiveness of Socrates's elusive personality.

It is ambiguous in what way, for Plato, Socrates dialectically resolves the tension between tragedy and comedy. Plato has Eryximachus reject the dissonant quality of

Heraclitus's statement that "'being at variance with itself is in agreement with itself like the attunement of a bow or a lyre.' Naturally, it is patently absurd to claim that an attunement or a harmony is in itself discordant or that its elements are still in discord with one another" (187a). However, such discordant harmony resonates throughout Alcibiades's speech. The beloved Socrates, who harbors within him a "godlike" figure of philosophical virtue, is at the same time a repugnant satyr — "impudent, contemptuous, and vile!" (215a–b). The Heraclitean theme of discordant harmony resonates most profoundly with Nietzsche's account of musical dissonance throughout *The Birth*, which in the end characterizes human nature. "If you could imagine dissonance assuming human form — and what else is man? — this dissonance would need, to be able to live, a magnificent illusion which would spread a veil of beauty over its own nature" (BT 25). In the *Symposium*, Socrates rends the veil of beauty covering Alcibiades, exposing his inner dissonance. The agonizing process of Alcibiades's exposure parallels the theme of musical intoxication in *The Birth*. Socrates's "divine" melodies at first throw Alcibiades into a state of drunken rapture, only to leave him hungover with feelings of nausea and shame (215c–e). The mood of optimism connects with the former feeling of being united with the beloved. In proximity with Socrates's "divine" virtue, Alcibiades feels himself elevated to the higher, harmonious unity of spiritual beauty. But this higher elevation turns out to be illusory insofar as Alcibiades is tragically incapable of possessing Socrates, who leaves him feeling empty, worthless, and base. These latter feelings connect with the mood of pessimism. Alcibiades's tragicomic vacillation in the dialogue reflects the drunken vacillation between optimism and pessimism in *The Birth*:

> The ecstasy of the Dionysian state, in which the usual barriers and limits of existence are destroyed, contains, for as long as it lasts, a *lethargic* element in which all personal experiences from the past are submerged. This gulf of oblivion separates the worlds of everyday life in Dionysiac experience. But as soon as the daily reality re-enters consciousness, it is experienced as such with a sense of revulsion; the fruit of those states is an ascetic, will-negating mood. (BT 7)

Wine, the Dionysian *pharmakon*, both stimulates and depresses the central nervous system. Its initial physiological effects energetically elevate one's mood, which drowsiness generally follows. In excessive amounts, the "lethargic" quality of self-forgetfulness charges the experience as one leaves the everyday world of bodily drudgery behind, entering the realm of Dionysian ecstasy. Pessimistic revulsion fills the reveler upon awakening from the oblivion of intoxication. In the *Symposium*, Alcibiades's yearning for divine beauty, whose Dionysian consummation is impermanent, produces feelings of shame and despair. His hangover experience parallels the nausea described in *The Birth*, whose "ascetic, will-negating" quality is one of Schopenhauerian pessimism. The tragic character of erotic yearning denies its permanent satisfaction, propagating the pessimism first glimpsed in Aristophanes's speech, while its comic character spurs us onward in the pursuit of renewed happiness, propagating the optimism first glimpsed in Agathon's speech. Such opposites are inextricable from one another, a point that Plato fortifies by linking optimism with the tragic poet and pessimism with the comic poet, the two finally being united in Socrates's characterization of the ideal poet who is capable of producing both tragic and comic dramas. Without the hopeful expectation of erotic consummation, no bilious pessimism would exist, its bitterness laced with disappointment. Conversely, without the inherent elusiveness of total consummation, no

hopeful expectation could flourish, pointing beyond the petty boundaries of narcissistic wellbeing.

The eternal object of the soul's desire may only be tasted and not possessed; is its object but an emptiness that our desire saturates with meaning? Alcibiades can only admire the "figures of virtue" (222a, 219d) Socrates harbors because he is denied their possession. The figures of virtue (*arete*) include moderation (*sophrosune*), strength of character (*andreia*), and wisdom (*sophia*/*phronesis*). Alcibiades glimpses these qualities in Socrates, and also finds them sorely lacking in himself. According to David N. McNeill, this lack is what is being emphasized and exposed. "It is in no way clear that [Alcibiades] has seen anything in Socrates other than the inverted mirror of his own ugliness. . . . In Nietzsche's terms, what Alcibiades sees in Socrates, what Socratic irony mirrors for Alcibiades, is Alcibiades' own degeneration, the contradictions in his own soul transformed into an ideal."[268] Through a process of sublimation, Plato's Socrates transfigures sexual lust into philosophical love. The philosopher's virtue overcomes the base quality of erotic desire, which undergoes a process of re-education and transformation in light of eternal, unchanging beauty (210e–212b). Such is the "inverted mirror" of ideal beauty through which Alcibiades recognizes his own wretchedness, a wretchedness that Alcibiades transfigures into the ideal of Socrates's moderation. "Alcibiades sees in Socrates not Socrates' own moderation, but a moderation which is the negation and critique of his own immoderate soul; what Alcibiades loves in Socrates is

[268] McNeill, "Nietzsche's 'Problem of Socrates,'" 268–69.

the complement of the hate he feels for what is ugly in himself."[269] The ideal of Socrates, whose ugly appearance conceals an inner beauty, inversely mirrors the contradictions of Alcibiades's own soul, reflecting an inner ugliness concealed by beautiful appearances. McNeill fails to stress how this mirror implicates both the hallucinatory quality of Socrates's inner beauty as well as the exaggerated quality of his outer ugliness, which corresponds to that of Alcibiades's own soul. McNeill argues that Alcibiades's recognition of his own immoderation produces, by means of its negation, the moderation that he glimpses in Socrates. But the causal logic of this productive process — that the negation of immoderation produces the ideal of moderation — must also be invertible, such that Alcibiades's shame is but the exaggerated effect produced by the elusive ideal beneath which he grovels. While Alcibiades's sense of worthlessness is transfigured into the divine worth of Socrates's inner virtue, this abjection is at the same time produced by it. The logic of causality loops back on itself. The cause of the ideal is also found to be its effect, while the ideal, as an effect, reverts to a cause.

Porter identifies the logic of "transfiguration" in *The Birth* as the paralogism of "'metonymy' (a substitution and reversal of an effect for a cause, which yields not the effect of a cause but the effect of an effect)."[270] In his early lectures on ancient rhetoric (1872–73), Nietzsche points to Plato's theory of ideal forms as a prime example of this rhetorical deception.

> It is very powerful in speech: the abstract *substantiva* are qualities inside us and around us, which are torn away from their substrata and set forth as independent essences. The *audacia* [courage] causes men to be *audaces* [courageous]; at

[269] Ibid., 269.
[270] Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 74.

> bottom, this is a personification, like that of the Roman concept-gods, such as Virtutes, Cura, etc. These concepts, which owe their origin only to our experiences, are proposed *a priori* to be the intrinsic essences of things: we attribute to the appearances as their cause that which still is only an effect. The *abstracta* evoke the illusion that they themselves are these essences which cause qualities, whereas they receive a metaphorical reality only from us, because of those characteristics. The transition from the *eidē* [originally, shape or form of that which is seen] to *ideai* [ideal forms] by Plato is very instructive; here, metonymy, the substitution of cause and effect, is complete. (RL p. 59)

For Nietzsche, the figures of virtue harbored by Socrates exemplify this type of metonymy. McNeill, for whom these figures form an "inverted mirror" of Alcibiades's immoderate soul, treats its ugly qualities as underlying causes of the *ideai*. Alcibiades's "degeneration," rather than Socrates's virtue, now resembles an independent essence. Porter goes further by suggesting that *degeneration* is already an effect of the *idea*: each is an effect produced by the other in the process of "transfiguration," as a twofold, involuted metonymy. Left beholding the dynamic play of mutually enforcing phenomenal effects, we can no longer identify any underlying cause. Although McNeill follows Porter, he fails to recognize how for him, "Socrates is rather the figure for the logic of causality, and for its self-exhaustion in the face of 'causes apparently without effects, and effects apparently without causes' [BT 14]."[271] "He is the breaking-point at which logic coils back on itself, reverses direction, or rather loses all sense of direction and narrative flow, only to be stalled in a vertiginous whirl."[272] If in Nietzsche's terms ideal beauty remains imaginary, the ideal background from which the relief of Alcibiades's ugliness

[271] Ibid., 120.
[272] Ibid., 90.

emerges, then this ugliness turns out to be no less imaginary than the ideal. The ideal is premised upon the production of the very contradiction that it promises to heal.

This double-edged, two-way inversion, the paradoxical interpenetration of base and ideal, informs Nietzsche's representation of the satyr chorus. His characterization of the sublime in *The Birth* apparently naturalizes Plato's aesthetics, stripping it of its moral idealism and returning beauty to its chthonic, sexual origins. However, Nietzsche's conception of the Dionysian is no less an inverted mirror, a universal ideal emerging from the painful contradiction of humanity's torn condition. He describes the satyr chorus "as a self-mirroring of Dionysiac man," "something sublime and divine."

> What the Greek saw in this satyr was nature . . . the original image (*Urbild*) of mankind, the expression of man's highest and strongest stirrings, an enthusiastic celebrant, ecstatic closeness to his god, a sympathetic companion in whom the sufferings of the god are repeated, a proclaimer of wisdom from the deepest heart of nature, an emblem of the sexual omnipotence of nature which the Greek habitually regards with reverent astonishment. (BT 8)

However, this image of humanity's primordial unity with nature, represented by the satyr chorus, is nothing but the transformation of nature into a metaphysical ideal which, appearing to hover beyond culture, is produced from within it. It is only by means of its theatrical representation that nature appears in sublime form. The architecture of the Greek theatre grounds this sublime illusion and seemingly evaporates into the vision its stage upholds.

> [I]n their theatres it was possible, given the terraced construction of the auditorium in concentric arcs, for everyone quite literally to *overlook* (*übersehen*) the entire cultural world around him, and to imagine, as he looked with sated gaze, that he was a member of the chorus. . . . The chorus of satyrs is first and foremost a vision of the Dionysiac mass, just as the world of the stage is in turn a vision of this chorus of satyrs; the strength of this vision is great enough to render the spectator's gaze insensitive and unresponsive to the impression of "reality" and to

> the cultured people occupying the rows of seats around him. The form of the Greek theatre is reminiscent of a lonely mountain valley; the architecture of the stage seems like a radiant cloud formation seen from on high by the Bacchae as they roam excitedly through the mountains, like the magnificent frame in which the image of Dionysos is revealed to them. (BT 8)

The staging effects of theatrical artifice are everywhere apparent in this passage, which by a feat of rhetoric accomplishes the spectral deception that it describes. As spectators ourselves, we are seduced by the imaginary projection Nietzsche sets up as the reflection of an ideal. If the chorus represents the self-mirroring of "Dionysiac man," then the magnificent frame of this inverted mirror cannot be ignored. This frame is the Apollonian realm of individuation — "the cultured people occupying the rows of seats" — becoming "a radiant cloud formation" reflecting the floating image of "Dionysiac man." This fantastical appearance is a cultural ideal that absorbs the artificial construction into an image of nature purified of culture.

This image parallels Nietzsche's analysis of Raphael's *Transfiguration*, whose lower half depicting primal suffering contrasts with the Apollonian apotheosis depicted in the upper half.[273] The painting presents the interdependence of the Dionysian/Apollonian realms and their mutual reinforcement *as mere semblances*, propagating one another in an incestuous circularity.

> In his *Transfiguration* the lower half of the picture . . . shows us a reflection of the eternal, primal pain, the only ground of the world; here "semblance" is a reflection of the eternal contradiction, the father of all things. From this semblance there now rises, like some ambrosian perfume, a vision-like new world of semblance . . . — a luminous hovering in purest bliss and wide-eyed contemplation, free of all pain. Here, in the highest symbolism of art, we see before us that Apolline world of beauty and the ground on which it rests, that terrible wisdom of Silenus, and we grasp, intuitively, the reciprocal necessity of these two things. (BT 4)

[273] See ibid., 74–77.

In "The Greek State," Nietzsche premises the Apollonian dream-world of culture, which he likens the Sphinx's upper torso, upon the Dionysian substratum of slavery and the terrible wisdom of Silenus about the nullity of life. These images function in the same way as the "inverted mirror" in which Alcibiades glimpses the Platonic ideal of beauty, against which his desire rebounds as he collapses in shame beneath it. Furthermore, Raphael's depiction of Apollonian transfiguration referred to in §4 mirrors the image of "Dionysiac man" in §8, who hovers above the Greek theatre as the ambrosial fruit of culture. Porter thus asks: "To what extent . . . is the Dionysian the invention *of the Apollonian*?"[274] In §8 Nietzsche reverses the structural hierarchy from §4, whereby the Apollonian realm of culture now *produces* the Dionysian realm of nature. Beneath the Dionysian ideal we discover none other than "cultured man shriveled to a mendacious caricature" who, in order to dream of his primal, sexual omnipotence, "must cast off the deceitful finery of so-called reality" (BT 8). Like the Sphinx's riddle, as the universal form of humanity that Oedipus rejoices in mastering but whose oracular power remains an unperceived destiny, the immortal ideal of "Dionysiac man" shatters at the limits of mortal self-recognition, producing shame. Finally, we must grasp the grotesque, caricatural quality of Alcibiades's Dionysian shame as yet another appearance, the apparition of a self-inverting contradiction without whose negative dissonance the transfiguring ideal of harmonious perfection could not get off the ground, so to speak. Combining the comedic features of Plato's Alcibiades with the tragic features of

[274] Ibid., 49.

Sophocles's Oedipus, Nietzsche's presentation of tragic pathos conceals a satirical vacillation between the denigration of a slave, which is how Alcibiades appears, and the apotheosis of an artist-philosopher. A mere play of appearances fuels this vacillation, for neither "semblance" exists without the other. Insofar as their polarity is inescapable, Nietzsche finds the "reciprocal necessity" of these opposite states to embody a psychological, social-political, and ultimately anthropological dissonance, through which "cultured man" ironically recognizes himself, as in a mirror darkly.

This section has analyzed the imagery of satyrs, sirens, and the Sphinx in *The Birth* through the lens of Plato's *Symposium*, which in many ways serves as a literary and philosophical model for *The Birth*. It turns out that Nietzsche's "Dionysiac man" is no less parodic than he is tragic, a fantasy figure embodying the irresolvable contradictions within "cultured man" himself. In the next section, I analyze the connection between Socrates as the moral-rational optimist from *The Birth*, and Socrates as the Schopenhauerian pessimist who despairs of life in *Gay Science* and *Twilight*. I discuss the significance of these opposites as they are united in the image of the music-making Socrates, and who embodies Dionysus as the modern ideal of Nietzsche's tragic philosophy, the heroic prototype of what he calls tragic culture. I argue that this Dionysian unity of opposites is continuous from Nietzsche's early to last works and is consistently associated with Socrates as a philosophical seducer.

III. SOCRATES, SEDUCER

Earlier, I examined how Plato's Socratic *logos* in the *Phaedo* concerning the immortality of the soul ends with recourse to the *mythos* of an afterlife and the

significance this has for Nietzsche. Martha K. Woodruff concludes that "both Plato and Nietzsche have a tragic sensibility . . . both are acutely aware of the limitations of the human mind and the need for myth and tragic art at the limits of reason."[275] While I have shown to what degree it would be presumptuous to simply characterize the music-making Socrates as Nietzsche's "alter ego," as Woodruff does, I also disagree with her overall conclusion, which seems to conflate Nietzsche's inverted Platonism with Plato's Platonism. Nietzsche's music-making Socrates exposes the Platonic Idea as a myth, in contrast to Plato's Socrates, who embodies the Idea as the metaphysical truth about reality. Woodruff to some degree projects the mythopoetic dimensions of Nietzsche's music-making Socrates onto Plato's Socrates, serving as the model of Plato's metaphysical ideal, whereas I argue that Nietzsche intentionally subverts this Platonic model. We shall see certain important differences between the two thinkers, apparent in their portraits of the music-making Socrates, enough to rebut her claim that "Nietzsche resembles Plato more than he realizes himself."[276] First, however, I turn to Porter's characterization of Nietzsche's Socrates, who indeed bears an uncanny resemblance to Plato's.

In the last chapter, I discussed how the music-making Socrates embodies the dialectical movement from scientific optimism to its end in pessimistic resignation, which the redemptive powers of art and religion transform into life's aesthetic affirmation. When the Socratic faith in knowledge confronts the limits of logic, from which no

[275] Woodruff, "The Music-Making Socrates," 182.
[276] Ibid.

rational conclusion may be drawn, that faith founders on the incomprehensibility of existence and transforms into despair at life's meaningless stupidity. The healing balm of art cures this despair (BT 14), supplying nature with an illusory, "metaphysical supplement" (BT 24) that accompanies the Dionysian affirmation of life. This informs the connection I made in the last section between Socrates and Dionysus, where logic is swept up into a rhetorical frenzy that exposes the irrationality of human psychology and confronts us with the insoluble strife of human desire, the only redemption from which is the all-too-fleeting solace of self-deception. We are most in denial about ourselves when tricked into the belief that we are free from delusion and at one with the primordial depths of nature. Porter provides a profound account of how *The Birth* revolves around this image of a tragic Socrates, as a music-making, Dionysian satyr who embodies the Platonic Idea *as fiction*.

> Who would think to compare Socrates with Dionysus or with one of his votaries, say that "fantastic and seemingly so offensive figure of the wise and rapturous satyr" who, we are told, "is at the same time 'the simple man' as opposed to the god" — that bearded, goatlike creature, that wholly imaginary and "made-up" being . . . — in short, that mythic projection if not product of a self-imagining, loaded, like Silenus, with negative wisdom (*BT*, §§8, 7). And yet this is, I believe, just what *The Birth of Tragedy* requires us to do: to read in Socrates the image of Dionysus, and vice versa. . . . It is this shadowy but still cheerful Socrates, dying, philosophizing, ever desirable and even erotic, thanks to his proximity to death and to his extinction in image and myth, who evokes the image of Dionysus in Nietzsche, following the hints of Plato: "He went to his death with the calm with which, according to Plato's description, he leaves the symposium at dawn, the last of the revelers, to begin a new day . . .," while they, the revelers, dream on about him, in their drunken stupor (§13). Socrates is the name for this intermittent appearance, at daybreak. *He is the Platonic Idea*.[277]

[277] Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 110.

Nietzsche subtly inverts Plato's metaphysics by affirming the metaphysical reality he names Idea, embodied in the tragic figure of the dying philosopher, as a seductive appearance. While Plato's Socrates transforms carnal love into the philosophical love of incorporeal beauty that entices Alcibiades, informing his pessimistic disgust with earthly life, Nietzsche transforms such disgust into a love of earthly life that is tragic insofar as this love is gilded with illusion. For Nietzsche, Plato's idealism conceals the illusory nature of the Idea whose seductive appeal Socrates embodies. Nietzsche inverts Plato's idealism by bringing to light the decadence of its moral fundament, which slanders earthly existence. His conception of Dionysian transformation is tragic in its affirmation of illusion, on the one hand, and in its destruction of the moral world order on the other. He thereby revalues the moral and metaphysical significance of Plato's Dionysianism.

I have already outlined how this revaluation prevails throughout *The Birth*. This revaluation is consistent with Nietzsche's later conception of both Socrates and Dionysus, who, as Porter observes end up in *The Birth* being identified with one another. Scholars have noted the important parallel in §295 of *Beyond* between the philosopher Dionysus, whom Nietzsche describes as a "pied piper of consciences," and Socrates, whom Nietzsche describes in §340 of *Gay Science* as the "pied piper of Athens."[278] Nietzsche contextualizes his description of Dionysus in §295 of *Beyond* with an allusion to *The Birth* as his *firstborn*, offered to the god Dionysus as a sacrifice that nobody understood.

[278] This connection is discussed in n. 43 of Kaufmann's translation of *Beyond* and in his "Admiration for Socrates," 490; *Nietzsche*, 410–11. It is further commented on by Ernst Bertram, *Nietzsche: Attempt at a Mythology*, trans. Robert E. Norton (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois, 2009), 284; Strauss, "Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*," p. 189; Lampert, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche*, 28–30; Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 170; Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 119; "Problem of Socrates," 421.

As we have seen, *The Birth* symbolizes the apex of Dionysian philosophy with the music-making Socrates, who reorients the pessimistic consequences of scientific optimism in relation to the healing power of religious myth. This same transformation returns unchanged in §56 of *Beyond*, which builds on the significance of Nietzsche's music-making Socrates.

> Whoever, like me, has long exerted himself with some enigmatic desire to think pessimism through to the bottom and to free it from the half-Christian, half-German narrowness and naïveté with which it last presented itself to this century, namely in the form of Schopenhauer's philosophy; whoever has actually looked with an Asian and supra-Asian eye into and down at the most world-negating of all possible modes of thought — beyond good and evil, and no longer like Buddha and Schopenhauer under the spell and delusion of morality — by doing so he has possibly opened his eyes to the inverse ideal, without really intending to do so: the ideal of the most exuberant, lively, and world-affirming human being who has learned to reconcile and come to terms with not only what was and is, but also wants to have it again *as what was and is*, for all eternity, insatiably shouting *da capo* not only to himself but to the whole play and performance, and not only to a performance, but at bottom to the one who needs this performance — and makes it necessary: because he needs himself again and again — and makes himself necessary — — What? And this wouldn't this be — *circulus vitiosus deus?*

In §15 of *The Birth*, the music-making Socrates explicitly embodies the circularity of the mythical ouroboros, symbolizing the moment of Schopenhauerian resignation when the moral-rational optimism of Socratic science bites its own tail and transforms into art. This image indicates the preliminary significance of the phrase *circulus vitiosus deus* (whose further significance I will elaborate in the next section) and already points beyond the morality of good and evil, including the Platonic metaphysics that accompanies it. The "world-affirming human being" shouting *da capo* in §56 of *Beyond* is identical to the music-making Socrates of *The Birth*, who is none other than the philosopher Dionysus: a god whose incarnation takes the form of a tragic hero. The tragic hero, as a poetic ideal,

embraces the eternal necessity of his character and fate; his optimism plunged into the depths of pessimism from which he emerges transformed. The music-making Socrates embodies this Dionysian inversion and unification of opposites.

From the beginning, Nietzsche's portrait of Socrates the optimist philosophically links hands with the music-making Socrates.

> Thus, if we have to assume that an anti-Dionysiac tendency was already at work even before Socrates [e.g. in Oedipus and Prometheus, as we shall see in the final chapter] and was only expressed by him with unheard-of grandeur, we must also ask ourselves what a phenomenon like Socrates points to, for the Platonic dialogues do not permit us to view him solely as a disintegrative, negative force. Although it is certain that the first effect which the Socratic drive aimed to achieve was the disintegration of the Dionysiac tragedy, a profound experience in Socrates' own life compels us to ask whether the relationship between Socrates and art is *necessarily* and exclusively antithetical, and whether the birth of an "artistic Socrates" is something inherently contradictory. . . . Just occasionally that despotic logician felt there was something missing in his relation to art, an emptiness, a half-reproach, a duty which he had perhaps failed to perform. As he tells his friends in prison, the same figure kept appearing to him in dream time after time, and it always said the same thing: 'Socrates, make music!' . . . Finally, in prison, he agrees to play the music for which he has so little respect, so as to unburden his conscience completely. (BT 14)

The Birth characterizes music as a "noble deception" that "bestows on myth a moving and convincing metaphysical significance to which word and image alone, without that unique source of help, could never attain" (BT 21). These passages refer us to Plato's music-practicing Socrates in the *Phaedo* (60e), while Nietzsche's characterization of music as a "noble deception" alludes to Plato's noble lie in the *Republic*. What is the difference between the deception of Plato's metaphysics and the metaphysics of tragic myth? "*The tragic myth* can only be understood as the transformation of Dionysiac wisdom into images by means of Apolline artistry; it leads the world of appearances to its limits where it negates itself and seeks to flee back into the one, true reality; at which

point it seems to sing . . . its metaphysical swan-song" (BT 22). We saw in the last chapter how the language harkens back to Nietzsche's image of the music-making Socrates and alludes to the metaphysical swan song sung by Socrates in the *Phaedo*.[279] Plato's music-making Socrates seductively draws us toward the good and the beautiful, sharing in the metaphysical unity of divine truth. Nietzsche's music-making Socrates emerges from the moral collapse of this Platonic unity, seducing us instead with the affirmation of life as an amoral, aesthetic phenomenon. Nietzsche's insight implicates the good as an illusion while also affirming the necessity of illusion. Paralleling Plato, the redemptive power of Apollonian appearance transforms the Dionysian substratum of existence that negates the value of the conventional social order invested by the ego, both together forming a Dionysian/Apollonian synthesis of mythopoetic *mousikê*. In both cases, this seduction alleviates the dreadful apprehension of death, receding almost imperceptibly behind the curtain of the philosopher's noble deception.

In Chapter 1, I showed how Socrates's dialectical *mousikê* is a *pharmakon* for suffering. Earlier in this chapter, I linked this insight with Plato's noble lie. I now draw the final conclusions concerning this connection. Bruce Ellis Benson expounds on the significance of music for Nietzsche, aligning with the ancient Greek conception of *mousikê* that denotes "tone, rhythm, dance, and words," as well as the endeavor of poets,

[279] "You seem to think me inferior to the swans in prophecy. They sing before too, but when they realize that they must die they sing most and most beautifully, as they rejoice that they are about to depart to join the god whose servants they are. . . . I believe that as they belong to Apollo, they are prophetic, have knowledge of the future and sing of the blessings of the underworld, sing and rejoice on that day beyond what they did before. As I believe myself to be a fellow servant with the swans and dedicated to the same god, and have received from my master a gift of prophecy not inferior to theirs, I am no more despondent than they on leaving life" (*Phaedo*, 84e-85b).

philosophers, and artists to cultivate the skills proper to the *art of living*. Benson argues that Nietzsche attempts to battle "de-cadence," emphasizing decadence as a falling out of rhythm with life, by means of a health-inducing, life-affirming *mousikê,* in contrast to the decadence of Socrates's dialectical *mousikê*.[280] I have been probing Nietzsche's subversion of this kind of binarism, which scholars have accepted at face value. Benson's reading simply assumes the scholarly consensus on this point.

We find Socrates's philosophical form of *mousikê* in dialectics, the rigorous exercise of moral perfectibility. It is the belief in moral perfectibility that Plato's science justifies, and which Nietzsche suggests is a flagrant deception. Concerning the psychological problem of the "improvers" of humankind, Nietzsche writes: "A small and basically modest fact, that of the so-called *pia fraus*, provided me with the first access to this problem: *pia fraus*, the legacy of all philosophers and priests who 'improved' humanity. Neither Manu nor Plato nor Confucius nor the Jewish Christian teachers ever doubted their *right* to lie" (TI "Improvers," 5).[281] Accordingly, Bertram reads Plato's metaphysics, in Nietzsche's terms, as a moral seduction and a seduction to morality. "Socrates employed his newly won dialectics as a seduction toward knowledge of the 'good' and the knowledge of the 'good' in turn as a seduction."[282] Lampert follows Bertram. "Let me also add a second, hard-to-accept point about Nietzsche's Plato as creator of values: he is one of those legislators of morality who afforded himself the right

[280] Benson, *Pious Nietzsche*, ch. 9.
[281] Cf. Schopenhauer's discussion of the noble lie in WWP 1:413–15, which could easily have made a distinct impression on the young Nietzsche.
[282] Bertram, *Nietzsche*, 286.

to lie, to lie morally for what he took to be the good of his people."[283] Derrida's analysis of the *Phaedo* helps to contextualize this insight. As he puts it, "*eidos*, truth, law, *epistêmê*, dialectics, philosophy — all these are other names for that *pharmakon* that must be opposed to the *pharmakon* of the Sophists and to the bewitching fear of death."[284] The *pharmakon* of Nietzsche's music-making Socrates resembles the sophistical counterpart of Plato's, since he emerges from the irrational depths of human existence and exposes the groundlessness of moral-rational ends, while also offering a *pharmakon* to the "bewitching fear of death." In doing so, he exposes Plato's benevolent promise as a sophistical deception, and his ideal philosopher as a dissimulating sophist engaged in the distribution of *pharmaka*. Hence, in §13 of *The Birth*, Nietzsche gently mocks those surprised at how "Socrates should figure in Aristophanes' plays as the first and leading *Sophist*, as the mirror and quintessence of everything the Sophists were trying to do." As if in direct dialogue with this passage, Nietzsche continues this thought in §28 of *Beyond*: "nothing I know has given me a better vision of *Plato's* secrecy and Sphinx nature than that happily preserved *petit fait*: under the pillow of his deathbed they did not find a 'Bible' or anything Egyptian, Pythagorean, or Platonic — but instead, Aristophanes." In his late notebooks, Nietzsche makes the implied point explicit. "Plato: a great Cagliastro . . . Is Plato's integrity beyond question? — But we know at least that he wanted to have *taught* as absolute truth what he himself did not regard as even conditionally true: namely, the separate existence and separate immortality of 'souls'" (WP 428).[285] This

[283] Lampert, "Nietzsche and Plato," 206. See also Lampert, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche*, 20–23, 30.
[284] Derrida, *Dissemination*, 124.
[285] Cf. WP 141.

statement comes after a discussion of Protagorean Sophism, which "represented a synthesis of Heraclitus and Democritus" — a view already expressed by Lange.[286] The seduction of Nietzsche's music-making Socrates obversely displays the seduction of Plato's Socrates, implicating dialectics as part and parcel of the optimistic myth of the soul's immortality, which Plato promulgates in the form of a noble lie. When the moral-rational ends of Platonic science prove illusory, and when the noble lie that sanctions the hierarchical rank-ordering of society in the service of this illusion becomes transparent, the nobility of Plato's Socrates debases itself. Despair ensues as the rational basis of morality collapses into sophistical tyranny.

Nietzsche's later portraits of Socrates reveal the latter's secret, pessimistic realization that *life is a disease*, whose sole cure is death (GS 340). This exemplifies how Socrates's (or Plato's) recourse to myth, apparently breaking with the *logos* of dialectics, undermines Socratic faith in reason and leads to despair, since, as we saw in *The Birth*, critical-theoretical inquiry is driven by the same moral-metaphysical need that produces myth beyond the boundaries of logic. While Nietzsche depicts Socrates as a moral-rational optimist in *The Birth*, his later portraits reverse this depiction and unveil the pessimistic counterpart of optimism, the dark side of Plato's dialectical *pharmakon*. Socrates owes a rooster to Asclepius, the god of medicine, as he is about to be cured of the irrational illness that is life, whose only redemption he finds in total extinction. However, given the Dionysian imagery in both the *Symposium* and *Phaedo*, characterizing Socrates as a siren-song *seducer* and musical *charmer*, Nietzsche's

[286] Lange, *History of Materialism*, 1:39 n. 31.

reformulation of Plato's deathbed drama — which in §13 of *The Birth* combines the imagery of both dialogues — may be seen to mask a more profound subtlety. There is a deeper level at which Nietzsche inverts Platonism, beyond merely transforming Socratic optimism into pessimism, and thereby revealing their complicity.

Nietzsche suggests the deeper ambiguity of his pessimistic Socrates by his depiction of Plato's idealism in §372 of *Gay Science*:

> *Why we are no idealists*. — Formerly philosophers feared the senses: is it possible that we have unlearned this fear all too much? Today we are all sensualists, we philosophers of the present and future, *not* in theory but in *praxis*, in practice. The former, however, saw the senses as trying to lure them away from *their* world, from the cold kingdom of "ideas", to a dangerous Southern isle where they feared their philosophers' virtues would melt away like snow in the sun. "Wax in the ear" was virtually a condition of philosophizing; a true philosopher didn't listen to life insofar as life is music; he *denied* the music of life — it is an old philosopher's superstition that all music is siren-music. Today we are inclined to make the opposite judgement (which could itself be just as mistaken), namely, that *ideas* are worse seductresses than the senses, for all their cold, anemic appearance and not even despite that appearance — they always lived off the "blood" of the philosopher; they always drained his senses and even, if you believe it, his "heart." . . . In sum: all philosophical idealism until now was something like an illness, except where, as in Plato's case, it was the caution of an overabundant and dangerous health; the fear of *overpowerful* senses; the shrewdness of a shrewd Socratic. — Maybe we moderns are not healthy enough *to need* Plato's idealism? And we don't fear the senses because —[287]

This passage demonstrates Nietzsche's perplexing relationship to Plato, whose idealism Nietzsche describes as serving to temper his overpowerful senses. Being himself presumably susceptible to the Dionysian intoxication of Attic tragedy, Plato fights against

[287] For further discussion of this passage, see Lampert, "Nietzsche and Plato," 217–18. Cf. GS 57, which concerns a similar phenomenon. "You sober people who feel armed against passion and phantastical conceptions and would like to make your emptiness a matter of pride and an ornament — you call yourself realists and insinuate that the world really is the way it appears before you . . . perhaps our good will to transcend drunkenness is just as respectable as your belief that you are altogether *incapable* of drunkenness."

its power by submitting to Socrates's excessive rationality. Plato witnesses the degeneration of life-affirming instinct, exemplified by Cebes and his companions' dubious trepidation, seeing the excessive rationality of Socrates as a means of overpowering their instinctual fear of death. For Nietzsche, Plato ingeniously *sensualizes* Socrates's dominating rationality because its abstract intellectual power fails on its own to entice the senses. In this way, Plato's idealism is more life-affirming than "all philosophical idealism until now."

The bewitching quality of Plato's Socrates seduces us toward regarding the eternal Ideas as a means of quelling the fear of death. In this case, then, Socrates's dialectical idealism is intended to overpower instinctual fear, thereby affirming life, albeit one gilded with an otherworldly dimension. For Nietzsche, Attic tragedy also seduces us to life — that of nature's eternal recurrence[288] — by means of arousing the passions and thus through an overpowering of the senses. Plato's idealism supplements the *logos* of philosophy with the *mythos* of religious belief. He believes this conjunction and reconciliation of contraries is rationally justified since the *logos* elucidates the truly metaphysical basis of what in religious myth remains persuasive for the philosophically unenlightened. For Plato, Socrates's embodiment of the eternal Ideas, as we saw in the *Symposium*, is explicitly Dionysian. Dionysus symbolizes the intellectualization of religious myth, or rather its truly metaphysical fundament, taking the form of Socrates as a human model. Plato's Dionysianism conjoins *logos* and *mythos*, pointing to the

[288] For a study of this ancient myth, see Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Pantheon: New York, 1954).

metaphysical unity of life that is at once rationally comprehensible (by means of dialectic) and religiously persuasive (by means of myth). Socrates, whose human figure harbors the divine forms, manifests this Dionysian conjunction of opposites. Plato's rationalism is Dionysian insofar as it seduces us towards an affirmation of life that is not incompatible with religious belief. In *The Birth*, Attic tragedy wrecks Plato's ideal reconciliation between science and religion upon a Dionysian affirmation that transfigures pessimism (the ultimate consequence of Socratic science) through a sensual sublimation of irrational, amoral instinct.

For Nietzsche, Plato's Socratic rationalism is fundamentally seductive in its intellectual domination of those whose life-affirming instincts are degenerating. The life-affirming instincts, rooted in the sensual deception of dreams and intoxication, drive the production of art and religion. These mythopoetic instincts embrace the sensuality of becoming by affirming life. Socrates's companions wrestle with a mortal fear of death that is no longer assuaged by the astonishing powers of religious and artistic sensuality, being tempered by a transformed religious belief that is rationally fortified and morally instructive. Socrates's dialectical power is Dionysian, for Plato, as an excessive rationalism that ironically lures its disciples into an appreciation of myth, providing them with the comfort necessary to endure life.

> Rationality was supposed to be the *savior* in those days, neither Socrates nor his "patients" were free to be rational — it was *de rigeur*, it was their *last* resort. The fanaticism with which the whole of Greek thinking hurls itself on rationality betrays an emergency: they were in danger, they only had only one choice: either to perish or — to be *absurdly rational* . . . (TI "Socrates," 10)

In this way Socrates is a physician whose rationalism gives birth to the deceptive fiction of the eternal Ideas. But this mythical fiction finally undermines the value of earthly life by affirming an otherworldly Beyond. Nietzsche's portrait of the dying Socrates exposes the sophistry of Plato's noble lie, which provides life with its religious justification, but whose mythical quality infects the philosopher's metaphysical interpretation of reality, at which point the ideal realm of metaphysics collapses into the dreamworld of appearances. Plato's mythopoetic brand of moral-rational idealism conceals a pessimistic despair marked by the metaphysical need to flee empirical reality, the deceptive accomplishment of which is realized through the philosopher's disavowal of his system's mythical fundament. Since myth alone no longer sanctifies the Greek body, decadently filled with bad appetites, Plato's philosophy points to its transcendent essence as the fictional ideal of its redemption.

For Nietzsche, Plato's dying Socrates gives thanks to Asclepius for gifting him with a dialectical power whose seductive quality is therapeutic. It cures his companions of their fear of death — a suspicious dread symptomatic of their own decadence. I interpret this to be the concealed significance of Nietzsche's understanding of Socrates's final words, "'O Crito, I owe Asclepius a rooster,'" his "veiled, gruesome, pious, and blasphemous saying" (GS 340). For Nietzsche, Socrates's dialectical power, which in Plato is a *pharmakon* that produces mytho-pharmaceutical effects, ends in life-denying pessimism. Hence his portrait of Socrates the pessimist, whose pessimism is concealed,

until the point of his death, under the guise of rational optimism.[289] This interpretation further clarifies the significance of Nietzsche's music-making Socrates. While Plato's Dionysianism is expressed in the excess of Socrates's musically seductive rationality, working its healing magic on those around him by dominating their intellects, Nietzsche's music-making Socrates lures us moderns — the "cultured man" of *The Birth* — by dominating the senses.

From the beginning of his career, Nietzsche's inversion of Platonism is striking in its consistency. He replaces the otherworldly being of Platonic metaphysics with the eternalization of earthly becoming; transcendent truth with the affirmation of appearances; the good beyond being with an aesthetics beyond good and evil; the rational harmony of ideal beauty with the passionate ecstasies of Dionysian dissonance. This thoroughgoing inversion, already accomplished in *The Birth*, illuminates not what Nietzsche himself takes to be a more accurate picture of reality, nor does it, in my view, point to a more desirable one. Instead, it illuminates the therapeutic needs of modernity,

[289] Eva C. Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus: Sexual Politics in Ancient Athens* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1993), 79–82, interprets Socrates's final words as a phallic joke. "When the time has come, Socrates empties the cup of hemlock and, at the instruction of the jailer, lies down on his back when he feels his legs getting heavy. In a little while the warden inspects Socrates' feet. He pinches one foot, asking the philosopher if he can feel this. Socrates says no. Then the jailer moves his hands up Socrates' legs, observing that the victim is growing stiff and cold. Socrates touches himself, too, and comments that when the stiffness will reach the level of his heart it will be all over. At the very moment when 'the region of his lower abdomen' has become cold, or 'has come to life' (there is a pun here on the Greek word *psychoo*, which can have both meanings), Socrates uncovers himself — not his head, as is usually understood, but his groin, to show off an erection, whether from the poison or from the jailer's touch, or both. It is, however, a known fact that men tend to have erections at the moment of death. The rooster was not only a standard offering to Asclepius, but also a conventional homosexual love gift, and Socrates' commandment to render one to the god of health and healing can only be a tribute to his humorously pretended last moment of sexual excitement, as well as a thanks offering for having 'healed him of the sickness which is life': the two implications are by no means incompatible." This fascinating insight again highlights Socrates's embodiment of the perpetually erect satyr.

which turn out to be the inverse needs of the decadent Greeks. In other words, the decadent, Socratic cure that Nietzsche diagnoses in classical antiquity is finally an inverted mirror of his own Dionysian cure for modern secular malaise, produced by the sensualist acceleration of hedonism typified by German Romanticism.

> I have indeed learned to think hopelessly and unsparingly enough about this "German character," and the same applies to current *German music*, which is Romanticism through and through and the must un-Greek of all possible forms of art; furthermore, as a ruiner of nerves it is in the first rank, a doubly dangerous thing amongst people who love drink and who honour obscurity as a virtue, particularly for its dual properties as a narcotic which both intoxicates and *befogs* the mind. ("Attempt," 6)

In his "Attempt at Self-Criticism," Nietzsche sheds light on the type of hedonism that his brand of Dionysianism is supposed to combat; however, the cure and the disease are nearly indistinguishable from one another. "Is not your pessimist's book itself a piece of anti-Graecism and Romanticism, something which itself 'both intoxicates and befogs the mind,' at any rate a narcotic, a piece of music even, of *German* music?" ("Attempt," 7). Nietzsche hardly answers this question (which I address in the next chapter), leaving Dionysus as "yet another question mark" ("Attempt," 3)[290] punctuating his grand narrative of decadence in which the modern malaise of German culture resonates with the degeneration of Hellenism.

Plato, "the typical Hellenic youth" (BT 13), makes use of Socrates's excessive rationalism as a palliative measure against the degeneration of Greek instincts, a degeneration that he is relatively free from due to his overpowerful senses, but whose

[290] Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 77, stresses this neglected characterization of Dionysus, indeed a Socratic one, since Socrates is "the most questionable phenomenon in Antiquity" (BT 13).

danger he fights against under the influence of Socrates. Plato curbs his mythopoetic sensibilities by way of dialectical reason as a matter of prudence rather than personal need. The artistic pleasure he takes in the construction of his ideal is circumscribed by logic due to its moderating effects, though Plato's unconsciously artistic nature belies his religion of reason. Conversely, in our post-enlightenment age of scientific progress, the proportions of Plato's moderating logic have been taken to such excessive lengths so as to lose what for Plato was their aesthetically seductive quality. Plato succeeded all too well in converting European culture to his religion of reason, whose unaesthetic product is "theoretical man." However, Socratic faith in reason has paradoxically exacerbated the precise ailment that Plato sought to cure: the dissipating danger of sensual intoxication. While the Greeks, with their degenerate instincts, became susceptible to the religious appeal of reason, Nietzsche's seduction appeals to the modern "man of culture," whose practical, that is to say religious, trust in the senses becomes the vulnerable site of a new therapeutic inoculation, a new philosophical *pharmakon*. In §372 of *Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes that "we are all sensualists, we philosophers of the present and future, *not* in theory," referring to the methodological empiricism of modern science, but "in *praxis*," referring to the sensualism of lived experience. Nietzsche's tragic aesthetics arouse the passions in order to persuade the exhausted intellect of life's value. His music-making Socrates, as a seductive charmer, is sensually overpowering, in contrast to the overpowering rationalism of Plato's Socrates. In this way Nietzsche's Dionysianism inverts that of Plato and also perversely reproduces it. "Perhaps we moderns are merely not healthy enough *to be in need of* Plato's idealism. And we are not afraid of the senses

because —" Nietzsche's sentence is left unfinished, though I take it that the continuation would run, "because we are, ironically, too enlightened for such superstition."

Nietzsche illuminates the hubris of our Enlightenment optimism by producing a myth that we moderns, supposedly free from superstition, find perfectly charming: the innocence of becoming.[291] From the beginning to the end of his career, he identifies this mythical ideal with the philosophy of Heraclitus. "In this world only play, play as artists and children engage in it, exhibits coming-to-be and passing away, structuring and destroying, without any moral additive, in forever equal innocence" (PTAG 7). Nietzsche repeats this image in §24 of *The Birth*, with Heraclitus's "comparison of the force that shapes the world to a playing child who sets down stones here, there, and the next place, and who builds up piles of sand only to knock them down again," a force that in §19 explicitly parallels the "unsullied, pure and purifying spirit" of German music, heralding the advent of cultural rejuvenation. Nietzsche's early writings clearly associate Heraclitus with the cosmic innocence of becoming, an association that recurs in the late writings in the context of the tragic philosopher's affirmation of eternal recurrence (EH "BT," 3; "Reason," 2). This myth appeals to the Enlightenment aversion to Christianity, and sentiments of moral-intellectual emancipation, displayed by our enlightened, well-disposed attitudes towards the body, having been delivered from the moral superstitions that once imprisoned it and us in asceticism and guilt. Nietzsche displays the idealized innocence of becoming as a sensual phenomenon, manifested in the delight of Dionysian

[291] See e.g. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 22–25, 34–36, 96.

intoxication and the Apollonian glorification of appearances. However, the consequences of this ideal appear to be anything but innocent.

> Here, perhaps for the first time, a pessimism "beyond good and evil" announces itself, here that "perverse mentality" is put into words and formulations which Schopenhauer never tired of bombarding (before it had actually emerged) with his most wrathful imprecations and thunderbolts — a philosophy which dares to situate morality itself within the phenomenal world, to degrade it and to place it not merely amongst the phenomena (*Erscheinungen*) (in the sense of the idealist *terminus technicus*) but even amongst the "deceptions" (*Täuschungen*), as semblance, delusion, error, interpretation, manipulation, art. ("Attempt," 5)

The ideal sphere in which Kant, following Plato, situates morality is brought down to the level of sensuous appearance, but a parallel reversal occurs, such that the level of sensuous appearance is raised up to the sphere of ideality, providing the sanctity of its newfound "innocence." The destruction of moral idealism coincides with the emancipation of phenomena from the constraints of a transcendent moral world-order, but this emancipation remains idealistic in the sense that it romanticizes life's cruelty. Nietzsche's critique of idealism propagates a life-affirming ideal whose anti-moral, anti-Christian grandiosity is no less fantastical, amounting to a grotesque "idealization of orgy" (DW 1) that beautifies the gruesome, merciless violence of phenomenal becoming.

> For we must not forget one thing: the same cruelty that we found at the heart of every culture also lies at the heart of every powerful religion, and in the nature of *power* in general, which is always evil . . . Whatever wants to live, or rather must live, in this horrifying constellation of things is quintessentially a reflection of primeval pain and contradiction and must seem . . . an insatiable craving for existence and eternal self-contradiction in terms of time, therefore as *becoming*. Every moment devours the preceding one, every birth is the death of countless beings, procreating, living and murdering are all one. Therefore, we may compare the magnificent culture to a victor dripping with blood, who, in his triumphal procession, drags the vanquished along, chained to his carriage of slaves: the latter having been blinded by a charitable power so that, almost crushed by the wheels of the chariot, they still shout, "dignity of work!", "dignity of man!" (GSt, p. 167)

Throughout *The Birth*, Nietzsche's idealization of the orgiastic "innocence" of becoming resembles a humane mask donned by a voluptuous, predatory beast. Nietzsche's *first revaluation of all values* — written "while the thunder of the Battle of Wörth rolled across Europe" ("Attempt," 1) — exposes the hypocrisy of his culture's purported intellectual enlightenment, with its empirical freedom from superstition and its well-disposed sensualism. The "innocence of becoming" announces the height of moral self-deception, the pernicious danger of which is located at the heart of a sensuous extravagance camouflaged by the hubris of intellectual self-mastery. What is the "idealization of orgy" but a moral justification for barbarism under the guise of an emancipation from morality? Nietzsche's Dionysian myth exposes such self-deception precisely by luring us with it, heralding the advent of a cultural revolution beneath which we discover the obsequious good conscience that attends the status quo and the banality of its horror. Turning back to §372 of *Gay Science*, Nietzsche suggests that it is our lack of Socratic mistrust towards the senses that is symptomatic of modern decadence, but as a form of sensual self-deception and dissipation produced by the intellectual over-refinement of secular culture, that is, by the inordinate success of Socratism itself.

IV. *CIRCULUS VITIOSIS DEUS*

In the last section, we saw how Nietzsche's Dionysian ideal dramatically functions as an immanent critique of modern culture and the hubris of Enlightenment idealism. This next section continues to analyze the significance of Nietzsche's tragic philosophy, which he consistently promulgates as a cure for cultural decadence. The historical narrative of decadence evidently frames Nietzsche's discussion of ancient

Greek decline in *The Birth*, which inversely mirrors the malaise he diagnoses in modern Europe. My exploration of Nietzsche's inversion of Platonism in his first book complicates this narrative. In the final chapter, I show how the Socratic lust for knowledge, the "anti-Dionysiac" tendency that is a purported product of Greek decadence, is present prior to the historical Socrates, in the figures of Oedipus and Prometheus, who Nietzsche identifies as masks of Dionysus no less. My present discussion characterizes Nietzsche's aesthetic affirmation of life as the inverted image of Socratic rationalism. These two therapeutic remedies for suffering reflect one another in the opposition of a twofold Dionysianism: the excessive rationalism of Plato's music-making Socrates and the sensual intoxication of Nietzsche's music-making Socrates. How might we further distinguish these from one another?

At the end of *Twilight*, Nietzsche claims to "touch again on my former point of departure — the *Birth of Tragedy* was my first revaluation of all values: with that, I put myself back into the soil from which grow my will, my *ability* — I, the last disciple of the philosopher Dionysus — I, the teacher of eternal recurrence" (TI "Ancients," 5). This revaluation signifies the transfiguration of Schopenhauer's pessimism into a tragic philosophy that affirms the value of existence as an aesthetic problem. Nietzsche's music-making Socrates accomplishes this, who I have argued is none other than the philosopher Dionysus. In what sense does Nietzsche's Dionysus offer a cure for decadence? In *Twilight*, Nietzsche denies the very existence of a cure, contrary to the belief of moralists like Plato.

> *Said into the conservative's ear.* — What people did not know earlier, what they do know today, could know — a *regression*, a turnaround in any shape or form is

> completely impossible. . . . Nobody is at liberty to be a crab. We have no choice: *we must* move forward, which means progressing *step by step further into decadence* (— this is *my* definition of modern "progress" . . .). One can *obstruct* this development, and by means of the obstruction, stem and accumulate it, making it more vehement and *sudden*: more cannot be done. (TI "Forays," 43)[292]

He goes on to define the genius as one who violently explodes the dammed-up forces of cultural conservation, presumably those same forces stored up by the inhibitory procedures of Christian-Platonic morality. Nietzsche identifies himself — or is it Dionysus? — with such an explosion. "I am no human, I am dynamite" (EH, "Destiny," 1). Nietzsche does not speak here as a *human being* but as an explosion of Dionysian forces. Decadence cannot be cured but only accelerated to the point of cataclysmic annihilation.

This insight further illuminates the meaning of Nietzsche's neologism from §56 of *Beyond*: *circulus vitiosus deus*. The vicious circle of (the) god (presumably Dionysus), manifested in tragic myth, is a feedback loop in which the hero's attempt to ameliorate his situation only serves to intensify it. Oedipus embodies this tragic predicament, a figure of special importance from the beginning of Nietzsche's scholarly endeavors and the most significant tragic figure in *The Birth*.[293] Oedipus's riddle-solving genius, which delivers Thebes from the tyranny of the Sphinx, ensnares him all the more tightly in the web of fate, bringing a plague to the city he once saved. Oedipus strives to flee his fate, whose circular path leads him blindly to where he began in infancy and ends in his gruesome

[292] For a discussion of this passage, see Rosen, *Ancients and the Moderns*, 191–93.
[293] Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, single out Nietzsche's "noteworthy" (p. 16) and even "prophetic" (p. 33) essay on *Oedipus Rex* at Pforta in 1864. He then develops a set of lectures on the play in 1870–71 (p. 45). They also emphasize Oedipus as the sole real representative in ancient Greek tragedy of Nietzsche's archetypal hero, whose annihilation produces metaphysical solace (pp. 254–58).

mutilation, which follows from the realization of his moral self-abasement. Oedipus's fate manifests a circular conjunction of opposites, between the high and the low, the noble and the base, knowledge and ignorance, whose revelation coincides with the destruction "of every law, all natural order, indeed the moral world" (BT 9). Similarly, the gods condemn Prometheus to eternal punishment for stealing their fire, bringing pain upon himself by transgressing the moral-intellectual boundaries set by the gods in their circumscription of humanity, and Pentheus, "the most rational and thoughtful of [Dionysus's] opponents . . . becomes enchanted by him unexpectedly and later runs into his fate because of this enchantment" (BT 12). What these heroes share, in Nietzsche's narrative, is a Socratic lust for truth and a faith in rational lucidity that defies the gods and through which they create their own suffering. This hubris is at once the cause of their heroic glory — excepting Pentheus, whose hubris lacks the glorification of a hero — and of their ignominious ends.

Perhaps the most memorable description in *The Birth* of such a tragic end is the one ascribed to Euripides, who "resisted Dionysus with heroic strength throughout a long life — only to end his career with a glorification of his opponent and a suicide, like someone suffering from vertigo who finally throws himself off a tower simply in order to escape the terrible dizziness he can tolerate no longer." Nietzsche has Euripides, opposing Dionysus under the daemonic influence of Socrates, suffer the ruinous fate of Attic tragedy itself, whose "most glorious temple lies in ruins." Euripides's "suicide" marks a kind of double victory and defeat, for while Dionysus triumphs over the Socratic poet who opposes him, the Socratic domination of the Dionysian has already been irrevocably

established, for "Dionysus had already been chased from the tragic stage, and, what is more, by a daemonic power speaking out of the mouth of Euripides" (BT 12). Tragedy dies by way of "suicide" (BT 11) but also by way of murder, namely, "Socrates' tendency to murder art" (BT 17). That Socrates here chases Dionysus from the stage is ironical, since the Euripidean moment being described coincides with Dionysus's literal appearance on stage in the *Bacchae*.[294] What else is at once a murder and a suicide other than the martyrdom of Socrates? In his discussion of Socrates's martyrdom, Nietzsche alludes to the *Symposium*, a dialogue that foreshadows the death of Socrates and connects his features with those of Dionysus. Socrates steals the stage by becoming the new hero of Athens, the new mask of Dionysus, but one who is no longer *regarded as a myth*. His martyrdom for science promulgates the Platonic myth that disavows itself as such.

> Like Plato, Euripides undertook to show the world the opposite of the 'unreasoning' poet; as I have said, his aesthetic principle, 'Everything must be conscious in order to be beautiful', is a parallel to Socrates' assertion that, 'Everything must be conscious in order to be good.' Accordingly, we may regard Euripides as the poet of aesthetic Socratism. Socrates, however, was that *second spectator* who did not understand the older tragedy and therefore did not respect it; in league with Socrates, Euripides dared to be the herald of a new kind of artistic creation. If this caused the older tragedy to perish, then aesthetic Socratism is the murderous principle; but insofar as the fight was directed against the Dionysiac nature of the older art, we may identify Socrates as the opponent of Dionysus, the new Orpheus who rises up against Dionysus and who, although fated to be torn apart by the maenads of the Athenian court of justice, nevertheless forces the great and mighty god to flee. . . . Dionysus now sought refuge in the depths of the sea, namely the mystical waters of a secret cult that gradually spread across the entire world. (BT 12)

The Dionysian imagery in this passage is multilayered. Socrates's martyrdom reflects the *sparagmos* (dismemberment) of Pentheus by the maenads in the *Bacchae*, which

[294] Cf. Porter, "Nietzsche and Tragedy," 80–81.

symbolically reenacts the original *sparagmos* of Dionysus-Zagreus by the Titans, alluded to in §10.[295] Socrates murders tragedy by way of his own sacrificial death, driving Dionysus from the stage of Athens with the scientific optimism that disavows its mythical fundament. As a *pharmakos*, his sacrificial death resembles the dismemberment of Dionysus with its promise of eternal life. However, this promise no longer provokes the tragic pathos that affirms life's suffering but is premised upon a scientific appeal to dialectics, which promises to heal us from the disease of life's irrationality. Plato's Socrates transforms the religious passion that once gave rise to the gods into a defense against the passions in the name of pure reason. The new god that emerges is a scientific one, supposedly stripped of any anthropomorphism as a transcendent moral-intellectual entity.

Interestingly, the passage concludes with an allusion to "a secret cult that gradually spread across the entire world." The Dionysus of old flees Athens to Jerusalem, where Christianity emerges from the death of its sacrificial god, flowering in the glory of its passional mysticism.[296] This connection is most pronounced in the "Greek State": "a rainbow of compassionate love and peace appeared with the first radiance of Christianity, and beneath it, Christianity's most beautiful fruit, the Gospel of St John, was born" (p. 167). This informs the Dionysian "gospel of universal harmony" through which "the bond (*Bund*) between human beings [is] renewed" (BT 1). The term *Bund* also refers to the Judeo-Christian covenant between God and his people and in this passage explicitly

[295] For a discussion of Dionysus-Zagreus in *The Birth*, see Murray, *Affirmative Morality*, ch. 1.
[296] See Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 154; "Nietzsche and Tragedy," 81; Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche and Tragedy*, 121, 213. Cf. Jaggard, "Dionysus versus Dionysus," 285–86.

alludes to Biblical story of the prodigal son.[297] In addition are Nietzsche's allusions to Christianity throughout *The Birth*. "In the German Middle Ages, too, ever-growing throngs roamed from place to place, impelled by the same Dionysiac power, singing and dancing as they went; in these St John's and St Vitus' dancers we recognize the Bacchic choruses of the Greeks, with their pre-history in Asia Minor, extending to Babylon and the orgiastic Sacaea" (BT 1). Nietzsche here alludes to the Semitic origins of the Dionysian, ironically undermining the type of nationalistic tenor that the following passage displays.[298] "The German Reformation grew up out of the depths of this [Dionysian] abyss, and in its chorale there could be heard for the first time the future melody of German music. This chorale of Luther's sounded so profound, courageous, and soulful, so joyously good and tender, the first, enticing call of the Dionysiac, breaking forth from a tangled thicket at the approach of spring" (BT 23). There is no denying the Christian-Romantic overtones of Dionysian redemption in *The Birth*,[299] which I address in the next and final chapters.

Such redemption would liberate us from the bondage of "theoretical man," whose aesthetic sensibilities have been corrupted by the Socratic value of truthfulness. This value is held responsible for the death of tragedy, and which Euripides makes into an aesthetic principle.

> This is why he places the prologue before the exposition and places it in the mouth of a character who can be trusted: often a deity had to guarantee the course of the tragedy to the public, as it were, and remove all doubts about the reality of

[297] See BT 1 n. 28.
[298] See Porter, *Philology of the Future*, 280–83.
[299] Burnham and Jesinghausen, *Birth of Tragedy*, gloss over this issue by emphasizing Nietzsche's critical attitude towards Christianity, in contrast to Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, 358–59, who note the parallel.

> the myth; in a similar way Descartes could only prove the reality of the empirical world by an appeal to the truthfulness of a god and his inability to lie. Euripides makes use of the same divine truthfulness again, at the end of his drama, in order to reassure the public about the future of his heroes; this is the task of the infamous *deus ex machina*. Between the epic retrospect and the prospect beyond the end of the action lies the dramatic-lyrical present, the 'drama' proper. (BT 12)

Nietzsche's allusion to Descartes is notable. Descartes relies upon God's Christian goodness (and not simply God's truthfulness, as Nietzsche has it) in order to prove the existence of an external world, which the mind alone cannot distinguish from a dream. God's omnipotent, omniscient goodness forbids him from being a deceiver. Descartes thus requires proof of God's existence in order to ground the existence of an external world. Considering Nietzsche's critique of the corrosive effects of rationalism in this passage, he clearly doubts the cogency of Descartes's proof, which arguably involves a vicious circle. Descartes's proof of God's existence relies upon the veracity of clear and distinct ideas that is itself premised upon God's goodness, which in the same way grounds the reality of an external world. In Descartes's *Meditations*, God's goodness operates like the infamous *deus ex machina* by miraculously saving the meditator from his abysmal skepticism, one that, had it been taken further, would have recognized the logic of God's existence as nothing but a vicious circle — *circulus vitiosus deus*. Descartes's God bites his own tail, collapsing the meditator's system, not to say his reality, back into fiction.

This provides us with an insight into the uncanny, theoretical sublimation of myth that characterizes Platonism as we find it in Descartes. Descartes's God functions as a logical device that turns out to be the fallacious premise of his metaphysical dualism. His attempt to fit God's mythical existence into a syllogism has dramatic consequences. God

rebels against the logic he is supposed to uphold. The disavowed mythopoeticism of science, its ultimately instinctual ground, wreaks havoc, perhaps even provoking a tragic pathos, in the strictly sublimated form of a circular syllogism. In §56 of *Beyond*, Nietzsche's *circulus vitiosus deus* parodies the scientific method by representing the logical self-annihilation of its moral-rational idealism as an irrational, tragic spectacle. As we saw in my discussion of the *Genealogy* in Chapter 2, the self-annihilation of God — when Christianity draws its most striking inference against itself by virtue of its faith in truth as the highest value — results from religious asceticism. Scientific inquiry embodies such asceticism, driven by a metaphysical need for redemption that Nietzsche's Dionysian "ideal of the most exuberant, lively, and world-affirming human" would satiate in all of its ironical incoherence, since scientific inquiry is here driven to a faith in the promise of redemption, the fallacious optimism that is its mythical fundament. Nietzsche's Dionysian *eidolon*, who notably appears at the end of the Second Essay in the *Genealogy*, doubles as one more form of Christian redemption under the guise of its annihilation. It is an idolatrous simulacrum that exposes the fantasy of cultural renewal — indistinguishable from an ideal of ascetic self-overcoming — promised by the secular humanism of modern science.

We saw how Descartes's skeptical inquiry produces a vicious circle that undermines his effort to secure the epistemological foundations of science, grounded in the concept of God. Taken to its logical conclusion, this skepticism collapses the external world into a fiction constituted by the subject. This type of vicious circle afflicts materialism no less than idealism. Citing Schopenhauer's refutation of materialism

(WWP 1:58–59), Nietzsche discusses this in his early lecture on Democritus. The causal ground of nature posited by the atomist remains a subjective representation, since time, space, and causality are the *a priori* conditions of experience, but do not correspond to things in themselves. The materialist takes the immediately given, subjective conditions of experience to be the objective ground of nature.

> All things objective, extended, efficacious, thus all things material, which qualify as the most solid of foundations to materialism — [all this] is nonetheless only an extremely mediated given, an extremely relative existence that has passed through the machinery of the brain and has entered into the forms of time, space, and causality, by dint of which it is presented as extended in space and working in time. Well, the materialist wants to deduce the truly immediate given — representation [*Vorstellung*] — out of a given of this sort. It is an incredible circular argument (*petitio principii*): the final member suddenly reveals itself as the point of departure, on which the first element of the chain is already hung. . . . The absurdity consists in this, that he proceeds from objectivity, while in truth everything objective is conditioned by the knowing subject in multifarious ways and consequently vanishes entirely whenever the subject is denied. (PPP, pp. 129–30)

For Nietzsche, this type of vicious circle undermines the objective validity of the natural sciences and implicates our engagement in the fictional construction of reality. In *The Birth*, Nietzsche metaphorically evokes this vicious circle by the image of a mythical ouroboros that signifies the transformation of science into art and that he links with the music-making Socrates. When logic bites its own tail, the metaphysical ground of nature reveals itself as a myth.

We can thus understand the neologism *circulus vitiosus deus* in two distinct senses that I have been discussing in relation to one another. On the hand, it refers to the self-ruination of a tragic hero like Oedipus, who, as an incarnation of Dionysus, realizes his fate by attempting to evade it. Like Nietzsche's portraits of Prometheus and Pentheus, he

creates his own suffering through rational hubris. The circular self-annihilation of reason, on the other hand, refers to the *petitio principii* common to both materialism and idealism, along with its philosophically devastating consequences. In both cases, human reason produces a vicious circle by overstepping its limits, being destroyed by its own hubris. In *The Birth*, Nietzsche evokes this tragic spectacle with the image of an ouroboros, an ancient esoteric symbol that courses through the Western tradition and springs from occult origins. The occult tradition, whose ancient development flourishes in Medieval alchemy and carries over into the Renaissance, proved highly influential in modern European thought.[300]

> In Christian alchemy the Philosopher's Stone was held to correspond to Christ, the Messiah of Nature, who has the apocalyptic function of restoring both fallen and divided man and the fallen and fragmented universe to the perfection of their original unity. And from the early period of Hermetic philosophy, the cosmic design of departure from and return to the source was sometimes pictured as the Ouroboros, the circular serpent who is eating his own tail.[301]

Coleridge popularizes this image as a Romantic metaphor for the nature of poetic imagination, as well as the course of history, no less.[302] In alchemical terms, this image refers to the transmutation of humanity's base qualities (corresponding to matter) into noble qualities (corresponding to spirit). Reconciliation with the eternal, universal unity of nature that encompasses the high and the low, the beginning and the end of all things comprises humanity's redemption. Schopenhauer's conception of the will's objectifications in Platonic Ideas, a developmental process that follows the logic of

[300] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 160–61.
[301] Ibid., 160.
[302] Ibid., 271–72.

hierarchical sublation, whereby the will's lowest gradations are at once negated, preserved, and raised up to a higher sphere of existence, reflects this alchemical transmutation.

> The more complete Idea that emerges from such a victory over a number of lower Ideas, or objectifications of will, wins an entirely new character precisely by the fact that it takes up into itself a more highly potentiated analogue of all of those that have been overpowered: will is objectified in a new, more distinct way; originally through *generatio aequivoca*, subsequently through assimilation into the available seed, there arise organic fluids, plants, animals, human beings. Thus out of the conflict among lower phenomena, higher ones come forth, devouring them all and yet to a higher degree actualizing all their striving. — Here accordingly the law indeed holds sway: *serpens, nisi serpentem comederit, non fit draco* [the serpent becomes a dragon only by devouring serpents]. (WWP 1:187–88)

Nietzsche's image of the ouroboros reflects the logic of sublation in cultural terms, whereby science reaches its limits and transforms into art, its long-lost twin. The revealed unity of science and art manifests a dialectical reconciliation of opposites. In Nietzsche's Romantic vision, the ouroboros evokes the redemption of science through myth and theoretical man through aesthetics. The symbol's esoteric meaning evokes the Christian overtones of such redemption, which exhibit "a higher, magical circle of effects" (BT 9) that the suffering of a figure like Oedipus purportedly produces. Oedipus represents how moral-rational inquiry falls away from the Dionysian unity of nature by sublimating the passions into the lifeless abstractions of scientific optimism. The hero's inquiry destroys him in his attempt to penetrate the secrets of nature, whereby this "magical circle of effects" nonetheless redeems theoretical man in his return to the mythical ground of reality, to the fructifying womb of mystical-aesthetic culture from which scientific inquiry originated. In this sense, the transmutation of ascetic self-denial into passionate life-

affirmation displays a sublation of opposites and a Christian-Romantic narrative of fall and redemption. Such is the mythical trajectory of Western civilization, a model the ouroboros symbolizes and that Nietzsche anachronistically projects as the archetype for the ancient Greek hero's tragic fate.

In the context of modernity, "theoretical man" embodies the culmination of Socratic science, who, as we have seen, is an early exemplar of the ascetic ideal. In *The Birth*, Lessing's statement that "searching for truth meant more to him than truth itself" (BT 15) points to this ideal. His statement exposes the self-deceiving character of the delusion that spurs scientific optimism, compelled by a truth whose unattainability — the secret condition of its pleasurable pursuit — is disavowed in the process of its endless unveiling. "[T]heoretical man enjoys and satisfies himself with the discarded veil [of truth], and his desire finds its highest goal in a process of unveiling which he achieves by his own efforts and which is always successful. Science would not exist if it were concerned only with that *one*, naked goddess and with nothing else besides" (BT 15). It is not unhelpful to follow the figural logic of Nietzsche's gendered language. Theoretical man enjoys being tempted, like Tantalus, before a truth that he clumsily denies himself. This manifests the self-denial of the ascetic who amplifies sexual desire by depriving himself of its object. As Babette Babich puts it,

> the process of [scientific] discovery expresses a pathological desire. If the goal of scientific inquiry were nothing more than a simple uncovering or revelation of the facts, its interests would quickly be either satiated or abandoned. . . . While the satisfaction of desire is the death of desire, a deferred or partial satisfaction can be its quickening. . . . Science's pursuit of the truth is like the pathology of voyeurism: the eye of science is like a hypertrophied, unblinking organ. . . .

> Speaking of science metaphorically, the objects of scientific research may then be called 'fetishes.' [303]

The frustration of sexual gratification is the achievement of ascetic desire. The opening line of *Beyond* correlates this metaphor, which mocks the dogmatic clumsiness characteristic of the theoretician's over-refined love of truth. "Supposing that truth is a woman — well?" In more expansive psychological terms, Nietzsche sees the quest of theoretical science as an unconscious, pathological sublimation of misogynistic narcissism masquerading as a love of truth: the *eternal feminine* of ascetic/scientific idealism. (I discuss the significance of the *eternal feminine* in the next chapter). It is not the "goddess" truth who theoretical man holds in high esteem, for she is transcendently *beyond* scientific estimation, but rather his ever-deferring pursuit of her as a cultural ideal.

A contrast to this ascetic image is found in the aphorism from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* prefixed to the Third Essay of the *Genealogy*, "What Do Ascetic Ideals Mean?" The aphorism reads: "Heedless, mocking, violent — that's how wisdom wants *us*: she is a woman and only ever loves a warrior." Nietzsche states that the entire Third Essay is a commentary on this aphorism (GM "Preface," 8).[304] The correlation of his imagery in *The Birth* with the aphorism from the *Genealogy* highlights the continuity between his discussion of theoretical optimism in *The Birth* and that of ascetic ideals in the *Genealogy*, producing "a lustful delight that reaches its pinnacle when ascetic self-

[303] Babich, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Science*, 141–42.
[304] Nehamas, *Life as Literature*, 114–15, takes the aphorism to mean that since all wisdom is interpretive, it involves a kind of intellectual warfare. In the Third Essay, Nietzsche self-reflexively demonstrates this insight as he wages war on the ascetic ideal by way of its reinterpretation. I instead stress the aspect of the aphorism that Nehamas explicitly downplays: the notion that truth is a woman who wants to be dominated.

contempt and self-mockery decree: 'there *is* a realm of truth and of being, but precisely reason is *excluded* from it!'" (GM III.12). In *The Birth*, the image of "Dionysiac man" whose "sexual omnipotence" may be compared to that of the warrior-philosopher in Nietzsche's aphorism, emerges from the self-mockery of reason. Beneath the ideal of "Dionysiac man" we glimpse "cultured man shriveled to a mendacious caricature" (BT 8). Seen in this light, Nietzsche's warrior-philosopher resembles a satyr springing on an unsuspecting maenad, only to be rejected.[305] The epistemic conquest of this modern warrior is in one sense comically quixotic. His attempt to conquer truth is no less absurd, frustrated, and pathological than the ascetic pursuit of theoretical man, because he represents the latter's disavowed fantasy.

In failing to be recognized, this Dionysian fantasy is in another sense exceedingly dangerous. The caricature of cultured man masks his inner barbarism — the violence of a conquering hero ready to leap beyond the bounds of good and evil for the sake of cultural rejuvenation. This is the destructive aspect of the therapeutic seduction that Nietzsche's Dionysianism offers in contrast to Plato's, both of which attempt to alleviate the aimless meandering of "mythless man" (BT 23). We must understand the violence of Nietzsche's Dionysian seduction within the dramatic context of ancient tragedy. The seduction of Dionysus — *circulus vitiosus deus* — annihilates its victims, who, like Oedipus, are "plunged into a confusing maelstrom of atrocities" because of their "unmeasured

[305] Catoni and Giuliani, "Socrates Represented," 705–06, discuss how this scenario is depicted on an ancient vase-painting, in which "we see an excited satyr assaulting a fleeing Maenad close to an altar — in other words, in a sacred place where particularly restrained behaviour would be required." See Sansone, "Socrates, Satyrs, and Satyr-Play," 71–80, who correlates this satyr imagery to Socrates and the erotic dynamics in the *Symposium*.

wisdom" (BT 4), lured into an abyss by the promise of knowledge that radiates the illusion of apotheotic glory. The music-making Socrates emanates from this abyss as the dissolute promise of cultural renewal. This image inversely mirrors the barbaric depravity fulminating beneath the spectral clouds of a modern Olympus. What Babich calls the "hypertrophied, unblinking organ" of theoretical science — alluding to "Socrates' one great Cylopian eye" (BT 14) as the voyeuristic cyclops-eye of modernity — is violently put out. From beyond the grave, the Sphinx's oracular riddle returns to devour its royal prey in an act of Oedipal self-blinding.

In *The Birth*, Nietzsche envisions the Dionysian communities of the ancient Greeks and medieval Germans as the mythical past grounding a modern ideal of cultural renewal. Silk and Stern note the circularity of *The Birth*'s historical narrative, but only in passing and without due consideration. "The rebirth of the Dionysiac spirit in art presages the rebirth of culture as a whole, in the shape of a new tragic age. This is shown by the Hellenic prototype, thanks to which we can see that we are now recreating the Hellenic epochs, but in reverse order, passing from Alexandrian to the tragic,"[306] since "history has been obliging enough to dispose itself in symmetrical patterns (for modern culture is re-enacting the stages of Greek culture in reverse order)."[307] On my reading, this narrative reflects how the nostalgia of "mythless man" gives rise to a redemptive vision of the future that would free him from his dissatisfaction with the present. The idealization of the past amounts to a disavowal of the present, which produces the phantasmal horizon of

[306] Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, 101.
[307] Ibid., 230. This historical narrative encompasses a dialectical antagonism between the masters and slaves of European culture (BT 18–19) whose significance is little discussed by scholars.

a redemptive future. This fantastical fetishization of history as a process of self-completion encloses "modern [secular] man" within the sort of mythical horizon that he disavows. "Modern man" must tragically confront the eternal recurrence of all that falls short of his ideal, namely, the banality of the present that he endlessly seeks to escape.[308] Nietzsche promulgates the therapeutic ideal of a Dionysian immoralism that affirms the innocence of becoming, an escapist fantasy that functions covertly as the "bad conscience" of his age (BGE 212) and of the modern *Zeitgeist* more broadly. Under the banner of this ideal he prophecies the emergence of militaristic barbarism in the twentieth century. "One day my name will be associated with the memory of something monstrous — a crisis such as the earth has never seen, the most profound collision of conscience," from which there will spring "wars as there have not yet been on earth. Only after me will the earth have *grand politics*" (EH "Destiny," 1). Nietzsche's proposed cure for the decadence of "theoretical man" and his Socratic science simply prophesies Europe's nascent barbarism, stimulated by the spectral fantasy of an ideal future that Nietzsche sees haunting Europe, and which he dramatically stages on the precipices of his tragic philosophy. "Dionysiac excitement" spreads "as an epidemic" (BT 8) throughout the crowd, a crowd of *Germans*. "And if the German should look around with faint heart for a leader to take him back to his long-lost home, whose paths and highways he hardly remembers, then let him but listen to the blissfully enticing call of the Dionysiac bird which is on the wing, hovering above his head, and wants to show him the way" (BT

[308] We find this same denial of the present in *Zarathustra*. "I love the one who justifies people of the future and redeems those of the past: for he wants to perish of those in the present" (Z "Prologue," 4).

23).[309] The music-making Socrates seduces his audience to swallow the poisonous bait of Dionysian wisdom — one which magically enchants the followers of this god by inducing in them the sublime, self-abnegating pathos of apotheotic ecstasy (BT 1) — ironically disguised as a healing potion.

While Plato's Dionysianism gives rise to a moral idealism that underlies the mythical pursuit of Socratic science, Nietzsche's Dionysianism involves this morality's dismemberment and finally points beyond good and evil. To what sort of life-affirmation does this direct us? Where does Nietzsche's music-making Socrates seek to lead us, if we understand his song to be that of a wily, amoral Silenus? While Plato's Socrates sought to heal, Nietzsche's music-making Socrates seeks to destroy. "*Schopenhauer's* question immediately comes at us in a terrifying way: *Does existence have any meaning at all*? A few centuries will be needed before this question can ever be heard completely and in its full depth" (GS 357). Nietzsche's tragic philosophy rhetorically deifies the destruction involved in affirming life beyond good and evil — a Dionysian pessimism beyond that of Schopenhauer's "romantic" pessimism. The cataclysmic proportions of such an affirmation, with whose *apparent* primordial depth a music-making Socrates seeks to seduce us modern decadents, has consequences not unlike those held in store for Oedipus and Prometheus, and parallels the Dionysian "enchantment" of Pentheus. Nietzsche's tragic philosophy is a wakeup call for those with ears to hear it, who, like Odysseus, must tie themselves to the mast, for we never know under what guise Dionysus will greet us.

[309] On the implied social-political significance of these passages, see Staten, "*Birth of Tragedy* Reconstructed," 32–37. Conversely, Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, 372, purport Nietzsche's political naivety.

His masks are as prolific as the myriad duplicitous projections of human desire. Our dogmatic moral-epistemological values are infected with his poison, whirling hand in hand in a circle dance with the new idols that would replace them.

V. CONCLUSION

This chapter has analyzed the relationship between Nietzsche and Plato, concentrating on their use of images of the dying and music-making Socrates. Both philosophers engage the theatrical tropes of comedy and tragedy in distinctly Dionysian fashion. In *The Symposium*, the comical, satyr-like quality of Socrates links him with Dionysus. Socrates's comical seduction of Alcibiades turns tragic, as Alcibiades's intoxication with the sublime form of beauty produces feelings of shame and pessimistic abasement through which he recognizes his own psychical dissonance. Discussing the significance of the satyr in Plato's *Symposium* and the role that this image plays throughout *The Birth*, we saw how the dual quality of the satyr embodies the contradiction between the interpenetrating and mutually inverted realms of Dionysian nature and Apollonian culture. And if Nietzsche's Dionysian aesthetics inverts Plato's Dionysian rationalism, it also perversely mirrors its seductive charms, produced by Socrates's illusory apotheosis. This insight reveals the "Problem of Socrates" as a line of thematic continuity that runs from Nietzsche's first to last works. Taking the form of a musical seducer who mirrors the souls of his audience, the philosopher Dionysus exposes the secret fantasies and disavowed desires underlying the moral-epistemological values of modern culture and especially modern science.

The destructive quality of this god's immoral seduction are supposed to inoculate us against the quintessential social-political intoxicant promulgated by modernity, namely, the phantasm of progress, though successful inoculation depends on our transformative capacity for self-recognition, and may never be consummated in a moment of rational lucidity but is rather — as we saw in Plato's *Symposium* and will see again in Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannus* — accomplished painfully and imperfectly under the exposing radiance of shame. Nietzsche challenges us to heed the duplicitous trappings of the Western imagination, whose myths masquerade as moral and scientific truths and proffer the promise of an ideal world that would satisfy our cultivated expectations. Conversely, we may be blinded by the secular myth that we worship nothing, having no gods. Nietzsche challenges us to recognize this impossibility for the self-deception that it is.

CHAPTER 5
INVERTED PLATONISM

> *The theoretical genius pushes for the unleashing of artistic-mystical drives in two ways: on the one hand through its sheer existence, which demands its immortal twin, like one colour the other, in accordance with a certain allopathy of nature; on the other hand through the abrupt transformation of science into art every time its limits are reached. . . . For the intellect there is no nothingness as a goal, and therefore no absolute knowledge, because absolute knowledge, compared to being, would be a not-being. Accordingly, to support life — to seduce to life — is the intention underlying all knowledge, the illogical element, which, as the father of all knowledge, also determines the limits of knowledge*. NF-1870 7[125]

> *My philosophy is an* inverted Platonism*: the further something is from true being, the more beautiful, the better it is. Living in illusion as the goal.* NF-1870 7[156]

> *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*. NF-1885 2[112]

In this chapter, I analyze the sublation of the distinctions between reality and appearances and myth and metaphysics in greater detail. The first section elucidates the transcendental framework of what Nietzsche calls his inverted Platonism. While Kant posits noumena as a limit concept designating the unknowability of things in themselves, it is debatable to what extent he questions their actual, independent existence. Under the influence of Lange, Nietzsche conceives of things in themselves as entirely imaginary. His portrait of the tragic artist embodies the paradoxical consequences of this neo-Kantian position, whereby skepticism keeps undermining the artistic positing of life's aesthetic value. The portrait displays the divided nature of a consciousness that grasps its own limits. The distinction between reality and appearances endemic to metaphysics coincides with the contradiction between being and becoming, which is discovered to be the ineliminable basis of subjective representation. When we determine appearances in

accordance with our ideals, when we posit values at all, we are *eo ipso* engaging in metaphysics, since these values relate to an ideal sphere of being in contrast to the flux of becoming, however relatively constricted we consider this sphere to be.

In *The Birth*, the horizon of metaphysics coincides with the redemptive ideal of what Nietzsche calls tragic culture. Kant and Schopenhauer newly inaugurate this by recognizing the noumenal limits of logic, at which point the moral-rational drives of science transform into the artistic-mystical drives of religion. I argue that the basis for this type of transformation is for Nietzsche most readily apparent in Schopenhauer's apophatic account of the *nihil negativum*, the transcendent Absolute that is to be attained by means of the saint's ascetic denial of the will, which directly informs Nietzsche's artistic-mystical conception of the primordial unity in *The Birth*. No scholar to my knowledge has analyzed this connection before.[310] I interpret Nietzsche's conception of primordial unity to correspond to Schopenhauer's *nihil negativum*, whose paradoxical formulation reflects the mystically transfigured limit of human subjectivity. This accounts for the mystical-artistic basis of Nietzsche's tragic philosophy in *The Birth*, which he projects onto the nineteenth century horizon of cultural rebirth. I interpret this projection of mystical-artistic experience to function as an immanent critique of the modern European expectation of social-political redemption.

In the second section, I discuss the consequences of Nietzsche's tragic philosophy in relation to his scholarly reception, where we find a ubiquitous distinction between the

[310] Staten, "*Birth of Tragedy* Reconstructed," 19 n. 12, and Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 58, speculate in passing that such a connection could potentially exist.

"critical" aspect of his philosophy as a critique of metaphysics in contrast to the "creative" aspect of his philosophy that posits new cultural values. I argue that while these "critical" and "creative" aspects cannot be distinguished from one another, the appearance of such a distinction ironically mimics the transition in Kant's philosophy from a transcendental critique to a metaphysics of morality. The latter emerges to redeem us from a world deprived of metaphysical meaning, which renders suspect the real intention behind Kant's critique of metaphysics. Nietzsche's critique ironically follows the same trajectory, given the redemptive quality of his Dionysian ideal, which emerges from the superficial abyss of metaphysics. On my reading, Nietzsche's Dionysianism functions as a parodic, immanent critique of Kant's critique, ending as it does in the ineluctable affirmation of myth. In Nietzsche, this type of affirmation is inherently suspect, as we lapse back into the skeptical inquiry which, having reached its limits, had produced it. Nietzsche's immanent critique undermines the emancipatory ideal that from the outset grounds and justifies Kant's critique, and that inevitably follows in the wake of its critical-destructive task.

I. *DAS UR-EINE*

We have seen that Nietzsche's early work engages the pessimism that reduces beautiful appearances to a meaningless, unaesthetic substratum, the ateleological flux of phenomena that his aesthetic ideal redeems us from. However, following Kant, he does not believe that we have access to any causal ground, what forms the rational basis for the distinction between appearance and reality that infects materialism no less than idealism. The conclusion drawn from the logic of materialism resembles that drawn from the logic

of idealism insofar as each assumes an *Urgrund* whose causal mechanisms can be rationally understood. In both cases, we infer a noumenal reality — for example, Democritus's eternal flux of atoms in the void or Plato's Ideas — from the empirical observation of phenomenal becoming, while never being given to us in experience. Given this insight, the consequence of Kant's transcendental critique is that primary qualities, no less than secondary qualities, are subjectively constituted features of the world. Thus, *all properties which constitute the intuition of a body belong merely to its appearance*,[311] and we have no access to the unconditioned ground of reality beyond appearances. The scientific drive for universal knowledge can never arrive at its goal, proving to be a futile and hubristic enterprise that we may consider tragic. For this reason, Nietzsche associates Kant with the tragic knowledge that follows from the realization that "all understanding, by its nature, is limited and conditional . . . Thanks to this demonstration it has been recognized that it is an arrogant delusion to believe that we can penetrate the innermost essence of things by following the chain of causality" (BT 18).

For Kant, the concept of noumena rationally derives from the logic of appearances, without which the term "appearance" would be illogical, since phenomena must be appearances adequate to real things, namely, things in themselves, so as not to be confused with mere illusions.[312] Nietzsche appropriates Lange's elucidation of Kant's noumena as a limit concept produced by reflexive self-consciousness, an appearance through and through. He thus invites us to view the unfolding of appearances as a

[311] Kant, *Prolegomena*, 37.
[312] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A251–52.

theatrical play of oppositional perspectives, a nested series of phantasmal masks.[313] As Porter puts it, "phenomenalities at different levels are played off against one another in Nietzsche's text like so many surfaces, resulting in illusory depths (*Illusionsstufen*)."[314] Porter's Langean analysis clarifies how the neo-Kantian evaluation of the *Ding an sich* reveals the noumenal realm to be yet another appearance, for "the limits of phenomena are the phenomena."[315] The unconditioned ground of phenomena merely represents their imaginary negation. As shadowy doubles, things in themselves are phantasmal appearances, having no real essence nor existence apart from phenomena. This should persuade us to reconsider the significance of Nietzsche's primordial unity as the mere negation of phenomena, creating the appearance of an unconditioned ground produced by the imagination. For Nietzsche, tragic myth represents the dramatization of this unconscious process through which we imbue existence with metaphysical meaning, and which is always bound up with the aesthetic creation of a world. Nietzsche argues that science is an unconscious process of aesthetic creation which negates appearances by positing the semblance of their unconditioned ground in order to idealize existence and give it meaning.

Nietzsche's early tragic philosophy thus operates within a transcendental framework that dramatizes the subjective basis of the world's aesthetic construction. He treats the thing in itself as no less of a "regulative fiction" than the "I" (NF-1885 35[35]) that Descartes considered to be the substantial cause of thinking and can be thought of as

[313] See e.g. BGE 40, 190 (where Nietzsche links a series of masks with Socrates no less), 230, 278, 289.
[314] Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 80.
[315] Ibid., 109.

the latter's negative afterimage. For Kant, the concept of a thinking substance (the transcendental Ego) is a heuristic designation that grounds our subjective experience of thinking, being "nothing more than the feeling of an existence without the least concept and is only the representation of that to which all thinking stands in relation."[316] Similarly, Lange points out that the idea of noumena may simply be the illusory representation of that to which all appearances stand in relation for human consciousness, without correlating to any reality of things in themselves. If it is not fallacious for Kant to say that thinking can exist without an underlying substantial subject, then it is similarly not fallacious to suggest that appearances can exist without any underlying substantial objects. By way of an analogy between the transcendental Ego and the thing in itself, the latter turns out to function as a kind of phantasmal thinking substance, a fictional subject projected beneath appearances as their substratum, without which the term "appearance" would have no meaning, but only for the same reason that Descartes had argued that the activity of "thinking" could have no meaning apart from a thing that thinks. In light of this analogy, the thing in itself would be a negative afterimage of the "I" produced by reflexive self-consciousness, collapsing into noumena as a limit concept that structures the meaning of our experience, but without referring to any necessary reality beyond it.

I draw the analogy above to illuminate the way in which Nietzsche radicalizes the subjectivist dimension of Kant's transcendental framework. He effectively collapses Kant's distinction between negative noumena, that is, the reality of things in themselves outside of space and time, and positive noumena, that is, hypothetical objects of non-

[316] Kant, *Prolegomena*, 82 n. 5.

sensible intuition that would be *produced* by the very intellect that conceives them.[317] We see this insofar as Nietzsche dramatizes the world's aesthetic creation from the perspective of a tragic philosopher whose identity merges with the intellectual intuition of a creator-god. Such is the significance of his inverted Platonism, referred to in his early notebook from 1870–71, which aestheticizes Platonic being as an appearance whose harmonious beauty is found to be illusory when dissonantly juxtaposed with the purposeless flux of becoming into which it dissolves. In his *Late Notebooks*, Nietzsche characterizes *The Birth* as the work of a disillusioned, inverted Platonist, someone infatuated with appearances.

> 'Being' as a fabrication by the man suffering from becoming. . . . The most suffering man most deeply craves beauty — he generates it. . . . Becoming, felt and interpreted from within, would be continual creating by someone dissatisfied, over-wealthy, endlessly tense and endlessly under pressure, by a god whose only means of overcoming the torment of being is constant transformation and exchange — illusion as the temporary redemption achieved every moment; the world as the succession of divine visions and redemptions in illusion. (NF-1885 2[110])

In *The Birth*, this god is the "original artist of the world" (BT 5), which scholars have read as a personification of the primordial will,[318] but who more closely resembles a Heraclitean version of Plato's demiurge (BT 24).[319] Given that Schopenhauer's will "is that which is inherently un-aesthetic" (BT 6), it is hard to see how this cosmic principle could accurately be portrayed as an artist. That this artist-god is nothing less than an anthropomorphism is hinted at earlier on, for "gods justify the life of men by living it

[317] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B307–309.
[318] E.g., Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, 270. Taking Nietzsche's metaphysical conception of the artist-god quite literally, Ridley, "Nietzsche on Tragedy," 319, follows Young, *Philosophy of Art*, 51–55.
[319] Following Heraclitus, Nietzsche associates the god with Zeus in PTAG 6, 8, and again in GM II.16.

themselves — the only satisfactory theodicy!" (BT 3). In his creatively intoxicated state, the Dionysian artist's "'subjectivity', as this concept is used by modern aestheticians, is imaginary," namely insofar as his subjectivity resembles that of a god. There is an infuriating circularity in the way that Nietzsche conceives of his god, who represents "the *torture* of having to create, as a *Dionysian drive*," and symbolizes the suffering artist's imaginary apotheosis. Artists generate the illusion of beauty from out of themselves, and this god is none other than the fabricated "being" projected by such artists as their ideal reflection, their redemption from becoming in the transfiguring mirror they hold up. This being, as a mere appearance, then strangely suffers the agony of the artist in reverse, since, for the god, *becoming* is a redemption from the "torment of being."

Being and becoming thus interpenetrate one another. The one inversely reflects the other, and Nietzsche tacitly exposes this in the way that their forms are mutually redemptive. Suffering from their own contradictions, their antagonism personifies the artist's reflexive self-consciousness, a consciousness that takes itself as an object and grasps its own limits. The metaphysical opposition between being and becoming appears as the hinge within appearances, and like a hinge it demarcates these spheres, while as the cognitive feature that structures our perception of duration it forms the basis of phenomenal representation. Nietzsche concludes that *Dionysian happiness reaches its peak in the annihilation of even the most beautiful illusion*. Such annihilation implicates the artist and his god in their mutual destruction as a doubly divided, self-mirroring consciousness: becoming as the annihilation of being (its release into "constant transformation and exchange") and being as the annihilation of becoming ("a fabrication

by the man suffering from becoming"). The self-reflexive apotheosis of Nietzsche's tortured artist represents the passage of time as a circular process of creation and destruction, wherein the contradiction between being and becoming is a subjective refraction of appearances, a self-generated, self-devouring illusion within a doubly divided consciousness.

The affirmation of existence as an aesthetic phenomenon sublates this metaphysical conflict and coincides with rapture (*Rausch*), wherein the subject delights in becoming, embodying the passage of time that returns anew to itself from its apparent annihilation, which is "*to be oneself* that eternal joy in becoming — this joy that also even incorporates the *joy in destruction*" (TI "Ancients," 5). Nietzsche proposes that this feeling justifies existence as a whole, a feeling of life-affirmation that overpowers the intellect with orgiastic delight. But this psychical resolution is fleeting and only compounds the artist's suffering, for "as soon as daily reality re-enters consciousness, it is experienced as such with a sense of revulsion; the fruit of those [Dionysian] states is an ascetic, will-negating mood" (BT 7). The artist's quotidian existence becomes intolerable, since the unaesthetic quality of life, which produces the Dionysian nausea accompanying "that whole philosophy of the wood-god" (BT 3) Silenus, must continually be overcome with more intense aesthetic stimulants, the renewed "succession of divine visions and redemptions in illusion" (NF-1885 2[110]). Such "illusion[s] are only for those equipped with nobler natures, who generally feel the burden and heaviness of being with more profound aversion and who have to be tricked by exquisite stimulants into ignoring their aversion. Everything we call culture consists of such stimulants" (BT 18). The insoluble

conflict between being and becoming stimulates the productive tension of the aesthete's skeptical imagination, fueling an ever-increasing *need for illusion*. "We do not know the true nature of *a single causality*. Absolute skepticism: the necessity of art and illusion" (NF-1872 19[21]). Nietzsche's tragic philosophy, which advocates "living in illusion" as an affirmative pursuit, reacts against the pessimist's disillusioned insight into the chaotic flux of phenomena, a pessimism that Dionysian intoxication also produces as its resultant nausea. From this perspective, Schopenhauer pessimistically declares the nullity of existence, and Nietzsche's understanding of science as an unconsciously creative process presupposes such pessimism, which takes the negation of appearances to its metaphysical limit as they are reduced to nothing in light of the transcendent Absolute.

In *The Birth*, Nietzsche ties his representation of Romantic "displeasure" (and its redemption in appearance) to an immanent critique of Schopenhauer's metaphysics, implicated as it is in a mythical fabulation. Nietzsche demonstrates his objection to a transcendent Absolute in his interpretation of tragic drama, which inverts Plato's conception of the good and subversively mimics the negation of life achieved by Schopenhauer's saint.

> [I]f we once divert our gaze from the character of the hero as it rises to the surface and becomes visible — fundamentally, it is no more than an image of light (*Lichtbild*) projected on to a dark wall, i.e. appearance (*Erscheinung*) through and through[320] — if, rather, we penetrate to the myth which projects itself in these bright reflections, we suddenly experience a phenomenon which inverts [*umgekehrtes*] a familiar optical one. When we turn away blinded after a strenuous attempt to look directly at the sun, we have dark, coloured patches before our eyes, as if their purpose were to heal them; conversely, those appearances of the Sophoclean hero in images of light [*umgekehrt sind jene Lichtbilderscheingungen des sophokleischen Helden*], in other words, the Apolline

[320] Plato, *Republic*, 518a *et seq*.

> quality of the mask, are the necessary result of gazing into the inner, terrible depths of nature — radiant patches, as it were, to heal a gaze seared by gruesome night. (BT 9)

This passage of course alludes to Plato's allegory of the cave. Nietzsche inverts the analogy of the sun that imbues the allegory, wherein the realm of nature is a dimly lit world of deception in relation to the radiating rays of Plato's good beyond being, a "demonic excess" (*Republic*, 509c) that saturates one's intellectual vision with knowledge, truth, and beauty. Turning one's gaze downward from the transcendent Idea of the good to the realm of phenomenal becoming, one is suddenly blinded by darkness (508c, 516e). Schopenhauer's *nihil negativum*, the will's return to which "is designated by the terms ecstasy, rapture, illumination, union with God" (WWP 1:476), transcends the distinction between subject and object, knower and known, amounting to an apophatic formulation of Plato's good beyond being. Up to a point, Nietzsche's account agrees with Schopenhauer's pessimistic reformulation of Plato, which he evokes in this passage, wherein the irrational, "terrible depths of nature" blind us in a way analogously to Plato's sun, though in an inverse way resembling Schopenhauer's *nihil negativum*, the absolute negation of life. Nietzsche suggests that we have not actually beheld the "terrible depths of nature" but have only been blinded to them in the form of their transcendent negation.

The character of the hero on stage suggests this, implicitly that of Oedipus, who "begins the prelude to the victory-hymn of the saint." Like Oedipus, an "abyss" of annihilation blinds us, from which the saint's radiant appearance emerges. The experience of "Greek serenity (*Heiterkeit*)" (BT 9) results from the illusory images of light that pessimism's "gruesome night" produces, transfiguring the tragic hero's appearance into

one of sacred radiance. The negation of phenomenal appearances, as we gaze beyond them to the "myth that projects itself" on stage, leads us not to repudiate their deceptiveness but to embrace their radiant transfiguration. This reflects Schopenhauer's final vision of the saint, who, having spiritually realized the *nihil negativum* in her innermost depths, indirectly displays the apophatic mystery that we, with our will for life, cannot bear to see. Schopenhauer seeks to illuminate and thereby "chase off the dark impression of that nothingness, which hovers as the final goal behind all virtue and saintliness and which we fear as children do the dark" (WWP 1:477). This is the darkness in which the hero on stage is bathed and the optical inversion of which radiates the holiness of the saint. However, Nietzsche's proposed optical inversion is grounded not in the real transcendence of an Absolute, but in its specious mythical double. In Nietzsche's account, "the myth," as the mirror-image of a metaphysical realm that projects itself in tragic drama, both inverts the Platonic analogy of the sun and subverts Schopenhauer's ascetic denial of appearances.

The transfigured appearance of suffering is the mythical representation that emerges as a healing balm in relation to the Dionysian nausea that grounds it, transforming apathy into life-affirmation, as described in the following passage.

> [E]verything here speaks only of over-brimming, indeed triumphant existence, where everything that exists has been deified, regardless of whether it is good or evil. Thus the spectator may stand in some perplexity before this fantastic superabundance of life, asking himself what magic potion these people can have drunk which makes them see Helen, "hovering in sweet sensuality," smiling at them wherever they look, the ideal image of their own existence. . . . At this point it must be said that this harmony, which modern men look on with such longing, this unity of man with nature, to which Schiller applied the now generally accepted art-word "naïve" in art, is by no means such a simple, so-to-speak inevitable condition which emerges of its own accord and which we would be

> *bound* to encounter at the threshold of every culture, as a human paradise; people could only believe when they were bent on thinking of Rousseau's Emile as an artist, and entertained the illusion that in Homer they had found just such an artist as Emile, reared at the heart of nature. (BT 3)

The critique of romanticism that Nietzsche mounts in the second half of this passage recurs in §19, where he deems "man in his original goodness" a "paradisiac prospect." This delusion derives from Rousseau's view of pity as a natural instinct and drives the "socialist movements of the present," those symptomatic of an optimistic, "Socratic culture."

> According to this sentiment, there was once a time at the beginning of time when man lay in the bosom of nature and, in this natural state, had achieved the ideal of humanity in a unity of paradisiac goodness and artistry; we are all supposedly descended from this perfect original human being, indeed we are its faithful likeness; it was just that we needed to cast off certain things, voluntarily rid ourselves of excessive learning and excessive cultural opulence, in order to recognize ourselves in the image of that original being. (BT 19)

Let us compare this passage with Nietzsche's description of Dionysian revelry.

> Now the slave is a freeman, now all the rigid, hostile barriers, which necessity, caprice, or "impudent fashion" have established between human beings, break asunder. Now, hearing the gospel of universal harmony, each person feels himself to be not simply united, reconciled or merged with his neighbour, but quite literally one with him, as if the veil of maya had been torn apart, so that there shreds of it flutter before the mysterious primordial unity. (BT 1)

Nietzsche depicts both the romantic harmony that he criticizes, and the redemptive vision of Dionysian revelry, as emancipatory experiences of communal sympathy, positively shameless orgies of sentimentality. The only apparent distinction between them is that he projects the former back into a state of nature, à la Rousseau, while mediating the latter through the religious compassion of pessimism, à la Schopenhauer. However, he patently mediates Dionysian revelry by a redemptive, illusory ideal that is indistinguishable from

the romantic illusion of some primeval state of nature. The romantic ideal that Nietzsche criticizes is no less a symptom of existential malaise than that of Dionysian redemption and in this sense they are identical products of a cultural fantasy. These cultural ideals inversely mirror one another, each giving the lie to the other's fiction. The hardy pessimists are escaping from the Hobbesian terrors of nature, while the oversensitive, Rousseauian romantics are escaping from the alienating effects of over-socialization. Are these not the invertible delusions symptomatic of modern Europeans? Interestingly, the *eternal feminine* (whose significance will soon become apparent) comforts both the Greeks and the romantics, be it the smiling face of Helen or the primeval bosom of nature. Nietzsche's cultural symptomatology exposes the complicity between pessimism and romanticism in their shared idealism. These ancient Greeks are, quite simply, hopelessly naive romantics in Schopenhauerian garb, living in full flight from life's oppressive banality.[321]

Nietzsche's duplicitous, rhetorical staging of the cultural complicity between romanticism and pessimism, recognized by the mere appearance of their opposition, demonstrates an immanent critique both of a romantic ontology of life that sanctifies the will and a pessimistic, negative ontology of life that denies it. In Chapter 2, I interpreted the latter through the lens of neo-Platonic mysticism, a move that I now suggest Nietzsche also takes, though not in sincere devotion to Schopenhauer's metaphysics, but rather by way of its immanent critique. This is no less a critique of Plato, whose highest

[321] We find that a similar inversion is characteristic of contemporary nihilism in Thacker, "Darklife," 23, citing Steven Shaviro. "[T]hese [nihilistic] thinkers have a very negative view of the efficacy of thought, and in that sense they're eliminativists. And yet they couldn't find the universe as horrible as they find it, in this Lovecraftian way, without being kinds of inverted panpsychists."

metaphysical principle Nietzsche formulates as a sensorial hallucination, dragging the heavenly realm of philosophical contemplation down into the vicious circle of pleasure and pain. Nietzsche immanentizes the transcendent One, reflecting the Absolute Presence of Plato's *epekeina*, and resembling something like the cosmic will's intellect (absent from Schopenhauer), while also being its innermost ground. My reading disputes Porter's doubt that the "mysterium beyond the will"[322] plays a precise, indeed pivotal role in *The Birth*, thereby helping to clear up his ambivalence surrounding this point. The confusion concerns Nietzsche's notion of the primordial unity, a term not used by Schopenhauer, and whose status in relation to the will is highly ambiguous.

Nietzsche's early notebooks (1870–71) contextualize his conception of the primordial unity as what lies beyond the will. "There is nothing in us that could be traced back to the primal One. The will is the most universal form of appearance . . . The *All-One suffers* and projects the will as cure." In this fragment, the One produces the will as a projected appearance, which raises the bewildering question of how the One, being will-less, could suffer, further undermining the supposition that nothing in us could be traced back to it. "That which truly is cannot suffer? Pain is the true being, i.e. the sensation of self. *Pain*, *contradiction* is the *true being*. *Joy*, *harmony is illusion*" (NF-1870 7[165]). Nietzsche reverses Schopenhauer's argument. He characterizes the primordial One beyond the will by eternal suffering, while the will is its illusory redemption in appearance. But this reversal deems *contradiction* itself — namely that between the will as an appearance and the One beyond it — the *true being*. Since one would be at pains to

[322] Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 58.

characterize the will as joyously harmonious, this illusion can only coherently refer to the will as a transfigured appearance of the One, which we can hardly distinguish from the will's painful striving. In short, it becomes unclear whether the will is a redemptive appearance of the One or if the reverse is true, since each is caught in the contradiction of appearances.

I will not belabor the fact that these notebook passages, charged with ambiguity, are extremely difficult to parse. Nietzsche discusses metaphysical abstractions such as the cosmic will and its primordial ground, but speaks of them as if from their perspective as conscious entities, and purely anthropomorphically in terms of sensations like pain (of the will) and pleasure (of will-less cognition), leading, as we glimpsed above and shall see below, to the bizarre reversal of these terms in the One that mediates the will's self-intuition (the unity of will and will-lessness in appearance). The viewpoint vacillates between and conflates human and cosmic perspectives. Nietzsche's concept of the "time-atom," soon to be sketched in his cryptic *Zeitatomenlehre* (1873),[323] also plays a role in these confusing passages, reflecting the perspective of the primal One within the realm of phenomenal becoming as "infinite time . . . concentrated into a second." Such is "the *surface of the primal One*. *Being satisfies itself in perfect illusion*" (NF-1870 7[157]). "Thus the whole will has become appearance and intuits itself" (NF-1870 7[204)]). In *The Birth*, Nietzsche deploys the One as a personification of human cognition and sensation, which generates the will as representation, its "continual Becoming in time, space, and

[323] See the "Symposium on Nietzsche's 'Time-Atom Theory' Fragment," *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 20 (2000): 1–81. On Nietzsche's atomization of the will, see Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 60–72, 130, 204–05 n. 13.

causality" (BT 4), while the will in itself is only "the most universal form of appearance" (NF-1870 7[165]). The primal One that transcends the will at once immanently beholds it through the medium of the tragic artist, since the One quite simply names his subjective consciousness, while appearing as its divine Other,[324] as the gaze of the artist-god's "primal intellect [*Urintellekt*]" (NF-1871 5[79–80]).[325]

I contend that *The Birth* dramatizes Schopenhauer's apophatic concept of the *nihil negativum* as it gives rise to the joyous vision of the transcendent One beyond the will, which emanates metaphysical solace by transforming the pessimistic longing for nothingness into life-affirmation. The pain of life's nullity transmutes into the pleasure of life's overabundant fullness. We first witness this transformation in the passage cited earlier from §1, where Nietzsche introduces his notion of the primordial unity. My discussion of Schopenhauer's negative ontology helps to clarify the ambiguity of this term. The primordial unity signifies a Platonic transfiguration of the *nihil negativum*, the "inaccessible abyss" (BT 24) — referring here to the innermost kernel of Schopenhauer's pessimism — that lies beyond the will, into the "primal being" (BT 6) expressed in music. This reality lies beyond the will, "since music, by its essence, cannot possibly *be* Will, because as such it would have to be banished entirely from the realm of art — for Will is that which is inherently un-aesthetic — but it *appears* as Will" (BT 6). While music expresses the dark, painful striving of the will as an appearance, what grounds this

[324] Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 186 n. 15, points out how Nietzsche's formulation of the "primordial gaze [*Urvisionen*]" (NF-1870 7[148, 157]) anticipates Lacan's "gaze of the Other," that of the unconscious super-ego.

[325] Cited from *Digital Critical Edition of the Complete Works and Letters*, ed. Paolo D'Iorio and based on the critical text by G. Colli and M. Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1967–).

appearance is the nothingness that radiantly transmutes into primal being by virtue of the tragic artist's transfiguring gaze. "This is the phenomenon of the lyric poet: as an Apolline genius he interprets music through the image of the Will, while he himself, completely set free from the greed of the Will, is a pure, unclouded sun-eye" (BT 6). Nietzsche's "sun-eye" alludes to Schopenhauer's discussion of the *nunc stans*, the eternal presence that corresponds to "the pure subject of cognition, the eternal world-eye" (WWP 1:334) and that he memorably likens to the sun's "eternal noon" (WWP 1:332). Strikingly, Nietzsche's Apollonian "sun-eye" resembles "Socrates' one great Cylopian eye" (BT 14), the eye of pure cognition that sought out "the deepest abysses of being" (BT 15) but "was debarred from ever looking with pleasure into the abysses of the Dionysiac" (BT 24). The sun-eye transforms the logical gaze of critical-theoretical inquiry into the dazzling gaze of the music-making Socrates, no longer debarred from beholding the tragic spectacle of existence, its Dionysian abysses. The One determines the quality of will as either painful striving or joyous swelling; its eye posits, reflects, and interprets life's vacillating valence, its positive or negative affective value, its affirmation or denial.

The Apollonian transfiguration of nothingness manifests the original, eternal contradiction at the heart of the primordial unity (BT 4–6), giving rise to the imaginary self-redemption of the Dionysian poet's painful subjectivity, causing it to "vanish to the point of self-forgetting" (BT 1) in its "release and redemption from the 'I'" that "sounds out from the deepest abyss of being" (BT 5). The *nihil negativum* constitutes the subjective limit of experience whose negativity the poet projects into a mythical beyond,

the *surficial appearance* of a depth that returns his gaze; reflexive self-consciousness produces a negative afterimage of the "I" as its phantasmal Other. When the poet identifies with his phantasmal Other, the "I" vanishes into a sensation of blissful oblivion as he feels the wound of existence, the contradiction at the heart of subjective experience, to be healed. The abyss of being is the object of Socratic inquiry in its attempt to seek out and correct reality, a dialectical process that achieves its completion in the hallucinatory vision of the tragic artist's apotheotic identification with the indestructible, "exuberant fertility of the world-Will" (BT 17), but who, as we saw in §14, beholds the creative self-annihilation of phenomenal appearances from a standpoint beyond the will, from the perspective of what we may call its value-positing eye. The logical basis of Socrates's instinctual "superfoetation" transforms into its opposite, whereby pure intuition absorbs scientific cognition into the "instinctive wisdom [of] the mystic" (BT 13). The illuminated gaze of the abyssal sun-eye strikes the surface appearance with which it is One.

> The *visions of the primal One* can only be *adequate* reflections of *being*. In so far as contradiction is the essence of the Primal One, it can be the supreme pain and the supreme joy at the same time. The supreme joy is immersion in appearance: when the will has completely become external surface (*Außenseite*). . . . But in so far as [the genius] is an adequate reflection of the primal One he is the image of contradiction and the image of pain. Now every appearance is at the same time the primal One itself. (NF-1870 7[157])

"What does the genius intuit? The wall of appearances, purely as appearances" (NF-1870 7[172]). The quality of "pure appearance, at every smallest moment becoming," is "without any content" (NF-1870 7[204]). What the genius intuits is nothing other than the noumenal void of his own subjectivity, whose negative limit he projects into the cosmic

gaze of the primal One through which his self-consciousness transfigures into "a luminous hovering in purest bliss and in wide-eyed contemplation, free of all pain" (BT 4). The serene state of this divine gaze personifies the poet's complete self-absorption in consciousness, mirroring the wall of appearances deprived of any content. Consciousness experiences the sensation of its own nothingness — the nonsense of unconsciousness — into which it is luminously thrust. The abyss of being transforms into solar radiance, an oceanic surface mirroring the azure. When the projection of a mythical beyond collapses into the immanence of subjective experience, when the gaze of the Other coincides with the "I" that projects it, then the One cannot be distinguished from nothingness any more than being can be distinguished from becoming. The One signifies the ecstasy of the void, its sensual transfiguration into an illusory being identical with nothingness. The ecstasy of the void refers to the momentary, meditative intuition of a trance state deprived of dreams, which we normally experience unconsciously, when in deep sleep the passage of time becomes as nothing to us. The world appears freed from contradiction insofar as there appears to be nothing left of the world, metaphorically analogous to the way that "a plant, e.g., perceives no external world" (NF-1872 19[217]). (So much for otherworldly transcendence, the overcoming of life's organic origins.) Such is the non-discursive cognition of time's sheer sensation, the mystical intuition of life's immanent duration — the abyss in every moment of becoming.

Nietzsche projects his mythopoetic representation of mystical intuition, grasping the negative limit of subjectivity as its immanent, abyssal void, into the cultural landscape of nineteenth century Germany as the religious, metaphysical horizon of its redemption.

From the apophatic, "inaccessible abyss" at the heart of Schopenhauer's pessimism, the "Dionysiac song rises" (BT 24) — to redeem the world. Shaken from its profound slumber, armed with its newfound artist's wisdom, the "German knight" (BT 24)[326] of tragic culture, "with its unmoved gaze on the total image of the world," would "embrace eternal suffering with sympathetic feelings of love, acknowledging that suffering to be its own" (BT 18). This cultural fantasy derives from a purely subjective phantasm, one of utmost solitude. "This is how we must think of him as he sinks to the ground in Dionysiac drunkenness and mystical self-abandon, along and apart from the enthusiastic choruses, at which point, under the Apolline influence of dream, his own condition, which is to say, his oneness with the innermost ground of the world, reveals itself to him *in a symbolic (gleichnishaft) dream-image*" (BT 2). As a subjective phantasm, Nietzsche envisions this Dionysian dream projected as a cultural fantasy, spreading throughout Germany, penetrating to the psychical, instinctual ground of its impressionable youths. What exactly is the compassionate character of this communal hallucination, its purportedly charitable power?

> Let us imagine a rising generation with this fearless gaze, with this heroic attraction to what is monstrous (*ungeheuer*), let us imagine the bold stride of these dragon-killers, the proud recklessness with which they turn their backs on all enfeebled doctrines of scientific optimism so that they may "live resolutely," wholly and fully; would not the tragic man of this culture, given he has trained himself for what is grave and terrifying, be bound to desire a new form of art, the art of metaphysical solace, in fact to desire tragedy as his very own Helen, and to call out along with Faust:

[326] This image builds on Nietzsche's earlier association in §20 of Schopenhauer with Dürer's knight, a passage that notoriously heralds the Dionysian rebirth of German culture through the purifying "fire-magic of music." Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff's's scathing critique of BT opens with this passage, in "Future Philology! A Reply to Friedrich Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*," *New Nietzsche Studies* 4, nos. 1 & 2 (2000): 1–33.

> And shall I not, with all my longing's vigor,
> Draw into life that peerless, lovely figure? (BT 7)

Nietzsche's new generation, blinded — as we saw earlier in the "Greek State" — by the state's "charitable power," embodies nothing short of its tyrannical, barbaric drive for world domination, for this, *the total image of the world*, is the alluring object of its lust, the Helen ensnared in its possessive sights. A song of harmonious reconciliation transfigures this barbarous desire, lured by the radiating vision of cultural redemption. We can no longer distinguish the will of the state, the instinctual ground of culture, from its redemption in appearance, for only by means of the latter delusion does the state attain its desired goal. "The true goal is obscured by a deluding image; we stretch out our hands towards the image, and nature achieves its goal by means of this deception" (BT 3). Nietzsche envisions the rise of a new generation which, by virtue of its deceptive *state instinct*, willingly throws itself into the "icy, terrible stream of existence" (BT 18), fearlessly sacrificing itself for the state's redemptive ideal, as a martyred saint for God, so as to become like God, united with the world-will in seeking its blissful return to the innermost ground of being — what is truly nothing.

In this section, I began by outlining the transcendental framework of Nietzsche's inverted Platonism through which he understands the tragic artist-philosopher's apotheosis. I interpreted Nietzsche's conception of primordial unity to correspond to Schopenhauer's *nihil negativum* and whose paradoxical formulation reflects the mystically transfigured limit of human subjectivity. This accounts for the mystical-artistic basis of Nietzsche's tragic philosophy in *The Birth*, which he projects onto the nineteenth-

century horizon of cultural rebirth. If this leads us to draw cynical conclusions about Nietzsche's intentions, it is only as an obverse reaction to our own sentimentalism, both of which he exposes. Nietzsche confronts us with the cruelty of the human being as a political animal and our moralistic disavowal of it, a disavowal in which both pessimism and romanticism are complicit. Nor need we read *The Birth* as a Wagnerian piece of nationalistic propaganda, provided we do not overlook the ironical implications of its mytho-metaphysical consolation, which dovetail with the parodic overtones of its philological pretensions. I thus interpreted this projection of mystical-artistic experience to function as an immanent critique of the modern European expectation of social-political redemption. In the next section, I examine how this critique functions in Nietzsche's later writings.

II. DUPLICITOUS REPRESENTATIONS

The tragic philosopher's affirmation of aesthetic illusion in *The Birth* is comparable to the *amor fati* that attends Nietzsche's later doctrine of eternal recurrence, which largely responds to the nihilism that he diagnoses in Schopenhauer's ascetic denial of the will for life. Nietzsche formulates the doctrine in his famous parable from *The Gay Science* §341, in which a demon comes to visit you in your loneliest hour, at the lowest point in life, and says that you will relive this life, replicated in every precise detail, for all eternity. The parable imaginatively reformulates the cosmological theory of metempsychosis in 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, one's self being repeated along with it.

Presumably, one would greet this uncanny news with horror, despairing of life's senselessness. However, Nietzsche asks us what kind of disposition towards existence would allow us to affirm this tragic predicament with joy, desiring this life alone and hailing the demon as a god.

Nietzsche elucidates the quality of such affirmation as a form of *amor fati*.[327]

> If we say Yes to a single moment, this means we have said Yes not only to ourselves, but to all existence. For nothing stands alone, either in us ourselves or in things: and if just once our soul has quivered and resounded with happiness like a harpstring, then all eternity was needed to condition that one event — and in that one moment of our saying Yes, all eternity was welcomed, redeemed, justified and affirmed. (NF-1886, 7[38])

This passage perfectly coheres with the lead-up to the demon parable in *Gay Science* §339. "I am inclined to believe that the highest peaks of everything good . . . *unveils itself for us only once*! The Greeks, to be sure, prayed: 'Everything beautiful twice or thrice!' Indeed, they had good reason to summon the gods, for ungodly reality gives us the beautiful either never or only once!" The desire for repetition inheres in the type of experience that affirms eternal recurrence, a rapturous moment of aesthetic delight whose singularity distinguishes it from all other moments. In *Zarathustra*'s "On the Vision and the Riddle," the gateway that unifies the passage of time's eternal recurrence is called "Moment" (*Augenblick*). The courage that "slays even death . . . says: Was *that* life? Well then! One More Time!" This corresponds to a disposition that deifies the Moment and rises to its occasion, characteristic of "the most high-spirited, vital, world-affirming individual" from §56 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, "insatiably shouting *da capo*."

[327] E.g., EH "Clever" §10.

As in *The Birth*, Nietzsche continuously characterizes this moment of happiness, which supposedly justifies existence as a whole, as a form of musical elation. In *Gay Science*, Nietzsche's first formulation of eternal recurrence as "the whole musical mechanism [that] repeats eternally its tune" (GS 109) prefigures the demon parable and borrows from Schopenhauer, who writes that "every time a human being is begotten and born, the clock of human life is wound up again, now to repeat once more its music box tune, already played to the end countless times, measure for measure and beat for beat, with insignificant variations" (WWP, 1:376). This passage alludes back to his earlier philosophical elaboration of the Indian and Graeco-Roman myth of eternal recurrence, which communicates the endless revolution of time in which the will manifests itself (WWP, 1:326–337). Given this historical context, Heidegger would seem to get it right when he argues that Nietzsche continues to think the Being of beings in terms of the metaphysics of the will.[328] Schopenhauer entertains the prospect of one who affirms one's own life in accordance with the cosmic will and likens this to an affirmation of life's eternal recurrence.

> [A] person who found satisfaction in life, to whom all in it was perfectly fine, and who in the repose of reflective consideration desired the course of his life as he had experienced it so far to be of endless duration, or ever anew recurring, and whose vital spirit was so great that, for the sake of life's enjoyments, he would willingly and gladly accept in the bargain all the hardship and pain to which it is subject — such a person would stand "with firm, solid bones on the well-rounded lasting earth" [Goethe, *The Limits of Humanity*, pp. 21–24] and would have nothing to fear. (WWP, 1:335)

[328] Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. 4, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 204–205; *What is Called Thinking?* trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 90–91.

Schopenhauer grounds the passage of time in the *nunc stans* or eternal present of the scholastics. “We can compare time to an endlessly turning circle: the constantly falling half would be the past, the one constantly rising the future, but on top, the indivisible point touched by the tangent would be the unextended present” (WWP, 1:331). In this context, eternal recurrence represents becoming as a metaphysical abstraction whose circular form approximates the changeless being of the present. Nietzsche in fact voices this view in his late notebooks. “To *imprint* upon becoming the character of being — that is the highest *will to power*. A *dual falsification*, by the senses and by the mind, to obtain a world of things that are, that remain, that have equal value, etc. That *everything recurs* is the most extreme *approximation of the world of becoming to one of being: pinnacle of contemplation*” (NF-1886, 7[54]). Nietzsche alludes to an image of eternity that implicitly reflects Schopenhauer’s meditation on circular time, while at once deconstructing the plausibility of this image insofar as it originates from a dual process of cognitive and sensory “falsification.” As a result, the uncanny afterlife of Schopenhauer’s debunked metaphysics here continues to haunt the passage of time. Metaphysically speaking, eternal recurrence is a “dual falsification” that sublates the antithesis between being and becoming. A duplicitous representation, Nietzsche promulgates the idea of eternal recurrence as a metaphysical abstraction that strangely doubles as a supposed repudiation of metaphysics. In the above passage, we cannot distinguish the authentic doctrine of eternal recurrence from its immanent critique as a metaphysical deception that originates from a manipulation of our psycho-physiological constitution.

Hence, as a purportedly anti-metaphysical doctrine, eternal recurrence has problematic metaphysical implications. If my life is identical with an endless series of lives, does this not deny change as the fundamental character of existence? Does the doctrine, which demands that I affirm the temporal flux of phenomena, 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? As we have seen, eternal recurrence is the "inverse ideal" (BGE 56) of Schopenhauer's pessimism, one of life-affirmation wherein the *highest pleasure*, however brief, is also the *highest good*. We find this view in Lange's discussion of Aristippos's sensationalism, according to which momentary sensual pleasure is the aim from which happiness may spontaneously follow. "Aristippos taught expressly that [life's] true aim is not happiness, which is the permanent result of many single sensations of pleasure, but the individual sensual concrete pleasure itself. Happiness is of course good, but it must come spontaneously, and is therefore not the aim."[329] Lange's conclusive remarks on sensationalism agree with the worldview of modern *décadents*: "we have no right to complain of [beauty's] worm-eaten blossom: the very law of blossoming is that it leads to decay; and in this respect Aristippos was at the highest point of his time when he taught that it is the present moment only that can alone bring happiness."[330] It would seem that Lange's characterization of Aristippos vacillates, first describing happiness as "the permanent result of many single sensations of pleasure," and later as what may be only temporarily achieved in the present moment. Lange weaves

[329] Lange, *History of Materialism*, 1:45.
[330] Ibid., 1:51.

this latter characterization of Aristippos into the fabric of his own history of materialism. Aristippos's hedonistic embrace of the moment in turn becomes the blossom of ancient Greek empiricism, its "highest point." This decadent flower emerges as the cultural-historical summit of materialism before its inevitable decay and decline. Lange identifies Aristippos's sensationalism as the apex of Protagorean phenomenalism,[331] a form of it that affirms the tragic beauty of life's flourishing and decay.

On my reading, Nietzsche combines Schopenhauer's idealistic metaphysics with Lange's treatment of Aristippos's sensationalism to produce a *simulacrum* of time, a metaphysical representation of its immortal riddle. "This long lane back: it lasts an eternity. And that long lane outward — that is another eternity. They contradict each other, these paths; they blatantly offend each other — and here at this gateway is where they come together. The name of the gateway is inscribed at the top: 'Moment'" (Z:III "On the Vision and the Riddle," 2). Augustine formulates the "enigma" of the Moment in book eleven of his *Confessions*.

> Take the two tenses, past and future. How can they 'be' when the past is not now present and the future is not yet present? If the present were always present, it would not pass into the past: it would not be time but eternity. If then, in order to be time at all, the present is so made that it passes into the past, how can we say that this present also 'is'? The cause of its being is that it will cease to be. So indeed we cannot truly say that time exists except in the sense that it tends towards non-existence.[332]

In "On the Vision and the Riddle," Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence concerns the riddle of time's passage, the contradiction between past and future, whose apparent

[331] Ibid., 1:42–44.
[332] Augustine, *Confessions*, 231.

unriddling in the affirmation of the moment coincides with the highest pleasure. The desire for repetition inheres in this experience, whose contingent singularity is such that it can only be for that *one* specific moment of affirmation, which could only recur given the recurrence of life in its entirety. The doctrine of eternal recurrence is in this sense a retrospective characterization of all-consuming bliss — a thought that expresses the memory trace that this highest of feelings leaves in its wake — in the form of a metaphysical abstraction. This reading counters the three dominant scholarly views, which treat eternal recurrence either as a thought experiment,[333] a cosmological theory,[334] or an esoteric teaching.[335] Most recently, Huddleston follows the first of these views and assumes that the thought corresponds to the moment of affirming life's eternal recurrence,[336] while I argue that the thought, as a dubious and duplicitous metaphysical abstraction, retrospectively communicates a rapturous experience of time's unfathomable passage. I thus take as my point of departure the question posed by Pierre Klossowski. "How can a tonality of the soul, a *Stimmung*, become a thought, and how can the highest feeling — the *höchste Gefühl*, namely the Eternal Return — become the supreme

[333] See e.g. Arendt, *Life of the Mind: Willing* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 158–72. Clarke, *Truth and Philosophy*, ch. 8, and Nehamas, *Life as Literature*, ch. 5, develop this dominant scholarly view.
[334] E.g., Paul S. Loeb, *The Death of Nietzsche's Zarathustra* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), reduces eternal recurrence to physics and interprets the *Übermensch* as a time traveller literally capable of *willing backwards*. The cultural significance of this science fiction superhero points to a fantasy of cosmic self-mastery, which Loeb unfortunately reads unironically.
[335] This is the line taken by Strauss and his followers, concerning natural hierarchy. The doctrine's exoteric dimension corresponds to the crisis of radical historicism, namely the need to create new values in the face of nihilism, a task whose esoteric significance only the noble philosopher comprehends as one who draws on a creative strength that others lack, thereby displaying natural right. See e.g., Strauss, *Nietzsche's* Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 139, 161; Rosen, *Ancient and Moderns*, 196–202; Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching*, 255–63.
[336] Andrew Huddleston, "Affirmation, Admirable Overvaluation, and the Eternal Recurrence," in *Nietzsche on Morality and the Affirmation of Life*, ed. Daniel Came (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 131–153.

thought?"[337] The solution to time's riddle amounts to a sensual embrace of the present moment that dissolves the opposition between past and future and collapses eternity into the immanence of subjective experience, that is, the abyss of human finitude. Such happiness predicates permanence of time's unfathomable passage, its instantaneous death and rebirth from out of the abyssal Moment that constitutes the enigma of my contingent existence.[338] This sensual deification of the moment, whose epiphanic eruption endures only as a memory, is fundamentally decadent in that it affirms ephemerality as the highest good, but paradoxically so, since it predicates permanence of a moment that has irrevocably passed, lusting after its return. Since the notion of repetition approximates the qualitative permanence of ephemerality as an endless succession of renewed moments — a "succession of divine visions and redemptions in illusion" (NF-1885 2[110]) — each tending towards non-existence, the thought of eternal recurrence presents time's momentary character as one eternal event of self-repetition — "the most extreme *approximation of the world of becoming to one of being*" (NF-1886, 7[54]). My formulation reverses Deleuze's notion of "a subjectivity of the universe which is no

[337] Pierre Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997), 60.

[338] *Zarathustra* consistently alludes to the abyss of human finitude. "Mankind is a rope fastened between animal and overman — a rope over an abyss" (Z "Prologue," 4). "Peak and abyss — they are now merged as one!" (Z:III "The Wanderer"). "Courage also slays dizziness at the abyss; and where do human beings not stand at the abyss? Is seeing itself not — seeing the abyss?" (Z:III "On the Vision and Riddle," 1). "Oh sky above me, you pure, you deep one! You abyss of light! . . . To hurl myself into your height — that is *my* depth!" (Z:III "Before Sunrise"). "My abyss *speaks*, I have unfolded my ultimate depth to the light!" (Z:III "The Convalescent," 1). "Especially the human world, the human sea — toward *it* I now cast my golden fishing rod and say: open up, you human abyss!" (Z:IV "The Honey Sacrifice"). "You cheerful, dreadful noon abyss!" (Z:IV "At Noon"). "Does the abyss yawn before you here?" (Z:IV "On the Higher Man," 2). "Whoever sees the abyss, but with eagle's eyes, whoever *grasps* the abyss with eagle's talons: he has courage" (Z:IV "On the Higher Man," 4). "Or, like the eagle that long,/ Long gazes fixedly into abysses,/ Into *its own* abysses" (Z:IV "The Song of Melancholy," 3).

longer anthropomorphic but cosmic."[339] Rather, eternal recurrence results from projecting the subjective experience of time into a cosmic anthropomorphism. Such is Nietzsche's simulacrum of time, which reflects the metaphysical approximation between being and becoming that imbues our experience of ephemerality with the illusion of stability, with the enduring sensation of temporal continuity. For one who desires to cognize the sensation of time's passage — the possibility of its momentary succession — a wave of blinding elation throws one, like a "speck of dust" (GS 341), into the pathos of sublimity. Conversely, detached from its purely subjective ground and projected as a simulacrum of time, the doctrine of eternal recurrence is a cosmological abstraction that amounts to "a most unspeakable bore," as Ivan puts it in *The Brothers Karamazov*.[340]

Nietzsche's doctrine turns the blissful sensation of the moment, which corresponds to the phenomenalist character of Aristippos's sensationalism, into a cosmological cycle. He undermines the ideal status of the Scholastic *nunc stans* as a pale reflection of hedonistic pleasure, but only insofar as this pleasure, as the sensation of illusory permanence, at once forms the peak of metaphysics. On my reading, since Nietzsche's doctrine mimics Schopenhauer's formulation of time's eternal wheel, Brassier is not wrong to point out its *nunc stans* effect.

> Nietzsche's irrealism about becoming threatens to restrict eternal recurrence understood as repetition of the same to the repetition of the present, for if the being of becoming orbits around its affirmation then it makes no sense to invoke a

[339] Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 44.
[340] "You keep thinking about our present earth! But our present earth may have repeated itself a billion times; it died out, let's say, got covered with ice, cracked, fell to pieces, broke down into its original components, again there were waters above the firmament, then again a comet, again the sun, again the earth from the sun — all this development may already have been repeated an infinite number of times, and always the same way, to the last detail. A most unspeakable bore" (Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Random House, 1991), 644).

> past or future dimension of becoming subsisting in-itself independently of the moment of its affirmation. The only sense in which the past and future of becoming recur is as fixed correlates of the *nunc stans*, the eternal now, of affirmation. Consequently, the affirmation of recurrence would render all the moments of becoming equivalent only insofar as it reduced them to *this* perpetually subsisting moment of affirmation.[341]

Brassier's critique accentuates the doctrine's mytho-metaphysical incoherence, but if this manifests Nietzsche's intentional design, he successfully ensnares Brassier in the embarrassing situation of all pedantic atheists who seek to *refute myths* on logical grounds, defending against the suspicion that all conceptions of time are anthropic, all similarly tainted by human sense and contradiction. If Nietzsche conceives of eternal recurrence as a mytho-metaphysical macrocosm of the present moment that constitutes a riddle for subjective consciousness, this is to suggest that any theory about time is bound by an anthropic limit whose uncanny quality Nietzsche displays in the form of time's simulacrum.

Lange's account of Aristippos describes a purely subjective experience of sensuous harmoniousness, momentarily affirmed of a vital process that is fundamentally dissonant. My earlier discussion of Nietzsche's subjectivist interpretation of Heraclitus points us in a similar direction. Recall the immortal words of Heraclitus: "from tones at variance comes perfect attunement."[342] Nietzsche appropriates Heraclitus's philosophy along these lines, now expressing his own tragic affirmation of existence as an aesthetic phenomenon. "If you could imagine dissonance assuming human form — and what else is man? — this dissonance would need, to be able to live, a magnificent illusion which

[341] Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, 220.
[342] Kahn, *Thought of Heraclitus*, LXXV [D. 8].

would spread a veil of beauty over its own nature" (BT 25). This illustrates the illusory character of aesthetic affirmation, through which the dissonance of humanity may "appear justified" (BT 24) so as not to appear unbearable. This affirmation is a fleeting joy, a Romantic fit of youthful delirium serving as a *pharmakon* for suffering. The *Late Notebooks* attest to this, which, as we saw above, describe the metaphysical comfort taken in the illusion of primordial being that serves as an escape from the realm of becoming. The mere sensation of pleasure (albeit a particularly extreme form of it) grounds this illusion. Such pleasure arises from pain felt in relation to all existence and in turn justifies the whole. It is thus the projection of the sensations of pleasure and pain in relation to all existence that forms the delusion of metaphysical comfort, namely, "*to be oneself* that eternal joy in becoming — this joy that also even incorporates the *joy in destruction*" (TI "Ancients," 5).

Aaron Ridley, building on Young's analysis, points out a continuity between the above passage from *Twilight* and the tragic affirmation of *The Birth*.[343] He nonetheless takes this position to be fundamentally Schopenhauerian, a reading that I have been arguing against. The 1886 Preface to *The Birth* also exposes the delusional character of Romantic redemption, a criticism that is hard to square with Ridley's view that Nietzsche, despite himself, lapses into such a position, in which, as Blondel put it, "genius and art . . . are presented as means of access to the thing-in-itself."[344] Nietzsche would thus be guilty of precisely the sin that he admonishes in the following passage.

Is not your pessimist's book itself a piece of anti-Graecism and Romanticism,

[343] See Ridley, "Nietzsche on Tragedy."
[344] Blondel, *Body and Culture*, 36.

> something which itself "both intoxicates and befogs the mind," at any rate a narcotic, a piece of music even, of *German* music? . . . No, three times no, you young Romantics; it should *not* be necessary! But it is very probable that it will *end* like this, that *you* will end like this, namely "comforted," as it is written, despite your training yourselves for what is grave and terrifying, "metaphysically comforted," ending, in short, as Romantics end, namely as *Christians*. ("Attempt," 7)

Is Nietzsche, in the end, naïve about this glaring inconsistency, all the while having the foresight to predict its emergence in his thinking some two years in advance? Such commingling of heightened, apparently prophetic, self-awareness with sheer self-ignorance instead strikes an undeniably ironical tone. I thus read this inconsistency as a sort of performative contradiction, largely because tragic affirmation in *The Birth* already possesses the same ironical, contradictory quality, which I now discuss in relation to Nietzsche's oeuvre more broadly as well as to his personal experiences.

In *The Birth*, Nietzsche links the religious states of Dionysian intoxication with "the influence of narcotic drink" (BT 1), which had hallucinogenic properties.[345] He later writes, "theater and music as the hashish-smoking and betel-chewing of the European! Oh, who will tell us the whole history of narcotics? — It is nearly the history of 'culture,' our so-called higher culture!" (GS 86). Nonetheless, Nietzsche's personal reliance on an array of *pharmaka*, mainly chloral hydrate, seems to inform the euphoria of Dionysian affirmation in his writings. Nietzsche's lifelong relationship with narcotics, beginning with his use of morphine in 1868 following an injurious stint in the military, arguably underlies the Dionysianism first communicated in *The Birth*. Scant scholarly attention is

[345] See David B. Allison, *Reading the New Nietzsche: The Birth of Tragedy, The Gay Science, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, and On the Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 19.

paid to the importance of these biographical details, whose decadence Nietzsche lucidly dramatizes.[346] The following excerpt from Nietzsche's 1882 letter to Lou Salomé and Paul Rée communicates the narcissistic impoverishment of a reclusive addict, driven by his mental obsessions to the point of collapse. Such is the Dionysian price of his gift-giving virtue.

> Do not be upset by the outbreaks of my "megalomania" or of my "injured vanity" — and even if I should happen one day to take my life because of some passion or other, there would not be much to grieve about. What do my fantasies matter to you? (Even my truths mattered nothing to you till now). Consider me, the two of you, as a semilunatic with a sore head who has been totally bewildered by long solitude. . . . To this, I think, sensible insight into the state of things I have come after taking a huge dose of opium — in desperation. But instead of losing my reason as a result, I seem to have *come* to reason. Incidentally, I was really ill for several weeks. (BVN-1882 108)[347]

This letter exhibits the attitude of self-contempt that Nietzsche will memorably go on to portray in his portrait of the *ugliest human being*, the murderer of god, in *Zarathustra*. In the epic coda of his "Attempt at Self-Criticism," it is this attitude that Nietzsche urges both his readers *and himself* to laugh off, for it is a laughter that only Zarathustra embodies, having been delivered from the inner witness of God that the ugliest man had killed but whose shameful shadow he could not shake.

> No, you should first learn the art of comfort *in this world*, you should learn to *laugh*, my young friends, if you are really determined to remain pessimists. Perhaps then, as men who laugh, you will some day send all attempts at metaphysical solace to Hell — with metaphysics the first to go! Or to put it in the words of that Dionysiac monster who bears the name of *Zarathustra*:

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[346] On the extent of Nietzsche's drug abuse, see Allison, *Reading the New Nietzsche*, 115, 276; Peter Sjöstedt-Hughes, "Antichrist Psychonaut: Nietzsche and Psychedelics," in *Noumenatics: Metaphysics, Meta-ethics, Psychedelics* (Psychedelic Press, 2015), 59–74. On the role of *pharmaka* in ancient Greek religious ritual and their relevance in *The Birth*, see Michael A. Rinella, *Pharmakon: Plato, Drug Culture, and Identity in Ancient Athens* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), 73–102.
[347] Translated by Christopher Middleton, *Selected Letters*, 198.

> Lift up your hearts, my brothers, high, higher! And do not forget your legs! Lift up your legs, too, you fine dancers! Even better, stand on your heads!
>
> This crown of the laughing one, this rosary-crown: I myself set this crown on my head, I myself have sanctified my laughter. I could find no one else today strong enough to do so.
>
> Zarathustra the dancer, Zarathustra the light one, he who beckons with his wings, he who is ready to fly, beckoning to all the birds, prepared and ready, he who is blissfully frivolous.
>
> Zarathustra who speaks the truth, who laughs the truth, not impatient, not unconditional, one who loves leaps and deviations: I myself set this crown on my head!
>
> This crown of the laughing one, this rosary-crown; to you, my brothers, I throw this crown! I have sanctified laughter; you higher men, *learn* to laugh, I beseech you! (Z IV, "On the higher man")

In the context of his self-criticism of *The Birth*, Nietzsche has just denied that this work is fundamentally Romantic, but the significance of the passage from *Zarathustra* in relation to his denial remains unexplained. Nietzsche has just suggested that *The Birth* only *appears* to exhibit a Romantic, indeed Christian, form of metaphysical redemption, but emphatically does not: "No, three times no." Zarathustra uses this same expression to refute that "odd holy man and advocate of small people who testified to himself: 'I — am the truth'" (Z, "The Ugliest Human Being"), and Nietzsche now uses it in a similar context to refute the appearance of Christian truth, in this case as it applies to his position on redemption in *The Birth*.

What is the exact nature of Zarathustra's laughter, and how does this relate to Nietzsche's view that *The Birth* only appears to exhibit a form of Christian-Romantic redemption, without actually being committed to it? In *The Birth*, the tragic philosopher's vision of the primordial unity emerges as an antidote to the pessimistic wisdom of

Silenus, according to which life is not worth living. In *Gay Science*, it is in relation to this same pessimistic attitude, as expressed by Socrates (GS 340), that Zarathustra, the herald of eternal recurrence (formulated in GS 341), emerges (GS 342).[348] "*Incipit Tragoedia*, we read at the end of this suspiciously innocent book. Beware! Something utterly wicked and mischievous is being announced here: *incipit parodia*, no doubt" (GS P 1). Paralleling *The Birth*, Zarathustra's tragic affirmation of life's eternity emerges from the depths of a pessimistic incapacity to endure earthly suffering. This is Zarathustra's response to the nihilistic consequence of the death of God, first heralded in *Gay Science* (GS 125). Zarathustra heralds the death of God immediately before the *Übermensch*, a being who, as Porter notes, resembles the "over-hero" (*Über-Held*, Z:II "On the Sublime Ones") beheld by the soul in a dream-vision of Dionysus.[349] More importantly, for Porter, this dream-vision echoes the allusion to Lucretius in *The Birth*: "it was in dream that the magnificent figures of the gods first appeared before the souls of men; in dream the great image-maker saw the delightfully proportioned bodies of superhuman beings (*übermenschlicher Wesen*)" (BT 1).[350] The being who emerges from the death of God is a phantasmal substitution for the object we have just been deprived of.[351] This new divinity emerges with such propinquity, the replacement of one metaphysical illusion for another

[348] On the continuity between GS and Z, specifically concerning the relationship between Socrates's pessimism and Zarathustra's doctrine of eternal recurrence, see Loeb, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra*.
[349] See Z:II "On the Sublime Ones," n. 1.
[350] See Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 180 n. 10.
[351] As Horkheimer and Adorno put it in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 90: "just as, in the service of this higher self, the old ascetic ideals are extolled by Nietzsche as self-overcoming in the interest of developing 'dominant power,' so the higher self turns out to be a desperate attempt to rescue the God who was dead. In this Nietzsche renews Kant's endeavor to transform the divine law into an autonomous principle, to rescue European civilization from giving up the ghost in English skepticism." Of course, I take this to be Nietzsche's point, rather than an uncritical regression on his part.

occurs so rapidly, that the irony goes unnoticed. This points us to the absurd quality of Zarathustra's laughter, which I will elaborate. Nietzsche's exhortation to find comfort in this world gives rise to a laughter that sweeps us upside down and carries us away by yet another flight of metaphysical fancy.

Throughout Nietzsche's oeuvre, Dionysus is the sign of a phantasmal substitution for the loss of religious meaning. The impossible phantasm of Romantic redemption — the recollection of a blissful state that one subsequently demystifies and recognizes as an illusion — continues to haunt Nietzsche's mature writings, which he confirms in his treatment of *The Birth* in *Ecce Homo*, where he writes that his conception of the Dionysian in *The Birth* remains consistent throughout his writings. "Nobody had ever turned the Dionysian into a philosophical pathos before: *tragic wisdom* was missing" (EH "BT," 3). Nietzschean affirmation often remains unrecognized as the artful deployment of a phantasm. The duplicitous past tense of Zarathustra's retrospective judgement of *The Birth* in *Zarathustra*, "On the Afterworldly," alone distinguishes the phantasm described there from its mirror image in the frenzied, no less Romantic redemption of "The Sleepwalker Song," §10. Finally, is not the *Übermensch* yet another "delusion [cast] beyond man"? One that is "man-made and madness, like all gods!" (Z:I "On the Afterworldly"). These phantasmal *pharmaka* for suffering are duplicitous and double-edged, exposing the dark outlines of fantasy life in a serene daylight that, for the naive reader, may yet serve to conceal their deception. I thus read Zarathustra's *Übermensch* as a seductive fantasy whose purpose is to inoculate "us moderns" against our naïve belief in social-political progress. "Where is the lightning that would lick you with its tongue?

Where is the madness with which you should be *inoculated*? Behold, I teach you the overman: he is this lightning, he is this madness!" (emphasis added, Z "Prologue," 3).

My discussion so far has shown how, throughout Nietzsche's writings, the tragic affirmation of life is a corollary of the Romantic's despair with life. The one emerges from the other. In contrast, Young distinguishes three different stages of tragic affirmation in Nietzsche's development: *The Birth* affirms a form of metaphysical comfort that is consistent with Schopenhauer's metaphysics; the *Gay Science* affirms life's contingency; and *Twilight* affirms the totality of becoming that absorbs life's contingency.[352] I contend that Nietzsche grounds his distinct formulations of tragic affirmation in the same subjectivist stance already taken in *The Birth*, wherein we cannot get beyond appearances, nor do we have any access to their totality, but that we take delight precisely in such delusions. In my view, Young's notion that the affirmation of life in *Gay Science* concerns the contingency of individuality is suspect, since ample evidence suggests otherwise. But first let us recall that affirmation of the individual as we already find it in *The Birth*, with Nietzsche's citation of Schopenhauer. "Just as the boatman sits in his small boat, trusting his frail craft in a stormy sea that is boundless in every direction rising and falling with the howling, mountainous waves, so in the midst of a world full of suffering and misery the individual man calmly sits, supported by and trusting in the *principium individuationis*" (BT 1; WWP 1:410–411). In his commentary on this passage, Nietzsche views the individual *sub specie aeternitatis*: "one might even describe Apollo as the magnificent divine image (*Götterbild*) of the *principium*

[352] See Ridley, "Nietzsche on Tragedy."

individuationis, whose gestures and gaze speak to us of all the intense pleasure, wisdom and beauty of 'semblance'" (BT 1). Nietzsche's vision is positively redemptive in its elevation of the lone individual to the level of a divine image, whose pleasurable "semblance" surely amounts to a comforting disavowal of life's contingency, now eclipsed by immortality. Consider the striking similarities between this image and those in the *Gay Science*, for instance in *the horizon of the infinite* (GS 124): "Beside you is the ocean . . . at times it lies there like silk and gold and dreams of goodness. But there will be hours when you realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity" (GS 124). This connects to the *"humanity" of the future* (GS 337):

> He who is able to feel the history of man altogether as his own history feels in a *monstrous generalization* [*ungeheuren Verallgemeinerung*] all the grief of the invalid thinking of health, of the old man thinking of the dreams of his youth, of the lover robbed of his beloved, of the martyr whose ideal is perishing, of the hero on the eve after battle that decided nothing but brought him wounds and the loss of a friend. But to bear and to be able to bear this *monstrous sum* [*ungeheure Summe*] of all kinds of grief and still be the hero who, on the second day of battle, greets dawn and his fortune as a person whose horizon stretches millennia before and behind him, as the dutiful heir to all the nobility of past spirit, as the most aristocratic of old nobles and at the same time the first of a new nobility the likes of which no age has ever seen or dreamt: to take this upon one's soul — the oldest, the newest, losses, hopes, conquests, victories of humanity. To finally take all this in one soul and *compress it into one feeling* [*Ein Gefühl zusammendrängen*] — this would surely have to produce a happiness unknown to humanity so far: a *divine happiness* [*Gottes Glück*] full of power and love, full of tears and laughter, a happiness which, like the sun in the evening, continually draws inexhaustible riches, giving them away and pouring them into the sea, a happiness which, like the evening sun, feels richest when even the poorest fisherman is rowing with a golden oar! This *divine feeling* [*göttliche Gefühl*] would then be called — humanity! (emphasis added)

Taken together, these passages elevate the individual to a fantastical representation of humanity as a whole, while setting the "humanity" of the hero in question against the oceanic horizon of "infinity" no less. This "humanity" ironically amounts to an inhuman,

monstrous generalization, no doubt a metaphysical one, since it refers to the impossible apotheosis of all human feeling. A contingent, singular feeling of intense pleasure grounds this image of a universal being whose sensual origin is disavowed in the process of its phantasmal projection onto the mythical horizon of history. Building on the continuity of these passages, Nietzsche clarifies the status of infinity in *Our new "infinite."*

> Rather has the world become "infinite" for us all over again, inasmuch as we cannot reject the possibility that *it may include infinite interpretations*. Once more we are seized by a great shudder; but who would feel inclined immediately to deify again after the old manner this monster of an unknown world? And to worship the unknown henceforth as "the Unknowable One"? Alas, too many *ungodly* possibilities of interpretation are included in the unknown, too much devilry, stupidity, and foolishness of interpretation — even our own human, all too human folly, which we know. (GS 374)

Nietzsche's "unknown" [*das Unbekannte*] is a monstrous metaphysical abstraction that he passes off using the rhetoric of anti-metaphysical perspectivism. Blondel comments on the status of the unknown for Nietzsche: "there is no direct access to the in-itself and no rational essence to the world, the latter being merely the thought but non-totalizable totality of our perspectives and interpretations."[353] The "non-totalizable totality" of Nietzsche's new "infinite" accords with Kant's noumena understood as a limit concept — beyond which we have no access to things in themselves — for this infinity cannot be grasped by any human subject. Or rather, it could only be grasped by the heroic individual described in §337 of *Gay Science*, who embodies the totality of human experience as a mythical, "monstrous sum."

[353] Blondel, *Body and Culture*, 145.

Nietzsche's notion of infinity thus lapses into untenable metaphysical territory, not unlike his concept of eternal recurrence, which on a literal level denies the very contingency that it supposedly affirms. We find an enhanced image of Schopenhauer's life-affirming individual in §337 of *Gay Science*, which presents nothing less than the universal Idea of humanity on the horizon of history, redeeming it from the curse of contingency. In order to clarify the implicit metaphysics at play in Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics, let us consider §374 of *Gay Science* in more detail, which attributes to the perspectival character of existence an infinite variability.[354] Nietzsche contextualizes this in the preceding passage (GS 373), where he criticizes the naturalistic, mechanistic interpretation of existence on which the perspectival character of existence is lost in its quest for a univocal "world of truth" [*Welt der Wahrheit*]. Taking these two passages together, Nietzsche suggests that the above mechanistic interpretation not only deprives existence of meaning but of actual "sense,"[355] insofar as it denies the value-laden, perspectival quality of existence. A mechanistic world of truth, emptied of all interpretation and valuation, is ultimately nonsensical for human beings, who for Nietzsche are nothing other than their interpretations. The mechanistic interpretation of existence is itself delimited by the perspectival character of existence it denies, since it projects human abstractions onto nature while disavowing their anthropic origin. In this sense it is nihilistic nonsense: the interpretive drive of mechanistic science both seeks out

[354] This passage alludes to Lange's statement concerning the "world of appearances" whose "collective relations is conditioned by our organisation" and thus of which "a whole infinity of different interpretations is possible" (*History of Materialism*, 2:217). However, such perspectival infinity fails to free us from the metaphysical distinction between appearances and reality, even after this is recognized as a product of our understanding (2:218).
[355] The mechanistic "sense" [*Sinne*] of the world is literally *sinnlose* (senseless).

a reality that it invents and attempts to make the world conform to a truth that is, at bottom, world-denying.

Nietzsche makes a similar argument in the *Genealogy* (GM III.12), where he attacks the ascetic subject of "pure, will-less" knowledge, but one who in this case is banished from the world of truth. In §374 of *Gay Science*, Nietzsche seems to defend what Brian Leiter, for example, optimistically interprets as the scientific "objectivity" of perspectivism,[356] against Kant's noumenal unknown. Nietzsche's new "unknown" comprises the manifold of particular human wills, but this manifold, as an imaginary representation, effaces the uniquely subjective value of any given will. A Kantian logic thus haunts these passages from *Gay Science*, in which this *new "infinite"* amounts to a metaphysical totality, thereby reifying a concept of the in-itself that remains, in Kantian terms, inaccessible to us. While Nietzsche advises scientists in §373 to have "reverence for everything that lies beyond your horizon" — a very Kantian sounding command — in §374 he worries that this same reverence might become a religious impulse inclined "to worship the unknown henceforth as 'the Unknown one.'" Nietzsche goes on to do just this when he addresses Dionysus as the "unknown god" in *Dionysian Dithyrambs*, "Ariadne's Lament."[357]

In §374 of *Gay Science*, perspectivism gives rise to an infinite alterity of interpretation, which we should apparently revere without worshiping. This infinity surpasses the subjective limit of human experience, whose value it effaces by

[356] See Leiter, "Nietzsche's *Genealogy*"; *Nietzsche on Morality*, 211–227.
[357] Cf. Z:IV "The Magician," which contains the original lament.

incorporating it into an ungraspable totality composed of that which any unique perspective is not and could never encompass. How is this *new "infinite"* (whose scare quotes demand close attention) any different from the noumenal realm posited by Kant's apophatic asceticism, in which the "true" world (now composed of manifold interpretations) remains elusive? In the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche attacks a form of Christian asceticism that he locates in Kant's transcendental idealism. Was Kant guilty of worshiping the unknown? Or did he propose to treat it with precisely the kind of scientific reverence before the horizonal "beyond" that Nietzsche himself counsels? This is a false dilemma. Kant does both and Nietzsche replicates his inconsistency. His distance from Kant is evoked through a rhetoric that conceals their proximity to one another, mainly when it comes to the question of the horizon of scientific knowledge. If Nietzsche's *new "infinite"* adds up to another noumenal realm, as the passage seems to suggest, then these scare quotes make sense: they imply an ironical re-description and reification of Kant's transcendental idealism. This is ironical because the Kantian asceticism that Nietzsche attacks in the *Genealogy* may only *appear* to oppose the anti-ascetic position that he espouses in §374 of *Gay Science*.

Consider the ending of this passage. "Alas, too many *ungodly* possibilities of interpretation are included in the unknown, too much devilry, stupidity, and foolishness of interpretation — even our own human, all too human folly, which we know" (GS 374). What is un-ascetic about Nietzsche's attitude towards "our own human, all too human folly, which we know"? If Nietzsche's *new "infinite"* amounts to yet another piece of human folly, indeed, as a representation of its ungraspable totality, then reverence for

such a concept is tantamount to absurdity. The distinction between what is "known" (our all too human folly) and what is "unknown" (the totality of our folly) completely collapses: the concept of the "unknown," replete with the whole of human experience, becomes but another piece of our all too human folly. What is "unknown" is but a product of what is "known," so the distinction between them becomes senseless, something merely apparent, merely "perspectival." On this reading, Nietzsche undermines the very epistemic "objectivity" that he purports to enlighten us about, turning perspectivism on its head. Our "all too human folly" infects the world of interpretation, which is all that we know, a folly that forms the basis of our knowledge about the world and that becomes, in a moment of parodic absurdity, an object of scientific reverence. Such reverence degrades the empirical value of human life and manifests the asceticism of science that Nietzsche exposes by means of its ironical reification.

Zarathustra's laughter thus resembles the laughter in *All Too Human*. "Perhaps then we will recognize that the thing in itself is worth a Homeric laugh: that it *appeared* to be so much, in fact everything, and is actually empty, namely, empty of meaning." This statement disturbingly undermines the one that precedes it. "Rigorous science can really free us only to a small extent from this world of representation . . . insofar as it essentially cannot break the force of age-old habits of sensation: but it can quite gradually, step by step, elucidate the history of the genesis of that world as representation — and lift us at least momentarily above the whole process" (HH 16). Suffice it to say that, hovering above the world as representation, momentarily beholding the whole history of its genesis, wrapped in the halo of our totalizing scientific cognizance of the world, we

would indeed have been freed from this world, having ourselves become like the thing in itself, namely, emptied of meaning and worthy of Homeric laughter. The self-undermining logic of Nietzsche's dialectical sublations manifests a double consciousness at work in his writings, where the appearance of meaning is turned upside down in its ironical reversal. He thus develops a nonrational technique for critiquing dogmatism, surpassing Kant at his own game.

III. CONCLUSION

The duplicitous representations that we have glimpsed in Nietzsche's writings display the Kantian critique of metaphysics as a cultural symptom that not only fails to dispel dogmatism but is complicit in its production. A world liberated from the illusion of metaphysical redemption simply reverts to a world desperately in need of redemption. We find this need in the wake Kant's transcendental critique, which reifies a metaphysics of morality whose production pivots on the ineliminable distinction between noumena and phenomena. Nietzsche similarly puts his critique of metaphysics and morality in the service of a new Dionysian ideal, which scholars continue to read at face value. Nietzsche's Dionysian ideal demonstrates that the nihilistic evacuation of all ideals is an impossibility, which is ironical insofar as this is the unique aim of the "critical" phase of his philosophy. Morality can only be revalued, the light in which it is bathed recast, but it can never be extinguished. The extinction of morality is but an illusory prelude for its inevitable resurrection. Nietzsche's Dionysianism inverts Kant's distinction between appearance and reality while performing its own immanent self-critique, as Dionysian redemption is underscored by its parodic self-abasement. Nietzsche's philosophy is thus

an immanent critique of Kantian critique, which tears down ideals only to build them back up again, and fatefully so. In this light, the creative self-annihilation of the Dionysian artist or tragic philosopher, discussed in the first section of this chapter, is laid bare by its psychological reduction to a manifestation of the constitutive division within reflexive self-consciousness, having appeared to be so much, in fact everything. In the next chapter, I turn to the moral consequences of Nietzsche's tragic philosophy as these unfold in his reading of the Oedipus myth. This discussion illuminates how Nietzsche anachronistically projects a modern philosophical drama into the cultural landscape of Hellenic Greece.

CHAPTER 6
OEDIPUS, PHILOSOPHER

In knowledge mankind has a beautiful means of downfall. NF-1872 19[182]

To live alone you must be either an animal or a god — says Aristotle.
The third case is missing: you must be both — a philosopher . . . TI "Sayings," 3

In previous chapters, we have come to appreciate the philosophical significance with which Nietzsche imbues tragic drama. Tragic knowledge fixates on the contradiction between eternal being and phenomenal becoming, whose dialectical reconciliation is sustained only by the saving illusion of art. The tragic figure of Oedipus — whom Nietzsche dubs "the last philosopher" (NF-1872 19[131]) in a memorable passage from his early notebooks — serves as a good illustration of this theme and its relation to Nietzsche's music-making Socrates. I understand the dialectical thread of Sophocles's play, as presented in *The Birth*, to illuminate the thinking behind Nietzsche's inverted Platonism. While Porter's analysis of this inversion is insightful, his discussion only slightly touches on the moral consequences of Nietzsche's thought, which I have developed in previous chapters and will bring to a conclusion in this one.[358] The following discussion builds on Porter's insight that Dionysian intoxication is *produced* by the dreamworld of Apollonian imagination, while focusing specifically on how its effects seem to differ from those of the Apollonian imperative to "know thyself." The Dionysian is marked by a delight in the destruction of the moral order that coincides with the self-annihilating suffering of the tragic hero on stage. Central to this tragic vision is

[358] See Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 139, 144–47, 207–8 n. 2, 5. Overall, Porter, "Unconscious Agency," 180, holds that "Nietzsche's writings reveal an unexpected *critique* of violence, not its endorsement."

Nietzsche's inverted Platonism, wherein the moral-rational expectations of Socratic science are confounded by the unknowable abyss of nature out of which the need for myth arises. While Porter shows that Nietzsche's Dionysianism inverts Plato's metaphysical idealism by reinstating the Idea *as fiction*, this involves, on a deeper level, the dismantling of Plato's moral idealism.

The most conspicuous indication of this is Nietzsche's insistence on Oedipus's innocence. Though we could consider the play to exemplify Plato's view that one only commits evil out of ignorance, Nietzsche characterizes Oedipus's seeming evil as creative deeds apparently contributing to communal flourishing. This point follows from his interpretation of the myth as an allegory for Dionysian dismemberment and reunification. I draw on the philological insights of Jeffrey Rusten to elucidate this aspect of the play's allegorical dimensions, as well as those of Cynthia Patterson to illuminate the idea of Oedipus's innocence, emphasizing the play's cultural-historical uniqueness. I explain how for Nietzsche, Oedipus's innocence as a sacrificial hero marks him with the traits of a Dionysian *pharmakos*, a victim of ritual violence whose destruction produces beneficial effects. This notably anticipates René Girard's account of the play, which in turn helps to clarify Nietzsche's interpretation and connects back to my discussion in Chapter 1.

This chapter divides into three sections. I begin by outlining how *The Birth* displays a Christian-Romantic redemption narrative, characterized by the expectation of cultural renewal that takes the form of communal self-recognition, which Nietzsche projects into his representation of ancient Greek culture. He follows Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will, which is modelled after the Platonic distinction between the one

and the many, wherein the will as an indivisible unity is differentiated through the process of its phenomenal objectivization in appearances. Communal self-recognition is to be achieved in the recognition of the will's fundamental unity. In the next two sections, I analyze how this paradigm is both reflected in and subverted by Nietzsche's understanding of the Oedipus myth, which I argue exemplifies the major components of his tragic philosophy. Nietzsche characterizes Oedipus as a martyr whose self-destruction coincides with the revelation of the Dionysian *Urgrund*. I draw on Girard's analysis of Oedipus as a scapegoat figure to illuminate this characterization. In Girard's view, Judeo-Christian martyrdom overcomes the scapegoating violence of Dionysian sacrifice through pacifism. In this way, he opposes two of Nietzsche's foremost French interpreters, Deleuze and Bataille. While Deleuze does indeed sanitize the type of Dionysian sacrifice that Girard castigates Nietzsche for celebrating, I argue that Bataille demonstrates the complicity between Dionysian and Judeo-Christian martyrdom, thereby confronting the violence in a manner that Girard fails to appreciate. This is, I think, an important, underappreciated point about martyrdom that Nietzsche's understanding of sacrificial violence conveys.

I. GRAECO-ROMAN AND JUDEO-CHRISTIAN MYTHOLOGIES

Schopenhauer's ethics of moral enlightenment follows Plato's metaphysics of Absolute Presence, taken up in Plotinus's neo-Platonic ascent to the One. That the world of becoming deprived of true being, has as its source the unchanging, absolute presence of the One is paradoxical. How can the flux of the many emerge from an unchanging unity? In Chapter 2, we saw that for Schopenhauer this transcendent being refers to an

apophatic reality beyond the will, the saint's identity with which also coincides with her recognition of the unity of the *will to life* that forms the totality of nature. Nietzsche's primordial unity seemingly operates in both senses throughout *The Birth*, containing as it does a primordial contradiction between the world and the will, but also between the will and the One. In the sense of nature's fundamental unity, the paradox of the one and the many corresponds to the relationship between Schopenhauer's cosmic will and its phenomenal manifestations, which in §10 Nietzsche frames in terms of Dionysus-Zagreus's dismemberment by the Titans, and the expectation of his restored unity.

> [W]onderful myths recount that [Dionysus] was torn to pieces by the Titans when he was a boy and is now venerated in this condition as Zagreus; at the same time, it is indicated that his being torn to pieces, the genuinely Dionysiac *suffering*, is like a transformation into air, water, earth, and fire, so that we are to regard the state of individuation as the source and primal cause of all suffering, as something inherently to be rejected. From the smile of that Dionysus the Olympian gods were born, from his tears human beings. In this existence as a dismembered god, Dionysus has a double nature; he is both cruel, savage demon and mild, gentle ruler. . . [T]he epopts' roaring song of jubilation rang out to greet [the image of Dionysus restored to his original unity]. Only in the hope of this is there a gleam of joy on the countenance of a world torn apart and shattered into individuals; myth symbolizes this in the image of Demeter, sunk in eternal mourning, who knows no *happiness* until she is told that she can give birth to Dionysus *again*.

I further unpack this passage in the next section. For now, we see that Dionysus, the son of Demeter, here symbolizes the underlying unity of the will, whose restoration is desired through "the fundamental recognition that everything exists is a unity" (BT 10). Such recognition is achieved through Attic tragedy, which communicates the secret teaching of the Eleusinian Mysteries. According to Nietzsche's modern appropriation of the Mysteries, Dionysus's dismemberment symbolizes the fragmentation of the will in the phenomenal world of individuation. The one falls into the many and the many must return

to the one for life's wholeness to be restored, amounting to a form of communal self-recognition. The disharmonious world of phenomenal becoming is filled with the suffering that accompanies the will's individuation, wherein human beings fail to recognize the will's unity.

For Schopenhauer, the strife of sexual reproduction, as the affirmation of the will to live, manifests the will's phenomenal dismemberment while concealing the underlying unity of the will above and beyond the appearance of its individuation. "[T]he begotten presents itself to the begetter, distinct from the latter in the phenomenon, but in itself, or with respect to the Idea, identical with it. . . . As thing in itself, the will of the begetter and that of the begotten are not distinct; for only the phenomenon, not the thing in itself, is subject to the *principium individuationis*" (WWP 1:383–84). For Schopenhauer, religious myth communicates the underlying unity of the will and the origin of its fragmentation through the sin of procreation. In Judeo-Christian terms, the fall of Adam represents the will's dispersal into the realm of individuation, representing sexual gratification and its perpetuation of the painful cycle of reproduction and death that characterizes the will to life in its generational becoming. In Graeco-Roman terms, Persephone's bondage to the underworld results from having eaten the pomegranate seed proffered by Hades, which Schopenhauer compares to the fall of Adam. Presumably, Persephone's union with Demeter would thus evoke the identity of the will in its self-recognition, paralleling Adam's union with the Savior, which signifies the will's redemption from sin. While Schopenhauer identifies sexual gratification as humanity's original sin, it is far from being the worst sin. While sexual union transgresses the boundaries of individuation,

essentially violating them in a pleasurable way, crimes like murder transgress these boundaries in painful ways that stem from the increasing selfishness of the will. In such acts, the will in itself, "in self-conflict by the very fact of its vehemence, is lacerating itself. . . . *Wrong* . . . is most completely, truly, and blatantly expressed *in concreto* in cannibalism. This is the most explicit, most evident species, the horrific image of the greatest self-conflict of will on the highest level of its objectification, the human being" (WWP 1:391). At the point of its highest self-conflict, the will literally tears itself to pieces and devours itself. This most horrific image is of course replicated in the *sparagmos* (dismemberment) of Dionysus by the Titans, who also commit *omophagia*, the devouring of his raw flesh.

The parallel that Schopenhauer draws between Graeco-Roman and Judeo-Christian mythologies is pertinent to *The Birth*. A common trope in Romanticism is the association between Dionysus and Christ, as Jürgen Habermas discusses. "Dionysus is supposed to return some day, reborn through the mysteries . . . He is distinguished from all the other Greek gods as the one who is absent, whose return is still to come. The parallel to Christ was evident; he, too, died and left behind bread and wine until he would himself return."[359] This association signifies the expected return of the god who has departed and points towards the messianic horizon of humanity's historical redemption, manifested in communal self-recognition. This Romantic expectation of a lost unity to be

[359] Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 91. See also Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, 211. Max L. Baeumer provides an extensive account of this connection in Romantic literature and its influence on Nietzsche in "Nietzsche and the Tradition of the Dionysian," in *Studies in Nietzsche and the Classical Tradition*, eds. James C. O'Flaherty, Timothy F. Sellner, and Robert M. Helm (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976), 165–89.

restored is memorably embodied by the initiates of Dionysian wisdom in *The Birth*, whose hope is for "the rebirth of Dionysus" (BT 10). In a related note from 1870, Nietzsche tells us that "individuation is the *martyrdom* of the god [Dionysus]" (NF-1870 7[61]). Both Dionysus and Christ are violently sacrificed and promise a redemptive vision of eternal life. I note that the *omophagia* of Dionysus parallels the ritual consumption of Christ's salvific body in the form of the Eucharist. This ritual symbolizes the incorporation of the divinity's flesh, as his followers partake in a communion with their god in the wake of his departure and in the expectation of his return. Both deities are associated with the ritual consumption of wine, the *pharmakon* that symbolizes the god's salvific presence. In a rough combination of the two myths, we might say that the greatest sin, the sacrifice of god, contains the seed of its transfiguration that would redeem humanity from its fallen state by virtue of the sacred power exuded by the *pharmakos*.

For Schopenhauer, spiritual redemption is a largely private affair, and religious self-recognition may be achieved, for instance, through the compassion of the saint. He is entirely pessimistic about the tide of history, which manifests the will's painful striving and cannot ultimately be said to make any real progress. Redemption is not to be found in history (WWP 2:495–503). This contrasts with the Romantic conception of history as the circuitous movement from fall to redemption, a *felix culpa*[360] paralleling the return of the many to the one that is achieved in communal self-recognition. Nietzsche maps Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will onto the Romantic expectation of humanity's communal reconciliation with nature. "Not only is the bond between human beings

[360] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 208–09, 211–12, 217, 308.

renewed by the magic of the Dionysiac, but nature, alienated, inimical, or subjugated, celebrates once more her festival of reconciliation with her lost son, humankind" (BT 1). I discussed the Judeo-Christian overtones of this passage earlier. Here we see how the Romantic vision of history assimilates the theological vision of the prodigal son. Adam is saved and united with Christ as the prodigal son returns to his father. This is a prominent Romantic model for humanity's reconciliation with nature. [361] Unlike Schopenhauer, nature is taken to be fundamentally good and even grounds a teleological movement of cultural-historical progress. Humanity's lost wholeness is to be regained when the world of classical antiquity is culturally renewed and the unity of history is finally realized. The messianic horizon of history promises a newly unified culture, reflecting a transfigured vision of classical antiquity as the redemption of the past in the future.

As we have seen, Nietzsche's narrative combines aspects of romanticism and pessimism in his vision of Dionysian redemption, which he further relates to Christianity. We saw that Nietzsche singles out Oedipus, in his most extensive portrait of any particular tragic figure, to inaugurate "the prelude to the victory-hymn of the saint" (BT 9). Nietzsche's depiction of Oedipus's "infinite transfiguration" (BT 9) in *Oedipus at Colonus* alludes back to his earlier discussion of Raphael's *Transfiguration* (BT 4). The basis for this emphatically Christian treatment of Sophocles's play is the passive quality of Oedipus's suffering that his unconscious subjection to fate displays, in contrast to Prometheus's intentional, active theft from Mount Olympus. Oedipus, specifically in light of his paradoxical, abject nobility in *Oedipus at Colonus*, is read as a martyr who attains

[361] Ibid., 194. See chs. 3–5.

the highest degree of religious dignity through his unjust treatment. This passivity is characteristic of the *pharmakos* — whose sanctity is recognized through his exposure to the shame and humiliation of the community — and is associated with the Judeo-Christian tradition. Nietzsche identifies *active sin*, exemplified by Prometheus, with the manly heroism of Aryan culture, while identifying passive sin, exemplified in the myth of the Fall, with the feminine seduction of Semitic culture. He plays upon the anti-Semitic, Aryan fantasy endemic to German philology.[362] In *The Birth*, Dionysus embodies both Semitic and Aryan characteristics, since both Oedipus and Prometheus are his masks.[363] This parallels the messianic horizon evoked by the Romantics and their association between Dionysus and Christ.

Following the cultural decline of tragedy in later antiquity, Nietzsche refers to the "mocking Lucians of the ancient world" who "chase after the discoloured, ravaged flowers [of tragic myth] scattered by all the winds that blow" (BT 10). This alludes to Lucian's parodic portrayal of a crucified Prometheus.

> The only possibility of something like a "crucified god" appearing on the periphery of the ancient world of the gods was in the form of a malicious parody, intended to mock the arbitrariness and wickedness of the father of the gods on Olympus, who had now become obsolete. This happens in the dialogue called *Prometheus*, written by Lucian, the Voltaire of antiquity.[364]

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[362] Porter, *Philology of the Future*, 273–86.
[363] Burnham and Jesinghausen, *Birth of Tragedy*, 83–85, note the association between Oedipus and Christ. However, they identify Prometheus alone, as an Aryan figure, with Dionysus, and further deny any anti-Semitic overtones in this passage. My reading agrees with Porter's on this point, wherein Nietzsche's Dionysianism ambivalently mixes an anti-Semitic Aryan myth with its Semitic counterpart.
[364] Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 11.

In the context of *The Birth*, this marks the transformation of tragedy into parody in the wake of "the twilight of the gods" (BT 9), an event that signals the cultural victory of secular science and in turn fuels the Romantic yearning for the return of the gods that marks the modern horizon of cultural renewal. Nietzsche's allusion to Lucian anachronistically projects the modern conflation of Graeco-Roman and Judeo-Christian mythologies back onto the ancient satirist, thereby exposing the Romantic vision of the future as the mirror of an idealized ancient past, while simultaneously ridiculing the anti-Semitic fantasy of an Aryan Prometheus, who suffers the same fate as Christ but in parodic form.

Nietzsche's portrait of Oedipus, who embodies the association between Dionysus and Christ as *pharmakoi*, displays the Romantic conflation of Graeco-Roman and Judeo-Christian mythologies. Oedipus's embodiment of this association also prevails in Girard's analysis of the scapegoat. Nietzsche's portrayal of Oedipus as *pharmakos* becomes an extensive allegory for the circular movement of the one's dispersal into the many and their subsequent return to the one, following the Platonic framework of Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will that structures the narrative architecture of *The Birth*. However, since Nietzsche inverts Plato's metaphysics, subverts Schopenhauer's pessimism, ironically mimics the Romantics, and parodies the philologists, what are we finally to make of Nietzsche's portrait of Oedipus? I draw on the Oedipal allusions dispersed throughout *The Birth* to make the case that this figure harbors all of these impossible tensions and dissolves them — into ignorance. The tragic knowledge that Oedipus communicates to the community at large, namely, that it is blind to itself, ironically

replicates the Socratic dialectic between ignorance and knowledge, since the recognition of ignorance occurs through the collapse of reason rather than its harmonious consummation. Oedipus's tragic self-recognition coincides with his self-abasement. Sophocles's drama guides the process of attaining self-knowledge by a dialectical movement whose climax violently impales upon the irrational, immoral depths of human existence.

II. THE PHILOSOPHER KING

A connection between Oedipus and Socrates may sound strange, but it is one that Nietzsche himself draws.[365] In his 1870–71 notebook, Nietzsche remarks on

> the deepest affinity of this Socrates with the Platonic Idea of the Hellenic. If we merely take a closer look at the mythical representatives of the Hellenic, the greatest of these figures recall nobody else but Socrates. He is at once Prometheus and Oedipus, but Prometheus before his theft of fire and Oedipus before he solved the riddle of the Sphinx. Through him is inaugurated a new reflection on these two representatives. (NF-1870 8[19])[366]

To appreciate the new reflection on the tragic figures of the Hellenic stage that Nietzsche connects to Socrates we should recall the reference to Oedipus in §1 of *Beyond*, which explicitly concerns "the problem of the value of truth" — "*why not rather* untruth?" This problem "stepped before us — or was it we who stepped before the problem? Who of us here is Oedipus? Who the Sphinx? It is a rendezvous, so it seems, of questions and question marks." The Socratic pursuit of truth is finally confronted with the problem of the value of truth, as we saw in previous chapters. Nietzsche explicitly identifies this confrontation with the figure of Oedipus, an identification that he repeats in §230 of

[365] Euben, *Tragedy of Political Theory*, 126–27, makes a similar connection in his discussion of Oedipus.
[366] Translated by Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 200 n. 2. See ibid., 102–05, 107, 197, 203 n. 2.

Beyond. The allusion to Oedipus in §1 asks whether the problem of the value of truth — for Nietzsche, the problem of science — is one that *we* boldly come to confront on our heroic path to self-knowledge and intellectual enlightenment, or whether this problem now confronts *us* as its unsuspecting *victims*. The cultural problem of science, according to the symbolism, is identified with the Sphinx.

The riddle posed by the Sphinx runs as follows: "'What walks on four legs at morning, two legs at noon, and three legs at evening?'" Oedipus replies correctly: "'Man': on four legs as an infant, upright at noon, and with a stick in old age."[367] The riddle concerns the universal form of human finitude, the temporal transformation from infancy to adulthood to old age. While Oedipus solves the riddle through abstract reasoning, perceiving in it the universal truth of human mortality, he fails to apply this knowledge to his own life. His cleverness precludes wisdom. While the Sphinx appears to be an external obstacle that Oedipus must conquer, her identity is in an obscure way bound up with Oedipus's own. The riddle, when directly addressed to Oedipus, concerns his fate alone. It is Oedipus who was abandoned at birth, who flees his fate as an adult, and who is destined to rely upon a walking stick as a blind old man. It turns out that the riddle, while in one sense concerning the fate of humankind, in another sense concerns the lonely fate of Oedipus as foretold by the oracle, amounting to a premonition that Oedipus, lacking self-knowledge, fails to heed. From this point of view, the Sphinx can no longer be understood simply as an external obstacle, nor can the significance of her

[367] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Early Notebooks*, eds. Raymond Guess and Alexander Nehamas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), n. 65.

riddle be reduced that of an abstract problem, being instead a hieroglyph representing the obscure truth of Oedipus's singular identity.

In §1 of *Beyond*, Nietzsche suggests that, like Oedipus's inability to recognize the personal significance of the Sphinx's riddle, we moderns fail to recognize the cultural significance of the problem of science. We misunderstand the problem of science when we fail to recognize its cultural significance, its significance for us. Instead, we approach this "problem of truth" as an impersonal riddle, the unriddling of which will give us access to universal knowledge, as if this problem were the gateway to the truth about nature, rather than the enigmatic hieroglyph of our own cultural conundrum. This problem (the value of science) appears to us as an external obstacle to be conquered, when in reality it arises from a lack of self-knowledge with which, unbeknownst to ourselves, we are confronted. Nietzsche conceives the Oedipus myth in modern terms. The scientific problem confronted by Oedipus in the form of a riddle takes on the proportions of the problem of science Western culture confronts. Nietzsche's anachronistic allusion implies a startling duplicity. Solving the problem of science appears to be Oedipus's heroic calling, and yet he finds himself a victim of this problem's power to humiliate his self-worth. The Sphinx stands at the gateway beyond which heroic glory and ignominious defeat ultimately coincide. The Sphinx's monstrous duality, being both beast and human, symbolizes this duplicity.

Blondel notes the Nietzschean significance of Oedipus's epistemic quest as it relates to the aim of genealogical analysis. Genealogy involves an uncovering of humanity's base qualities beneath the artifices of philosophical knowledge. "As is

confirmed by the allusion to the Sphinx in Oedipus in §1 of *Beyond*, genealogical research is an enquiry into the physiological and biological, or more precisely sexual, origins of concepts and knowledge." [368] We can link the significance of this allusion to Oedipus in *Beyond* to Nietzsche's discussion of this myth in *The Birth*. Read in this light, his allusion to the myth is also a striking self-reference. In *The Birth*, Socrates had not solved the problem of the value of truth but had been its unwitting instigator through the outsized expectations with which he loaded the idea of knowledge of truth. As the "archetype and progenitor" of "*theoretical man*, equipped with the highest powers of understanding and working in the service of science" (BT 18), Socrates was the progenitor of science's ascetic ideal. In this way, Socrates is Oedipus before he solved the riddle of the Sphinx, the riddle of the value of truth finally posed by science but for a long time concealed beneath the priestly mask of asceticism.

The morally dubious character of science is, like the production of culture itself, consistently justified by means of the transfiguring mirror of the Apollonian ideal. Science is morally dubious in its headlong dive into the abyss of nature, violating it for the sake of knowledge. This is exemplified by Bacon's experimental ethos,[369] which Nietzsche's rhetoric mimics. "How else could nature be forced to reveal her secrets, other than by victorious resistance to her, i.e. by some unnatural event?" (BT 9). Nietzsche's glorified account of Oedipus's crimes parallels his description of scientific investigation in *Dawn*. "We investigators are, like all conquerors, discoverers, seafarers, adventurers,

[368] Blondel, *Body and Culture*, 19.
[369] See the debate between Carolyn Merchant, "'The Violence of Impediments.' Francis Bacon and the Origins of Experimentation," *Isis* 99, no. 2 (2008): 731–760, and Peter Pesic, "Proteus Rebound, Reconsidering the 'Torture of Nature,'" *Isis* 99, no. 2 (2008): 304–317.

of an audacious morality and must reconcile ourselves to being on the whole evil" (D 432). The ironical reversal of this passage reveals how the scientific investigator would be reconciled with his evil nature, namely, by conceiving of himself as virile conqueror, bold adventurer, and heroic transgressor, in short, as a noble master. This represents the disavowed fantasy of the scientific investigator, one that "theoretical man" is far from being reconciled with, laying claim to the disinterested pursuit of objective knowledge that justifies his questionable inquiries into nature. Like Oedipus, "scientific man" is confronted with his own monstrous reflection in the form of the Sphinx — who in this context embodies the problem of the value of truth confronting modern science — and yet for all his genius he fails to recognize himself in the solution to the riddle, in the abysmal fate that he violently sows and that his idealized self-conception conceals from consciousness.

This lack of self-recognition accompanies Oedipus's moral stature as the ruler of Thebes, its riddle-solving Philosopher King. As Girard notes, "Oedipus owes his glory to the solution of an objective riddle, external in principle to what he is. His answer to the Sphinx applies only to man in general. The hero believes himself to be detached, scientific, positive. But reality constantly gives him the lie; hence the anger and fear of conspiracies which lead him to set himself up as an oracle."[370] Oedipus, as the saviour of Thebes, also brings with him the pestilence that will blight it. In searching out the criminal cause of the pestilence, he discovers that it is himself. From the beginning of

[370] René Girard, *Oedipus Unbound: Selected Writings on Rivalry and Desire*, ed. Mark R. Anspach (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 38.

Oedipus the King, lowly criminality taints his kingly stature. In his ignorance, Oedipus ironically curses himself as king and criminal at once. "If with my knowledge he lives at my hearth/ I pray that I myself may feel my curse" (ll. 250–51). Having murdered his father and taken his royal seat, Oedipus at once curses and defends himself as the responsible party. "Since I am now the holder of [Laius's] office,/ and have his bed and wife that once was his/ . . . I fight in his defence as for my father, and I shall try all means to take the murderer" (ll. 259–65). From these lines we see how Oedipus's lack of self-recognition ironically both establishes and undermines his moral authority; he unwittingly directs his self-righteous curses against himself.

Nietzsche's allusion to the Sphinx in "Greek State" further illuminates the relationship between Socrates, Oedipus, and Prometheus, the last of whom is identified with the "promoter of culture."

> We now have the general concept for categorizing the feelings the Greeks had in relation to work and slavery. Both were looked on by them as a necessary disgrace that aroused the feeling of *shame*, at the same time disgrace and necessity. In this feeling of shame there lurks the unconscious recognition that these conditions are *required* for the actual goal. In that *necessity* lies the horrifying, predatory aspect of the Sphinx of nature who, in the glorification of the artistically free life of culture (*Kultur*), so beautifully presents the torso of a young woman. Culture (*Bildung*), which is first and foremost a real hunger for art, rests on one terrible premise: but this reveals itself in the nascent feeling of shame. (GSt, p. 166)

Science, no less than art, flourishes on the shameful base of slavery. In Nietzsche's thought Oedipus (like Prometheus) represents the tragic movement of the Socratic man of science who, having solved the riddle of the Sphinx, is confronted with the shameful origins of culture, namely, that its hierarchical arrangement rests upon the perverse domination of nature by means of the power, violence, and degradation of slavery. Girard

describes the plague that afflicts Thebes as "a euphemism for this state of things that condemns men to the deadly strife of enemy brothers."[371] This refers to the violence of war but can also, in the context of Nietzsche's discussion in "The Greek State," be extended to that of slavery. These are the conditions of the state's "ignominious birth" that give rise to its "salvation in appearance (*im Scheine*), in the mirror of the genius" (GSt, p. 169). The political dimension of *The Birth*, according to which slavery is the Dionysian substratum giving rise to Apollonian appearances, cannot be ignored in light of this essay, which communicates Nietzsche's explicit attempt to unveil what he regards as the esoteric truth of Plato's ideal state.[372] Aside from the fact that Plato places the genius of wisdom at the head of that state, rather than the creative genius that Nietzsche associates with the Olympian realm of artistic beauty, Nietzsche implies that Plato finally affirms the necessity of slavery in precisely the form that Nietzsche has been describing it. "This external, almost accidental gap ought not to prevent us from recognizing, in the total concept of the Platonic state, the wonderfully grand hieroglyph of a profound *secret study of the connection between state and genius*, eternally needing to be interpreted: in this preface we have said what we believe is fathomed in this secret script" (GSt, p. 173). Drawing on the consistency of Nietzsche's imagery of the Sphinx, the genius of the state is like the torso of a beautiful woman whose lower body is not only that of a murderous beast of prey but also that of the fructifying womb of cultural achievement. It is Plato's noble lie, which conceals the unnatural perversity of the state's caste system in order to

[371] Girard, *Oedipus Unbound*, 72.
[372] On the theme of Nietzsche and Plato's esotericism, see Lampert, "Nietzsche and Plato," 205–19.

justify an Olympian realm of noble leisure, that marks the secret connection between genius and state. Given Nietzsche's conclusion, it becomes evident that for him Plato's politics remain indelibly tyrannical. Nietzsche espouses this view throughout his career.

While the tyranny of Plato's noble ruler is expressly concealed as a secret, Sophocles exposes such tyranny. Oedipus, as a tyrannical "philosopher king," is a tragically immoral figure, rather than one whose tyranny is morally justified. The public exposure of the noble ruler's inner corruption is of philosophical significance, inasmuch as it undermines Plato's moral-intellectual idealization of the philosopher king. In *The Birth*, the ascending mood of aesthetic affirmation is inextricably bound up with the skepticism through which metaphysical speculation collapses into an abyss of ignorance, provoking pessimism's nausea of existence. These oscillating moods dramatically feed into one another, reflecting what Girard aptly describes as the "'cyclical' temperament" of Oedipus. "[S]ometimes the hero recalls his epic feats, praising himself to the skies; at other times he becomes discouraged and plunges into the darkest pessimism. The two themes of Fortune and of cyclothymia converge in the hero's anxiety about his birth. Oedipus is forever wanting to know whether he is the son of a king or a slave."[373] The theme of cyclothymia, that is, the temperamental oscillation between elevated and depressed moods, reflects that between optimism and pessimism. This illuminates the significance of the relationship between Socrates and Oedipus, "the last philosopher." In the above notebook entry from 1870, Nietzsche describes Socratic optimism as paradoxically embedded in the anti-Socratic art of Attic tragedy. The Socratic tendency

[373] Girard, *Oedipus Unbound*, 70.

predates the historical Socrates in the figure of Oedipus prior to solving the Sphinx's riddle, who embodies the philosopher's optimistic search for truth. Porter emphasizes this point. "Socrates, after all, 'is simultaneously Prometheus and Oedipus,' prior to their tragic undoing, which is to say, he is their tragic precondition."[374] Oedipus's tragic self-discovery as he uncovers his own crimes represents the wreckage of Socratic optimism.[375] His desire for truth and propensity for abstract reasoning — exemplified in his ability to solve the Sphinx's famous riddle — leads to his ruination.

Nietzsche links the ruination of Oedipus with his ability to penetrate the secrets of nature. "I see this insight expressed in that terrible trinity of Oedipus' fates: the same man who solves the riddle of nature — that of the double-natured Sphinx — must also destroy the most sacred orders of nature by murdering his father and becoming his mother's husband" (BT 9). As a hero of the tragic stage, the gods punish Oedipus for transgressing the boundary dividing the human and divine realms of justice: he commits a crime against nature and suffers for it. While the measured justice of Apollo protects the sphere of individual integrity by delimiting it, the hero's Dionysian crimes obliterate his integrity by transgressing these limits. "The individual, with all his limits and measure, became submerged here in the self-oblivion of the Dionysiac condition and forgot the statutes of Apollo. *Excess* revealed itself as the truth; contradiction, bliss born of pain, spoke of itself from out of the heart of nature" (BT 4). The violence of transgression reveals the

[374] Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 105.
[375] Having been abandoned by his royal parents at birth, Oedipus unknowingly murders his father, later taking his place as the king of Thebes, and marries his mother, with whom he has children. His crimes effect a divine curse that blights the city of Thebes with a plague. Oedipus, blindly driven onward by his noble quest for knowledge, discovers himself to be the culprit. This leads him to gouge out his eyes with his (now dead) wife's brooches.

fundamental Greek antagonism between humans and gods, one which Attic tragedy, in *The Birth*, overcomes in aesthetic rapture. The hero's transgression both obliterates and transfigures his human identity, an Apollonian appearance whose Dionysian destruction is sensually intoxicating. Oedipus's horrific crimes plunge the moral order into an abyss, revealing the overwhelming Dionysian substratum of nature by violating the integrity of the hero's Apollonian individuality. Oedipus's self-idealization as a moral individual is destroyed by his insight into the abyssal depths of his crimes, which obliterate the distinction between self and other, exemplified by the acts of incest and patricide. The hero commits these acts against those through whom he emerges into the world and from whom his tragic identity cannot be extricated. Attic tragedy sanctifies the suffering that results from the hero's crimes, inciting feelings of repulsion and horror in order to transform these into the sublime experience of Dionysian "metaphysical oneness" (BT 9). Speaking of Sophocles's Oedipus, Nietzsche writes:

> Wisdom, the myth seems to whisper to us, and Dionysiac wisdom in particular, is an unnatural abomination: whoever plunges nature into the abyss of destruction by what he knows must in turn experience the dissolution of nature in his own person. "The sharp point of wisdom turns against the wise man; wisdom is an offence against nature": such are the terrible words the myth calls out to us. But, like a shaft of sunlight, the Hellenic poet touches the sublime and terrible Memnon's Column of myth so that it suddenly begins to sound — in Sophoclean melodies! (BT 9)

The unsettling symbolism of Oedipus's crimes conceals the dialectical knowledge of tragic wisdom — a dialectic that concludes in an ephemeral rapturous reconciliation of optimism and pessimism. The Dionysian negation of Apollonian appearances reveals this conclusion, a negation achieved through the poet's representation of Oedipus's primordial pain.

From the beginning, the suffering of Oedipus relates to that of the polis. "My spirit groans/ for city and myself and you at once" (ll. 63–64). The play was produced around 426 BCE, in the midst of the Peloponnesian war. Athens, having become the seat of the Greek colonial empire, was ravaged by plague. Girard interprets the hero as a scapegoat figure who takes responsibility for the suffering of the community, providing it with a religious meaning. From this perspective, the play manifests the scapegoating mechanism embedded in the value system of a war-torn colonial empire. The assimilative power of the hegemon infects the polis with the violent erasure of difference. Oedipus, at once a lame, stigmatized stranger marked by social difference, and their king, as a paradoxical figure takes responsibility for the plague's monstrous indifference to social difference, its total erasure. We can relate this insight to Nietzsche's interpretation of the hero's mythical significance, rooted in the distinction between reality and appearances. The following comment from Girard can be fruitfully understood in the context of Nietzsche's analysis in *The Birth*. "Parricide and incest serve openly as the intermediaries between the individual and collective; these crimes are so oblivious of differences that their influence is contagious to the whole society. In Sophocles' text we establish that to lack difference is to be plague-stricken."[376] Oedipus's crimes annihilate the natural differences that circumscribe familial identities. Girard links this circumscription with the power of the plague, which annihilates the difference between Oedipus and the polis, between the individual and the collective. Oedipus is held responsible for the collective

[376] René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvone Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 25.

suffering of the polis and his expulsion results in its restored unity.[377] The difference between individual and collective fuels the drama prior to the unveiling of Oedipus's true identity, a drama that plays upon the difference between reality and appearances. For Nietzsche, this drama manifests the dialectical antagonism between Apollo and Dionysus; the annihilation of difference coincides with the self-destruction of the tragic hero, whereby as spectators we experience the "primal joy" of returning to "the womb of the Primordial Unity" (BT 22), an imaginary appearance. Yet when Oedipus brings to light the hidden cause of the city's pollution and exposes the shameful truth hidden behind the veil of appearances, this reversal of appearances remains deceptive. Nietzsche's primordial unity, the one true reality, is yet another appearance that serves to conceal the nascent shame of public exposure beneath the intoxication of tragic joy. The spectacle of tragic drama evokes a Dionysian doubling of Apollonian appearances, creating the illusion of having transcended them.

From an Apollonian perspective, Oedipus is guilty, and yet he only follows the Apollonian imperative to "know thyself."[378] Insofar as Oedipus remains bound to his fate from birth and is unconscious of the criminal nature of his own actions, he is perversely innocent. We can only understand the nobility of Oedipus from a Dionysian perspective, one that undermines the integrity of the Apollonian imperative and its counterpart in Socratic rationality, namely, in the famous injunction to the effect that "the unexamined

[377] See Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, ch. 3.
[378] On the connection between Oedipus and the *daimonon* Apollo, see Euben, *Tragedy of Political Theory*, 116, 125–26.

life is not worth living" (*Apology*, 38a). The Dionysian undermining of individual integrity nonetheless follows a rigorous logic, as Nietzsche observes.

> The noble human being does not sin, so [Sophocles] wants to tell us; every law, all natural order, indeed the moral world, may be destroyed by his actions, yet by these very actions a higher, magical circle of effects is drawn which found a new world on the ruins of the old one that has been overthrown. . . . [Sophocles] first shows us a wonderfully tied trial-knot which the judge slowly undoes, strand by strand, to bring great harm upon himself; the genuinely Hellenic delight in this dialectical solution is so great that an air of sovereign serenity pervades the whole work, blunting all the sharp, horrifying preconditions of the trial. We encounter this same serenity in *Oedipus at Colonus*, but here it is elevated into infinite transfiguration; in this play the old man, stricken with an excess of suffering, and exposed, purely as a *suffering being*, to all that affects him is contrasted with the unearthly serenity which comes down from the sphere of the gods as a sign to us that in his purely passive behavior the hero achieves the highest form of activity, which has consequences reaching far beyond his own life, whereas all his conscious words and actions in his life hitherto have merely led to his passivity. Thus the trial-knot of the story of Oedipus, which strikes the mortal eye as inextricably tangled, is slowly unravelled — and we are overcome with the most profound human delight at this matching piece of divine dialectic. (BT 9)

Oedipus violently reverses the order of nature, negating his own moral integrity, while unconsciously behaving in the service of the Apollonian moral imperative. This annihilation of the moral order is for the spectators felt to give rise to a blinding image of eternity, for this negation of the moral sphere of Apollonian knowledge seemingly abolishes the principle of individuation grounding the distinction between individual and collective. However, this Dionysian dissolution of appearances is paradoxical insofar as it remains aesthetically pleasurable only *as* an illusory appearance, for: "the poet's whole interpretation of the story is nothing other than one of those images of light held out to us by healing nature after we have gazed into the abyss" (BT 9). Sophocles's drama provides a premonition of the *imaginary* dissolution and transfiguration of nature in the coincidence of Oedipus's self-destruction and self-recognition. The transfiguring power

of tragedy attains its height in *Oedipus at Colonus*, where the gods bless the hero by granting him a noble death. Nietzsche interprets the conclusion of Oedipus's fate, characterized by "infinite transfiguration," as a consequence of the hero's abominable crimes.

Porter points out that the dialectical logic of Socratic inquiry is Oedipus's "tragic precondition." In the Oedipus tragedy, Socratic optimism comes to wreck upon the insight of Dionysian pessimism, which, coupled with the deception of Apollonian appearances, undergoes a process of metaphysical transfiguration. The Dionysian horror of Oedipus's crimes transforms into the experience of Greek serenity (*Heiterkeit*). The immortalized hero, revered as a holy figure, now induces "the most profound human delight at this matching piece of divine dialectic" (BT 9), namely, the matching of the sacred with the criminal. Oedipus's taboo transgressions form the cursed underbelly of this "divine dialectic." Viewed apart from the sacred power of transfiguration, such criminality undermines Oedipus's rational idealism and evokes the pessimism of Silenus. In the Oedipus myth, we find that the hero's "detached" quest for justice leads to his moral ruination and ends up exposing the perversity of philosophical enlightenment. This is the abysmal conclusion that Nietzsche draws against optimism about science. The secrets it unnaturally wrenches from nature end by filling us with the nausea and horror of gazing into a cosmic void of nature's "gruesome night" (BT 9), comparable to Schopenhauer's view of nature and its extinction in the *nihil negativum*. The point of this epistemic oblivion, where knowledge leads to non-knowledge, corresponding to the noumenal realm beneath appearances, is in tragic myth transfigured by the healing balm

of art, the Greek *pharmakon* that impels us to go on living. Schopenhauer's pessimism parallels "the terrible consistency of Darwinism. . . . All our admiration refers to qualities we take to be eternal: moral, artistic, religious, etc. [Beneath this illusion we discover] *the world ether as primal matter*" (NF-1872 19[132]). This note from 1872 illuminates how *The Birth* already responds to the pessimistic reductionism that Nietzsche draws out of Schopenhauer's psychology and links with Darwinism. Science may imperil our desire to go on living by debasing the status of our will to life, which, stripped of the ideal qualities (moral, aesthetic, and religious) that would sanctify it, is reduced to the mechanical function of mere self-preservation. For this reason, Schopenhauer advocates the denial of the will as the negation of a profane reality deprived of any sacred character. However, this sort of reductionism is a pessimistic *reaction* to the loss of what were taken to be eternal values and is therefore nothing but the fallen twin of moral optimism. The fall of Oedipus reflects the oscillation from optimistic rationalism to pessimistic irrationalism, his royal nobility plagued by an abyssal depth of carnal shame.

For Nietzsche, the "dialectical" movement of Sophocles's play is, on my reading, composed of three key moments working in tandem. The play begins with a Socratic optimism characterized by the hero's philosophical capacity for abstract reasoning and his confidence that this capacity will save the city from the plague that blights it. This leads into a judicial pursuit of truth that ends with the dissolution of optimism by exposing the unconscious, criminal abomination linked with this capacity, marking the hero's fateful fall. Finally, the play ends with the transfiguration of the hero's suffering, inducing (so Nietzsche has it) in the spectator an imaginary experience of metaphysical oneness. This

movement underlies the "terrible trinity of Oedipus' fates" (BT 9). Hinden concludes that "Nietzsche insists on the importance of the Sphinx's riddle because behind it he detects the ancient paradox of the One and the Many, specifically the myth of Dionysus dismembered and restored."[379] Staten clarifies the significance of this paradox. "The dismemberment of Dionysus by the Titans would represent the true nature of mythic representation because it is the image that represents the *agony of the determinate image*, its explosion and dispersal as it reaches its limit and then expires in its attempt to represent the unrepresentable universality" of "Absolute Presence."[380] Porter's reading complicates the paradox of representation insofar as it is born of the human imagination that itself produces the fiction of Absolute Presence. De Man comments on the overall dialectical framework of *The Birth* that links Dionysus, Apollo, and Socrates together.

> The starting-point, Dionysos, contains the endpoint, the Apollonian work of art, within itself and governs the dialectical pathway that leads from one to the other. Any cross-section made in the diachrony of the history can be valorized in terms of the greater or lesser manifestation or presence of Dionysos, the original "ground" by means of which distance and proximity can be measured: Sophocles is glorified, Plato and Euripides cast as near-villains because of their greater or lesser proximity to Dionysos. . . . It can be shown, however, that whenever an art form is being discussed, the three modes represented by Dionysos, Apollo and Socrates are always simultaneously present and that it is impossible to mention one of them without at least implying the others. The Dionysian moments always occur in revolt against the tyranny or as a result of the failure of the Socratic claim to knowledge; the Dionysian insight must always be doubled at once by the Apollonian shelter of appearances; and the Apollonian vision is always the vision of "the eternal contradiction, of the father of things." [BT 4][381]

[379] Michael Hinden, "The Five Voices of *The Birth of Tragedy*," *Comparative Drama* 22, no. 2 (Summer 1988): 105.
[380] Staten, "*Birth of Tragedy* Reconstructed," 17.
[381] Paul de Man, "Genesis and Genealogy in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*," *Diacritics* 2, no. 4 (Winter, 1972): 46.

Porter distinguishes his reading from De Man's deconstructionism (also challenged by Staten), which reduces the paradox of representation to a "linguistic and rhetorical" dissonance within Nietzsche's text, whereas for Porter it is "anthropological."[382] For Porter, Nietzsche's representation of Attic tragedy displays the ineliminable quality of metaphysical thinking. The metaphysical distinction between appearance and reality derives from an oneiric consciousness that infects waking consciousness. In this way metaphysical thinking is inextricable from human perception and is not reducible to the linguistic or rhetorical structures of cognition.

The Dionysian principle of intoxication, which abolishes the distinction between subject and object or self and other, collapsing identity in primordial unity, manifests tragedy's "unconscious metaphysics" (BT 23), synthesizing the instincts of Socratic rationality and Apollonian morality that define the hero's mortal identity only to undermine the integrity of both rationality and morality in an amoral, irrational, primal sublimation of life-affirming instinct. There is a moral and rational dialectic at work in Nietzsche's conception of tragic drama, but its aesthetic justification appears in the form of a mytho-metaphysical phantasm that is neither moral nor rational. This tragic worldview shifts with the advent of Platonism, which revalues the moral and rational features already present in Sophocles's art and devalues the sacred status of myth. For Nietzsche, the Oedipus myth embodies the unconscious metaphysics of aesthetic world-creation, exemplifying the justification of existence in a tragic affirmation of life.

III. THE MASK OF DIONYSUS

[382] Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 189 n. 3. See also pp. 79–80, 176–77 n. 31.

I will clarify the dialectical aspect of tragic knowledge with a brief analysis of Sophocles's play. As we have seen, the Dionysian immoralism of Attic tragedy subverts Plato's moral idealism. Rather than Plato's genius of wisdom, Nietzsche's tragic philosophy places artistic genius at the head of the perfect state. We must consider Nietzsche's Platonic analysis of the tragic hero as an Apollonian mask of Dionysus with this moral-aesthetic subversion in mind.

> Using Plato's terminology, one would have to say something like this about the tragic figures of the Hellenic stage: the one, truly real Dionysus manifests himself in the multiplicity of figures, in the mask of a fighting hero and, as it were, entangled in the net of the individual will. In the way that he now speaks and acts, the god who appears resembles an erring, striving, suffering individual; and the fact that he *appears* at all with such epic definiteness and clarity, is the effect of Apollo, the interpreter of dreams, who interprets to the chorus its Dionysiac condition by means of this symbolic appearance. In truth, however, this hero is the suffering Dionysos of the Mysteries, the god who experiences the sufferings of individuation in his own person, of whom wonderful myths recount that he was torn to pieces by the Titans when he was a boy and is now venerated in this condition as Zagreus . . . But what the epopts hoped for was the rebirth of Dionysos, which we must now understand, by premonition, as the end of individuation . . . [H]ere we already have the all the constituent elements of a profound and pessimistic way of the looking at the world and thus, at the same time, of *the doctrine of the Mysteries taught by tragedy*: the fundamental recognition that everything which exists is unity; the view that individuation is the primal source of all evil; and art as the joyous hope that the spell of individual can be broken, a premonition of unity restored. (BT 10)

As a tragic figure, Oedipus represents a synthesis between the Apollonian realm of appearances and their unconditioned, Dionysian ground. Oedipus symbolically embodies the "primordial contradiction" between being and becoming, between the one and the many. This reading of the myth requires that we appreciate the symbolic significance of the familial relationships that guide Oedipus's tragic destiny, which Nietzsche fails to provide us with, and which I shall explore through an analysis of the play. The oracle at

Delphi informs Oedipus's father, King Laius, that his own son will murder him (this is not the entire oracle). The parents thus abandon their infant, who is left to die of exposure on a mountainside, his ankles spiked. He is saved by a sheepherder and raised as an adopted son, ignorant of his true lineage. When he is informed of the same oracle, which reveals in full that he will marry his mother and produce incestuous children, he flees his adopted parents only to realize his tragic fate.

Oedipus begins his life by suffering, on the most immediate scale of human intimacy, the greatest cruelty imaginable. He is traumatized by the violent realization of our deepest emotional fear, that of abandonment. Utterly helpless, he is exposed to the indifference of nature. This trauma hobbles Oedipus. Parental care, the perversion of which is emotionally crippling, is the first and perhaps the deepest of intimacies that we experience as human beings. Without some form of it we are swallowed by an abyss. Although as a child Oedipus is saved from this abyss, he is symbolically acquainted with it from birth. Oedipus's life is structured, from the beginning, by the transgression of the taboo against infanticide, a transgression that is linked with the taboos of patricide and incest by being committed as a means of preventing them. It must be noted that Sophocles's treatment of infanticide is idiosyncratic. Infant exposure, while not a crime in ancient Greece, was nonetheless accompanied by purification rituals. Cynthia Patterson highlights the moral complexity of the phenomenon.

> For an act to require purification does not necessarily imply moral or legal reprehensibility: sexual intercourse and childbirth also require purification. The relatively long period of purification for [acts of abortion and exposure], however, suggests that [these] were more serious sources of pollution in the eyes of the framers of sacred law and perhaps society in general. On a personal level, Sophocles' Oedipus, when asserting his own innocence of conscious wrong-

> doing, imputes moral reprehensibility to his parents' *knowing* act of exposure (literally of his destruction; O.C. 272).[383]

In an earlier note, Patterson contrasts the prevailing view of infant exposure, as something comparable to the abortion of the fetus, to Sophocles's distinctive moral treatment of it.[384] On my reading, the triangulation of Oedipus's familial relations is governed by the tripartite logic of these three taboos, which, over the course of Oedipus's life, are knit together as parts of a single structure. Social taboos exist in order to protect us from nature's indifference, but by virtue of their existence they also expose us to the cruelty of life's violent possibilities. Taboos are saturated with ambivalence given their capacity both to protect and expose, to be respected or violated. Using archetypal language, the father is respected as a moral authority and the mother is loved as a nourishing caregiver. A child's psychosocial and psychosexual development depends upon these powers of moral and emotional sustenance, which presuppose parental love. The tripartite logic of the Oedipal taboos is often obscured by focusing on patricide and incest. We must not forget that Oedipus is the survivor of failed infanticide, nor the psychological significance that the fear of abandonment plays in the formation of human attachments. For example, one's futile attempt to control a loved one, fearing that one will lose him or her, more often than not results in the eventual realization of that very fear. A narcissistic need to form an attachment by drawing another close can paradoxically coincide with pushing him or her away. Inversely, this is the paradoxical logic of Oedipus's destiny — the

[383] Cynthia Patterson, "'Not Worth Rearing': The Causes of Infant Exposure in Ancient Greece," *Transactions of the American Philological Association (1974–2014)* 115 (1985): 106.
[384] Ibid., 103 n. 1.

further he flees from his fears, the closer they come to being realized. This logic structures the "blessed" power of the oracle, whose knowledge curses Oedipus's family to accomplish what it would avoid, as well as the effective logic of taboo, whose prohibition invites transgression.

Apollo symbolizes the *principium individuationis* that ensnares Dionysus in this paradoxical logic of desire, in the web of fate guiding Oedipus's suffering. According to the logic of taboo, Apollo is the prohibitive element and Dionysus is the transgressive element. Nietzsche assumes that these two elements of divine justice must work in tandem in order for tragic art to be successful. The logic of taboo is paradoxical: it both erects and demolishes a sacred boundary, at once negating and affirming it, creating the opposition that will destroy it, as Dionysus loosens Apollo's snare by tightening its bonds, as we see in the myth of Oedipus. The transgressive element of taboo realizes the inner destiny concealed by prohibition: its logical self-destruction. In the tragic myth of Oedipus, the annihilating powers of Dionysus dramatically leap into the confines of the Apollonian logic that shapes human identity by separating the many from the one, distinguishing the parts from the whole. Dionysus, symbolizing the abyssal ground of reality, is the one from which the many emerge and the whole that links the parts together. By pushing the Apollonian logic of identity to its limits, Dionysus collapses this logic upon itself, pointing beyond it. The Apollonian logic of identity situates individuals in relation to one another, while the Dionysian collapses these relations into the universal whole that dissolves the separation of identities, representing their common ontological ground. Insight into the synthesis of the Apollonian and the Dionysian is entirely Platonic

and reflects the aim of metaphysical investigation, whose task, as Schopenhauer defines it, is to attain "cognizance of the one in the many and of the many in the one" (WWP 1:119). An understanding of the relationship, in tragic myth, between the Apollonian and Dionysian spheres calls for rigorous mereology, the study of parts in relation to the whole and of the whole manifested in the parts.

In the context of *The Birth*, the triangular structure of Oedipus's familial relations and the interactions between his family members must be understood according to this type of mereology. A dialectical thread weaves the Oedipal triangle together, forming a unity of its members. Oedipus is the sacrificial center of this triangle, the last-born of the three but also the first to be pitilessly tossed by the other two into the wilderness of nature, as a seed cast onto barren soil. In its most brutal sense, the plot details this child's unconscious revenge upon the parents that originally treated him so treacherously. In this insane fantasy, we behold a human being behaving as an inhuman, alien life-form that breaks the laws of nature. Animated by revenge, as by the supernatural powers of justice, the tragic child devours his father and ruins his mother for the wrong they once committed. In keeping with Nietzsche's reading of the play, *Oedipus at Colonus* stresses Oedipus's innocence and implicates his parents' guilt.

> "I/ Suffered those deeds more than I acted them,/ As I might show if it were fitting here/ To tell my father's and my mother's story . . ./ For which you fear me, as I know too well./ I had been wronged, I retaliated; even had I/ Known what I was doing, was that evil?/ Then, knowing nothing, I went on. Went on./ But those who wronged me knew, and ruined me." (ll. 266–74)

While it could be argued that Oedipus simply blames his parents so as to impute to them his own guilt, the play clearly portrays Oedipus in a sympathetic light given the noble

quality of his earthly departure (ll. 1663–65) and the hallowing of his grave as a sacred site (ll. 1760–65). This supports my reading of Sophocles's tragedy as a revenge saga that treats infanticide as a taboo whose transgression is met with punishment. I do not intend to diminish the force of Oedipus's own transgressions, resolving the drama with recourse to mere moralism. My interpretation only stresses the prominence of infanticide and retaliation as themes that are present in *Oedipus the King* — being somewhat obscured by the other violent aspects of the play — and which are continuous with *Oedipus at Colonus*. In connection with the wisdom of Silenus in the latter play, it would seem that Laius and Jocasta's original crime was to have produced the child to begin with, a crime that Oedipus's suffering expiates in accordance with divine justice. Laius and Jocasta's attempt to nullify the course of divine justice only sets it in motion. They cannot expunge their progeny, doomed with the prophecy of patricide and incest. The damning evidence of his life cannot be wiped away with murder. Had Oedipus's parents become his murderers, his birth would not have transformed their identities, which thereafter are destined by the logic of taboo that leads to their destruction. Oedipus's birth symbolizes the emancipation of the many from the one, the formation of a triangular plurality in which each part is denied its singularity and is given its identity in relation to the other parts, each stained with the curse of Oedipus's fate.

In the context of Schopenhauer's philosophy, Oedipus's childhood scar is of universal significance. It symbolizes the brute trauma of birth as a wound that can never be healed. Our birth, which condemns us to death and is in this way inseparable from it, is a wound from which we emerge and to which we will return, life's exit wound (death)

reflecting its entry wound (birth). The sacred boundaries of life — birth and death, womb and tomb — together form the primordial woundedness of human existence, the eternal contradiction out of which the primeval taboos are erected. The trauma of Oedipus's birth signifies the primal wound of the will's individuation, the origin of its self-conflict. The original unity of the parents in their shared identity fractures into a triangular multiplicity. Oedipus's parents attempt to efface their newfound identities by reversing their creative deed. They wish to erase the stain of individuation symbolized by Oedipus's accursed birth, who henceforth carries with him the trace of self-erasure. Oedipus's scar symbolizes the mortal wound of existence, which bears witness to the trauma of childbirth as the perpetuation of the will's eternal self-conflict. The primordial violence of the will structures the identities of those who partake in the production of life, marking them with the self-erasure of death and the universal pain of loss.

Oedipus's wound, manifesting his self-ignorance with regard to his parental origins and the trauma of his exposure, leads him back to the parents that abandoned him. His foot scar is also psychical. The distance between head and foot, between conscious intention and unconscious instinct, is only apparent. "He is sad and lonely, and lonely his feet/ that carry him far from the navel of the earth;/ but its prophecies, ever living,/ flutter around his head" (ll. 479–82). Laius and Jocasta's attempt to expel Oedipus from the earth draws them into unnatural proximity with their unknown son. The further his parents push him away, the closer Oedipus approaches. The paradoxical logic of tragic fate governs the temporal and spatial distance that separates Oedipus from his parents, whose mutual familial destruction resolves these contradictory tensions in one devastating

conclusion violently abolishing all familial distance. The self-recognition of the will's fundamental unity is achieved by means of the incestuous, murderous inversion of the natural relations that govern the realm of individuation. This conclusion symbolizes the return of the many to the one, a return whose pathways follow the dialectical triangulation of the Oedipal taboos: infanticide, patricide, and incest. While Oedipus survives his parents' attempted infanticide, it is in an important sense successful; without its apparent success, the other taboos would remain unbroken. Oedipus is dead to his parents and this death will rebound upon them. The dialectic that structures the transgression of these taboos remains hidden beneath the veil of appearances, the transcendental forms of space and time. By the end of the play, the logic of time reverses itself as the past returns to haunt the future; the logic of space reverses itself as the apparent death of Oedipus rebounds upon his parents, thereby dissolving the distance that separates them but the appearance of which had for them been absolute. The Apollonian deception of appearances conceals the transgressive reality of Dionysus and will by the end of the play be unveiled.

When Oedipus breaks the taboo of patricide, it is as a dead man that he commits the deed. Oedipus is at once dead and undead: the resurrected son, he is animated by a supernatural power of revenge. Symbolically, Laius's crime of infanticide, leaving Oedipus for dead "upon a pathless hillside" (l. 720), is thrust back upon himself, on the "narrow way" (l. 1399) of the crossroads. The "death" of the son begets the death of the father. The victim of the former "death," cast beyond the boundary of civilization, comes back to haunt the civilization from which he was cast out, beginning with the death of its

king on the road leading to and from Thebes. This death manifests the annihilation of one ego by another, two egos ignorantly united by the bond between father and son. The murderous bond Oedipus shares with his father troubles him. "How can my father be my father as one that's nothing to me?" (l. 1019). Speaking of his adopted father Polybus, Oedipus unknowingly refers to Laius's act of infanticide and the rebound effect that this has in the act of patricide, bringing to nought the father who had abandoned him. Oedipus falls upon his father at a triple confluence of roads, referred to by Jocasta as "a triple wagon-road" (ll. 730–34) and by Oedipus as a "triple path" (ll. 794–812). Jeffrey Rusten highlights the underappreciated fact that the crossroads is "not really a crossroads in the common English sense of the word 'cross,' but 'triple roads,' . . . 'the junction of three roads' . . . or, most frequently, a 'split/cracked/forked road.'" [385] The spatiotemporal configuration of the crossroads places it midway between Delphi and Thebes. Oedipus crosses it as a young man, midway through life's journey. The crossroads rests at the dead center of the drama as its triangular nub. The patricide concretizes the temporal center of the three taboos, lying between the acts of infanticide and incest and serving as the link between them. The triple confluence of roads is patterned after the tripartite structure of the Oedipal taboos that binds its three family members together.

At the crossroads, Oedipus brings death upon the begetter who would have effaced him. The familial bond between Oedipus and his father unites them as a single self, wherein the distinction between begetter and begotten is annihilated with the transgression of the sacred taboo differentiating them as separate parts of a whole. Laius's

[385] Jeffrey Rusten, "Oedipus and Triviality," *Classical Philology* 91, no. 2 (1996): 97.

murder symbolizes the swallowing of the begetter by the begotten and the annihilation of the distance that separates their identities. This language reflects Schopenhauer's conception of the will as self-devouring, whose highest grade of objectivization is displayed in cannibalism, but which permeates all gradations of the will. "[W]ill has to feed on itself, because beyond it there is nothing and it is a hungry will" (WWP 1:198). Since tragedy represents the will's self-conflict at its "highest level of objectivization" (WWP 1:302), wherein "it is one and the same will that lives and makes its appearance in all [human beings], but whose phenomena do mutual battle and are mutually lacerated" (WWP 1:303), such laceration is implicitly cannibalistic.[386] According to this schema, the son absorbs the father in a symbolic act of self-consuming rage. Oedipus takes his father's place by means of his father's negation, murderously devouring his genetic point of origin. This occurs at a crossroads of sinners, where the identities of father and son are consummated in their crossing over and their crossing out. "Now I am found to be/ a sinner and a son of sinners. Crossroads,/ and hidden glade, oak and narrow way/ at the crossroads, that drank my father's blood/ offered you by my hands" (ll. 1397–1401). Rusten surveys the multifaceted symbolism of the crossroads and supplies ample evidence in support of the view that it is, among other things, a metaphor for the sexual territory represented by the mother, symbolized by the "split" in the roads.[387] Laius exits

[386] Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, 330, write that "on [other important aspects of human existence, Schopenhauer] feels obliged to say something for no other reason than that they are there. Tragedy is one of these." This downplays the importance of tragedy for Schopenhauer, given that he singles it out for its capacity to represent the highest stage of the will's phenomenal manifestation, a view that no doubt influences Nietzsche.

[387] Rusten, "Oedipus and Triviality," 108–112. The patricide occurs at a crossroads symbolizing the mother's vagina. Rusten notes that this coincidence evokes Hesiod's *Theogony*, specifically Gaea's castration of Uranus with the help of her eldest son Cronos. "The eldest son is striving to be born, but the

the sexual territory that Oedipus enters. The father represents an obstacle to the maternal womb that Oedipus is returning to. By fathering a son, Laius fertilizes Jocasta's womb, the "seed" that bears fruit. By returning to the womb, Oedipus reverses this process, bringing death upon the father that sowed him in the same seed that he himself begets in. "Now I am godless and child of impurity,/ begetter in the same seed that created my wretched self" (ll. 1360–65). The crossroads represents and prefigures the maternal passage in which this reversal takes place. Oedipus offers his father's blood to his mother's vagina, the crossroads that absorbs the patricidal stain, drinking its blood. Symbolically, the father's blood atones for infanticidal sin but only by transforming into patricidal sin, and this transformation is linked with the blood of menstruation, that of the mother's reproductive organs. The crossroads drinks this polluted blood just as Jocasta's womb will drink its progeny's semen. Laius's murder in this sense coincides with Oedipus's return to the maternal womb; by killing the father who penetrates the mother, he reverses the procreative process by becoming him. The father's blood binds the triangulated taboos of infanticide, patricide, and incest together, staining the triple confluence of roads where the three members of Oedipus's family symbolically converge as a single self, born of tragedy's incestuous womb.

The womb to which Oedipus returns is the vortex from which the tragic drama radiates, swallowing his familial relations into an incestuous unity. The entangling of

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father's penetration of the mother's vagina prevents it; the mother conspires with her eldest son to castrate the father from inside the womb, which allows his passage to the outside" (p. 110). According to 4th C. Orphic theology, Cronos swallows the genitals (p. 110 n. 43). This detail resonates with the cannibalistic language that I use in describing Oedipus as one who devours his father. In light of this mythological backdrop, Laius also takes on the dimension of Uranus in his initial attempt to destroy the child, in a sense "preventing" the birth.

identities that results from Oedipus's marriage to his mother has an uncanny doubling effect. Each natural kinship tie, characterized by innocence, is tainted with its unnatural double, characterized by sin, such that Oedipus is "proved father and brother both/ to his own children in his house; to her/ that gave him birth, a son and husband both;/ a fellow sower in his father's bed/ with that same father that he murdered" (ll. 458–60). The father's murder embeds the entanglement of identities that Oedipus's incestuous act produces, as he becomes a father to his own siblings and a husband to his own mother. All parts of the family tree interpenetrate one another according to a mereology of incest that unifies each separate member into a single self, forming a proliferation of perverse doublings. The mother's womb bears the criminal fruit of infanticide, patricide, and incest. This circle of death perversely doubles the circle of life, which reflect one another in an overarching, polluted symmetry of interpenetrating opposites. The father's death mythically coincides with life's procreation of life within the mother's womb, for we cannot compartmentalize these acts in neat distinction from one another. Such is the driving force behind Sophocles's poetic formulations. "Your father killed his father/ and sowed the seed where he had sprung himself/ and begot you out of the womb that held him" (ll. 1495–1500).

The play arrives at its conclusion dialectically, slowly unveiling the underlying unity of its puzzle pieces. The Oedipal taboos exist in dialogue with one another, just as the play centres around a dialogue that Oedipus has with himself, the unknown criminal whom he seeks out. Oedipus resolves his psychical fragmentation in a moment of excruciating insight: the royal detective recognizes himself as the ignoble criminal.

Oedipus is his own dialectical companion, both accuser and accused, saviour and polluter, genius and ignoramus. This doubling effect, manifesting a reversal and inversion of opposites, is the play's crowning achievement. Oedipus's family drama is guided by the mereological interpenetration of its members, as pieces of a puzzle that together form the unified whole of Oedipus's true identity. Oedipus's abject act of self-mutilation realizes the ultimate doubling effect. His self-ignorance is dispelled in a moment of illumination that results in his self-blinding. As the hidden truth about himself is exposed, Oedipus's self-blinding amounts to a brutal confession of his debased identity and a violent means of atoning for his sins. It is his atoning confession that is heroic, a heroism that is perhaps too ungodly for the audience to recognize, for his debased identity amounts to that of the polis itself, since tragic theatre stages a spectacle through which the polis engages in the activity of communal self-recognition. The audience beholds an artistic representation of the polis that illuminates the wounded quality of its psychosocial tensions.[388]

For the ancient Greeks, vision is the ground of knowledge.[389] The spectators' act of watching, then, would have been associated with the cultivation and heightening of self-knowledge. *Oedipus the King* subverts this expectation by denying the link between vision and knowledge. If Oedipus's self-knowledge results in blindness, then the intellectual vision for which he is praised amounts to ignorance. I draw attention to the Oedipal imagery in Nietzsche's account of the tragic spectator:

> He sees the transfigured world of the stage, and yet he negates it. He sees before him the tragic hero with all the clarity and beauty of the epic, and yet he takes delight in his destruction. He comprehends events on stage to their innermost core,

[388] See Euben, *Tragedy of Political Theory*, 106.
[389] Ibid., 101.

> and yet he gladly flees into the incomprehensible. He feels the actions of the hero to be justified, and yet he feels even more elated when these actions destroy the man who performs them. He shivers in horror at the sufferings which will befall the hero, and yet they give him a premonition for a higher, far more overwhelming delight. He sees more and deeper than ever before, and yet he wishes to be blind. (BT 22)[390]

In this passage, the self-blinding of Oedipus mirrors the desire of the spectator, the desire for blind, mystical rapture that the tragic poet produces by manipulating the audience's aesthetic sensibilities. The tragic hero embodies the unconscious process of the spectator's own aesthetic experience. But this desire is also what gives rise to the drama in the first place and in this sense is shared by poet and spectator alike.

> Thus the experiences of the truly aesthetic spectator reveal to us the tragic artist himself as someone who, like some abundant deity of *individuatio*, creates his figures . . . but whose enormous Dionysiac drive then consumes this entire world of appearances, thereby allowing us to sense, behind that world and through its destruction, a supreme, artistic, primal joy in the womb of the Primordial Unity. (BT 22)

The ritualistic destruction of the *eidolon* makes possible a communion between artist and spectator, both of whom intuit their shared identity in the hallucinatory suffering of a figural representation that evokes the apparent annihilation of personal identity, of the difference between individual and collective. Girard similarly interprets the symbolism of Oedipus's self-blinding as that through which "tragic creation signifies itself."[391] Girard argues that Oedipus embodies the traits of a *pharmakos*, a stigmatized scapegoat who takes the blame for the blight that infects the city. For Girard, this raises serious questions

[390] Burnham and Jesinghausen, *Birth of Tragedy*, 141, note that this section "begins with the omniscient eye which no longer sees surfaces, but penetrates to the heart of things; an eye that sees after vision has been negated (at the end of the previous section); in other words, the eye of the blind prophet like Tiresias," though they miss the Oedipal significance of this insight.
[391] Girard, *Oedipus Unbound*, 88.

about the cultural role of tragedy for the Greeks. What is the significance of their delight in tragic spectacle, erupting from the sort of identification with the sacrificial victim described above? Does such identification mask the pleasure of being blinded to and by the violence of desire? Is this delight a persecutory purgation of collective rage or *ressentiment*, and if so, does it serve to justify or to subvert the violence of the scapegoat mechanism? This moral ambivalence surrounding the tragic *mythos*, as an aesthetic manipulation, lies at the heart of Nietzsche's text, which, similarly to Girard, portrays the Oedipus myth as an archetypal representation of martyrdom.

Given the religious overtones of Nietzsche's portrait of Oedipus, we might conclude that he endorses a Schopenhauerian form of Christian asceticism. In his book on Nietzsche, Deleuze analyzes the development of the philosopher's emancipation from asceticism by virtue of its agonistic, aesthetic sublimation. The philosopher wears the mask of the priestly ascetic while concealing anti-religious impulses of Dionysian creativity, a development that could easily be applied to Nietzsche's portrait of Oedipus as a saintly figure who nonetheless destroys "every law, all natural order, indeed the moral world" in order to inaugurate "a new world on the ruins of the old" (BT 9). Dionysus, as the god of theatre, is also the god of masks and dissimulation. Deleuze writes:

> The mask or trick are laws of nature and therefore something more than mere mask or trick. To begin with life must imitate matter merely in order to survive. A force would not survive if it did not first of all borrow the feature of the forces with which it struggles (GM III 8, 9, 10). Thus the philosopher can only be born and grow with any chance of survival by having the contemplative air of the priest, of the ascetic and religious man who dominated the world before he appeared. The fact that we are burdened by such a necessity not only shows what a ridiculous image philosophy has (the image of the philosopher-sage, friend of

> wisdom and ascesis) but also that philosophy itself does not throw off its ascetic mask as it grows up: in a way it must believe in this mask, it can only conquer its mask by giving it a new sense which finally expresses its true anti-religious force (GM III 10).[392]

We may interpret Deleuze's comments in accordance with the imagery of *The Birth*, in which the mimetic mask of Apollonian self-preservation and individuation conceals a dissimulating Dionysus, "the one, truly real [god who] manifests himself in a multiplicity of figures, in the mask of the fighting hero and, as it were, entangled in the net of the individual will" (BT 10). According to Deleuze, Nietzsche's Dionysianism emerges from the "anti-religious" affirmation of somatic difference and plurality lying dormant in philosophical empiricism and inaugurates a tragic conception of sovereign justice "in which existence *justifies* all that it affirms, including suffering, instead of being justified by suffering, or in other words, sanctified and deified [sc. by the bad conscience]."[393] Girard would agree with Deleuze that *mimesis* grounds the play of forces between shared identity and hierarchical social difference, between the self-recognition of the same and the polarization of the other that structure human instantiations of justice. In distinction from Deleuze's empiricist analysis of mimesis in the above passage, Girard's analysis locates in mimesis the basis of *ressentiment*. The Dionysian mob projects evil onto the scapegoated other, whom Oedipus mythically exemplifies and Christ historically

[392] Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 5. Cf. TL, p. 142. "As a means for the preservation of the individual, the intellect shows its greatest strengths in dissimulation, since this is the means to preserve those weaker, less robust individuals who, by nature, are denied horns or the sharp fangs of a beast of prey with which to wage the struggle of existence. This art of dissimulation[*Vorstellungskunst*] reaches its peak in humankind, where deception, flattery, lying and cheating, speaking behind the backs of others, keeping up appearances [*repräsentieren*], living in borrowed finery, wearing masks, the drapery of convention, play-acting for the benefit of others and oneself — in short, the constant fluttering of human beings around the one flame of vanity is so much the rule and the law that there is virtually nothing which defies the understanding so much as the fact that an honest and pure drive towards truth should ever have emerged among them."
[393] Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 19.

exemplifies, in its violent purgation of communal *ressentiment*, bred by mimetic rivalry. Girard sees in the sacrifice of Christ an anti-pagan, pacifistic resolution to the *ressentiment* that grounds the scapegoat mechanism.[394] In contrast, Deleuze embraces Nietzsche's tragic Dionysianism as an affirmation of hierarchical difference manifested in the somatic play of forces[395] that culminates in the "'eternal joy in becoming' which is avowed in an instant, the 'joy of annihilation,' the '*affirmation* of annihilation and destruction'" (EH "BT" 3).[396] He further follows Nietzsche by locating *ressentiment* in the Jewish tradition, purportedly exemplified by Abraham and Job.[397] Girard forcefully condemns the affirmation of hierarchical difference in favour of the Biblical resolution to tragic violence found in pacifism, which recognizes the same in the other.[398] He ultimately equates Nietzsche's Dionysianism with what may be termed a will-to-hegemony.[399] Neither Deleuze's paganistic, "anti-religious" reading of Nietzsche nor Girard's anti-pagan critique of Nietzsche in my view adequately address the ambivalence Nietzsche finds in Dionysian martyrdom.

Georges Bataille does so in *On Nietzsche*, which dramatically represents the Dionysian intoxication that results from contemplating ritual human sacrifice, the "moral

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[394] E.g. René Girard, "Dionysus versus the Crucified," *MLN* 99, no. 4 (1984): 823–24; *Oedipus Unbound*, 89.
[395] See Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, chs. 1–2.
[396] Ibid., 174. Porter notes how "this moment of destruction is forgotten, so to speak, in a self-blinding and virtually Hegelian sublimation, in a negation of negation . . . [wherein] 'destruction becomes active to the extent that the negative is transmuted and converted into affirmative power. . . . Negation has defeated itself' and 'is completed' [*Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 174–75]. Something is clearly being evaded here; violence is being purified" ("Unconscious Agency," 156 n. 8).
[397] Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 36.
[398] Girard, *Oedipus Unbound*, ch. 5.
[399] See Girard, "Dionysus versus the Crucified."

summit" that is "a summit of evil."[400] Transgressing the taboo that demarcates the sphere of Apollonian morality inverts the relationship between good and evil proper to the individual. In the sphere of Dionysian intoxication, the individual's existence appears as evil, while one experiences his annihilation as good. Bataille illustrates this framework in the following passage, where he transposes "Dionysus" onto "the crucified" and thereby dissolves their apparent opposition.[401] He finds in the crucifixion of Christ — the *pharmakos* of Christianity — a tragic communication with the divine that implicitly mirrors the primordial contradiction, the divine wound, that in *The Birth* is the revelation of Attic tragedy. The drama of crucifixion here communicates the Dionysian unity experienced through the laceration of Apollonian integrity.

> The killing of Christ injures the being of God.
> It looks as if creatures couldn't communicate with their Creator except through a wound that lacerates integrity.
> The wound is intended and desired by God.
> The humans who did this are not less guilty.
> On the other hand — and this is not the least strange — the guilt is a wound lacerating the integrity of every guilty being.
> In this way God (wounded by human guilt) and human beings (wounded by their own guilt with respect to God), find, if painfully, a unity that seems to be their purpose.
> If human beings had kept their own integrity and hadn't sinned, God on the one hand and human beings on the other would have persevered in their respective isolation. A night of death wherein Creator and creatures bled together and lacerated each other on all sides, were challenged at the extreme limits of shame: that is what was required for their communion.
>
> *Thus "communication," without which nothing exists for us, is guaranteed by crime. "Communication" is love, and love taints those whom it unites*.
>
> In the elevation upon a cross, humankind attains a summit of evil. But it's exactly from having attained it that humanity ceases being separate from God. So clearly the

[400] Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, 17–18.
[401] "Have I been understood? — *Dionysus versus the crucified*" (EH "Destiny," 9).

> "communication" of human beings is guaranteed by evil. Without evil, human existence would turn in upon itself, would be enclosed as a zone of independence: and indeed an absence of "communication" — empty loneliness — would certainly be the greater evil.[402]

Lest one mistakenly interpret this bit of theology literally in support of Bataille's purportedly religio-historical or anthropological claims about the significance of ritual sacrifice, Amy Hollywood dispels the notion that such passages describe anything other than a dramatic representation of suffering that the contemplative subject projects through inner experience.

> [T]he object contemplated by the mystic is not a divine object of emulation but a projection of the self, a dramatization of the self's dissolution. . . . What is central about the cross, Bataille suggests, is neither who is on it, nor the salvific nature of his suffering, but suffering itself, which serves as the projected image through which the subject experiences his or her own dissolution.[403]

Bataille communicates an object of mystical meditation whose drama leads to the inner experience of "horror transfigured."[404] It can be said, with Nietzsche, that in his contemplative dream state the poet-mystic "resembles, miraculously, that uncanny image of fairy-tale which can turn its eyes around and look at itself; now he is at one and the same time subject and object, simultaneously poet, actor, and spectator" (BT 5). In the crucifixion drama that Bataille describes, the poet projects this dream-vision, identifying both with the innocence of the sacrificial victim and the shameful horror of the mob, while beholding the scene as a spectator moved by an anguish that transfigures into joy. This Apollonian dream-vision dissipates into the experience of "being suspended beyond

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[402] Ibid., 18.
[403] Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 70, 73–74.
[404] Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, 58.

oneself, at the limit of nothingness"[405] that erupts from psychical self-laceration as one identifies with the hallucinated death of the sacrificial victim.[406] Here the projection of an imaginary Beyond empties into void. In Bataille's meditative practise, the Beyond of divine transcendence collapses into nothingness, which the immanence of subjective experience transmutes into mystical ecstasy, that is, the shock of the real's heterogeneous contingency.

Bataille's dramatic representation of Nietzsche's thought inseparably beholds Judaic and Dionysian sacrifice, wherein "the victim's surrender . . . coincides with the blow striking the god. The gift partly frees up a 'humanity' for us, and for a brief moment human beings are free to unite with the existence of their divinity, a divinity that at the same time death has brought into existence."[407] At this "moral summit," good and evil coincide. Shame taints love, guilt taints innocence, pain taints joy. The transposition of "Dionysus" onto "the crucified" implicates the object of Christian mysticism in the violence of intoxication and the intoxication of imaginary violence. Conversely, the innocence of Dionysian self-abandonment is not freed from guilt; human beings unite and communicate with God through shame. Bataille's reading of Nietzsche avoids the mimetic rivalry between Deleuze's "anti-religious" appraisal of Greek affirmation and Girard's anti-Nietzschean appraisal of Biblical pacifism, both of which fall prey to

[405] Ibid., 19.
[406] Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, 79–87, connects Bataille's meditative practise to the ethical encounter with the real in Lacan, one that bears witness to human suffering without recourse to its soteriological justification, since the sacred "lies beyond salvation" (p. 104), in the "recognition of the essentially 'nonsensical' nature of misfortune [that] is the necessary preliminary to any real historical or political change" (p. 85).
[407] Bataille, *Nietzsche*, 21.

competing passions for forms of justice that offer a return to innocence — *extrication* from the horror of the Dionysian mob. Hollywood stresses that "for Bataille the desire for horror is not a desire to escape the demands of history but to face them."[408] Both Deleuze and Girard avoid being implicated by the violence of evil and thus fail to confront the crisis of communication endemic to Nietzsche's thought. This crisis confronts and uncovers the hidden, disavowed manifestations of an inner violence that otherwise dominates us in the form of *ressentiment*, which locates the causes of suffering and evil everywhere but in oneself, thereby fuelling the "will to power" characteristic of political partisanship. This denial feeds into and off of the cultural fantasy of innocence, the profane illusion of social-political salvation. Yet "all those things which we now call culture, education, civilization must some day appear before the judge Dionysos whom no man can deceive" (BT 19).[409] If Nietzsche puts the Western conscience on trial, Bataille passes its final sentence: we are all found guilty. If Deleuze and Girard had made this their point of departure, they would recognize how the scandal of the cross evokes the complicity between Jews and Romans in the collective sin of god's murder. Violence immanently dissolves the very oppositions that it erects. Only by recognizing our complicity in evil — debarring the safety of siding with either Christians or pagans, Jews or gentiles — is surmounting it paradoxically made possible. In Bataille's I think sound reading of Nietzsche on martyrdom, an excruciating shame taints the puerile "innocence" of love, unlike the "innocence" that both Deleuze and Girard cling to in their competing

[408] Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, 86.
[409] Franck, *Shadow of God*, 339, notes this formulation in a note from 1885: "Dionysus is a judge!" (NF-1885 41[7] in *Complete Works*).

visions of justice. I must emphasize that while Nietzsche discusses tragic violence within the context of its mythic representation, the deceptive veneer of philological, religio-historical objectivity clings to his writings, most notably in *The Birth* and the *Genealogy*. In a similarly ambiguous fashion, Bataille writes about myths formulated as religio-historical insights, especially as we saw in his theological subversion of the crucifixion scene.[410] The impossibility of finally extricating these domains from one another — an attempt that produces what Porter calls the modern *myth of mythlessness*[411] — is for both writers their scandalous provocation.[412]

In Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, the martyrdom of Oedipus reflects the Romantic association between Dionysus and Christ as a mythical anachronism. An imaginary *pharmakos*, Oedipus embodies the profusion of tensions endemic to modern culture, thereby subverting the pretence of historicity that Girard clings to. Girard's religio-historical analysis exposes the mythopoetic justification of the violence that mimetic rivalry breeds. He aims to diffuse this tendency by means of its demystification but everywhere projects an archetypal pattern of mimetic rivalry into the sources that he analyzes. Nietzsche's philological subversion exposes the type of religio-historical method adopted by Girard to be infected with moral-metaphysical prejudices, such as the

[410] Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, p. 38, clarifies Bataille's language of scientific objectivity. "For Bataille, the success of his writing depends on eliciting inner experience in his readers. The key to his use of objective, scientific language (and the contradiction between scientific and existential language) work to engender inner experience (and hence, paradoxically, to render Bataille's writing general)." I would reverse her formulation. Bataille uses objective, "scientific" language (broadly speaking) to communicate inner experience, rather than to engender it, since like many mystics he has little faith that writing itself induces such experience but rather presupposes prior initiation on the part of his readers. "For one who is a stranger to experience the above [communication] is obscure — but it is not destined for him" (Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, trans. Stuart Kendell (Albany: State University of New York), 117).
[411] Porter, *Invention of Dionysus*, 162.
[412] On Bataille's scandalous writing strategy, see Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, ch. 1.

need for archetypal patterns in history. Girard's analysis exemplifies the type of archetypal projection that Nietzsche represents as a mere myth, an invariably anachronistic one that subverts and exposes our modern need for historical meaning, which masquerades under the pretence of our emancipation from myth. Nietzsche ingeniously stages the modern *myth of mythlessness* as the very crisis at the heart of tragedy itself. Oedipus accordingly embodies both the self-destructive consequences of our secular disavowal of myth as well as the Romantic *mythos* of cultural redemption, since these apparently opposing tendencies spring from the same source and are complicitous with one another.

Against Aristotle, Nietzsche contends that pity and fear are not the primary emotions that tragic drama produces, nor is their purgation its aim. He also rejects Schiller's view that tragic drama is pleasurable insofar as it is morally instructive (BT 22). In contrast, for Nietzsche,

the optical effect of pain's poetic representation induces in the "truly aesthetic spectator" an experience of "primal joy in the womb of the Primordial Unity" (BT 22). He repeats this image in the next sections. "The pleasure engendered by the tragic myth comes from the same homeland as our pleasurable sensation of dissonance in music. The Dionysiac, with the primal pleasure it perceives even in pain, is the common womb from which both music and the tragic myth are born" (BT 24). In *The Birth*, the Socratic desire for knowledge reflects that of the "mythless man," who manifests "the enormous historical need of dissatisfied modern culture, the accumulation of countless other cultures, the consuming desire for knowledge — what does all this point to, if not to the loss of myth,

the loss of a mythical home, a mythical, maternal womb?" (BT 23). Nietzsche's subtle associations in these passages connect the Oedipus myth with the Socratic desire for knowledge, ending with a flight into the "mythical, maternal womb" that symbolizes an ecstatic unity between poet and spectator, individual and collective. Like the "mythless man," Oedipus returns from exile to the primordial womb of *myth itself*, which, throughout *The Birth*, parallels the Romantic movement of a return to nature.

M. H. Abrams discusses the Romantic quality of rapture in *The Birth*, stressing the dialectical reconciliation of opposites that produces it. Abrams reads in Romanticism the cultural flourishing of Enlightenment idealism that we find especially in Schiller's moral-aesthetic reconciliation between reason and sensuality.[413] Abrams vacillates in his characterization of Nietzsche's Romanticism, moving between a self-redemption from psychical self-division and a more far-reaching communal reconciliation with alienated nature.[414] My discussion shows how Nietzsche subverts a Romantic redemption narrative insofar his tragic philosophy is plagued by humanity's irreducible *dissonance* (BT 25), as a post-romantic critique both of the Enlightenment's "theoretical man" and of his Romantic moral-aesthetic redemption. As Euben writes of the Oedipus myth, in tragedy "the long-sought unity of understanding merely presages disintegration."[415] In one rhetorical register, Nietzsche frames tragedy as the fulfillment of the Romantic ideal, ironically imbuing its social significance with a form of Rousseauian optimism that I have elucidated throughout my reading of *The Birth*. The aesthetic experience of a communal

[413] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, ch. 3.1.
[414] Ibid., 121–22, 316–18.
[415] Euben, *Tragedy of Political Theory*, 121.

reconciliation that harmonizes humanity's psycho-social dissonance realizes humanity's long-sought unity with nature. In another register, Nietzsche undermines this rhetoric in the illusory quality of aesthetic experience, which serves to conceal humanity's irreducible dissonance. He thereby subverts the Romantic expectation of a harmonious return to nature, which is nothing short of a desire to escape from reality into a cultural fantasy.

In *The Birth*, the metaphysical comfort that tragic myth affords is nothing but a cultural illusion, a delightful phantasm divorced from reality. The perversely unnatural quality of this illusion, which Nietzsche associates with the crime of incest, is that it masquerades as the primeval, hidden truth about nature, as its ultimate revelation.

> There is an ancient popular belief, particularly in Persia, that a wise magician can only be born out of incest; the riddle-solving Oedipus who woos his mother immediately leads us to interpret this as the meaning that some enormous offence against nature (such as incest in this case) must first have occurred to supply the cause whenever prophetic and magical energies break the spell of present and future, the rigid law of individuation, and indee the actual magic of nature. How else could nature be forced to reveal her secrets, other than by victorious resistance to her, i.e. by some unnatural event? (BT 9)

The symbolism of incest is prevalent in the Hermetic doctrine of the return of the many to the one, which manifests a unity of opposites. Abrams indicates that this mystical union influences the Romantic narrative of a return to nature that coincides with cultural renewal.

> This *mysterium coniunctionis*, leading to a new alchemical birth, was equated in the realm of mind with the event of spiritual death and rebirth, and the conjunction was often pictured in Hermetic literature by a male and female figure in a sexual embrace. (As a clue to one source of the Romantic theme of the symbolic love of brother and sister, it is noteworthy that in alchemy, on the grounds that the male

> and female opposites had a common genetic source, the *coniunctio* was often represented as an incestuous brother-sister union.)[416]

In *The Birth*, the antagonism between Apollo and Dionysus is that between the two sexes (BT 1), which further parallels the brother-sister relationship between Aryan and Semitic mythology (BT 9). The Oedipus myth manifests the synthesis of Apollo and Dionysus that reflects an incestuous unity between pagan and Christian mythology. Oedipus's incestuous union breaks the bonds of individuation, leading to the audience's perceived return to the primordial unity of nature. In a metatheatrical sense, this Romantic return is incestuous because in it nature is nowhere to be found; tragic drama produces the illusion of our perceived intimacy with nature by means of an instinctual deception.

The paradoxical effect of tragic myth resonates profoundly with Oedipus's incestuous relation to his mother. The woman whom he dearly loves, the mother of his children, is the woman he knows least. The unknown depth of their erotic relationship is one of murderous enmity. This paradox registers on two distinct levels, since not only is the intimacy between Oedipus and Jocasta totally divorced from reality, insofar as they remain strangers to one another, but their intimacy is, genetically speaking, as close as humanly possible. The Apollonian deception of appearances operates at the first level, while the Dionysian dissolution of appearances operates at the second level. Nietzsche's picture of tragedy weaves these two levels incestuously together.

> If drama, with the help of music, spreads out all its movements and figures before us with such inwardly illuminated clarity, as if we were seeing a tissue being woven on a rising and falling loom, it also produces, taken as a whole, an effect which goes *beyond all the effects of Apolline art*. In the total effect of tragedy the Dionysiac gains the upper hand once more; it closes with a sound which could

[416] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 160.

> never issue from the realm of Apolline art. Thereby Apolline deception is revealed for what it is: a persistent veiling, for the duration of the tragedy, of the true Dionysiac effect, an effect so powerful, however, that it finally drives the Apolline drama itself into a sphere where it begins to speak with Dionysiac wisdom and where it negates itself and its Apolline visibility. (BT 21)

Tragedy weds the deepest cruelty to the deepest tenderness so forcefully that, "listening to countless calls of lust and woe re-echoing from the 'wide space of the world's night'" (BT 21), reality escapes our imagination. We are no more able to comprehend rationally or morally the horror of Oedipus's monstrosity than we are naturally willing to gouge out our eyes. The radiating light that emanates from the ungraspable horror presented on stage is that of sheer illusion, the total eclipse of nature in the form of its redemptive transfiguration. Exhausting the musical dissonance of the passions, uniting despair and elation, mourning and jubilation, the ultimate metaphysical reality that tragic drama unveils amounts to a deceptive aftereffect that is positively blinding. The subjective limit of knowledge blinds us in the pleasurable laceration of consciousness by ignorant unconsciousness. We experience the return of knowledge to nonknowledge as yet another deception, since this return is imbued with metaphysical significance, as if in ecstatic nothingness we had discovered the metaphysical ground of being. The aftereffect of tragedy is that of a shock wave that the audience experiences as a blissful state of objectless contemplation — nature's sublime transfiguration into ethereal emptiness. Oedipus's defilement of nature is hidden from view precisely in the moment of its revelation, as his self-blinding takes place off stage. Along with Oedipus, we are left with nothing but sockets for eyes, awestruck.

My interpretation of how Nietzsche reads this mytho-metaphysical process into Sophocles's play adheres to its symbolic dimensions, manifested in the reversals of phenomenal appearances. These reversals hinge on the destructive power of Dionysus, whose inversion of opposites creates a doubling effect. The triangulated taboos of infanticide, patricide, and incest manifest the Dionysian negation of appearances, "the dissolution of nature" (BT 9) concealed within the tragic hero. Oedipus's murder of his father avenges the act of attempted infanticide and results in incest. He commits these transgressions, which annihilate the difference of familial identities, in a blind state of ignorance. The hero's Apollonian self-consciousness masks his Dionysian unconsciousness. The murder of the father represents the negation of paternal and political authority, whose royal seat Oedipus usurps, and symbolically coincides with the return to the mother's womb. The Dionysian negation of Apollonian appearances produces a doubling effect, wherein the hero's dissolution of nature perversely erects a new apparent order, headed by Oedipus as king of the polis. While Oedipus embodies the state's domination of the polis, his role as a *pharmakos* also reverses this position, since he becomes its redemptive scapegoat. Playing the role of dominator, his rule is idolatrous. The polis praises the criminal as their king and hero; as the source of its corruption, the polis praises him as its savior. This idolatry exists at the heart of state power, whose deceptive ideal conceals a violence that harbors the seeds of its self-undoing. Oedipus the king represents the tyranny of a deceptively Apollonian ideal that masks the hero's Dionysian corruption. This Apollonian idealization of existence conceals its inner corruption, realized in Oedipus's incestuous union with his mother. This leads to his

tragic insight into the Dionysian abyss of nature as the horror of his own crimes is revealed to him. All of this is inscribed in Oedipus's fate from the moment of birth, symbolized by his scarred feet. His guilt doubles as innocence and vice versa, in true Dionysian form. "In this existence as a dismembered god, Dionysos has a double nature; he is both cruel, savage demon and mild, gentle ruler" (BT 10). The poet's tragic aesthetic finally transfigures Oedipus's suffering (like that of Dionysus), symbolized by his ocular disfiguration. Oedipus's self-blinding "inverts a familiar optical one" in the experience of the spectators.

> When we turn away blinded after a strenuous attempt to look directly at the sun, we have dark, coloured patches before our eyes, as if their purpose were to heal them; conversely, those appearances of the Sophoclean hero in images of light, in other words, the Apolline quality of the mask, are the necessary result of gazing into the terrible depths of nature radiant patches, as it were, to heal a gaze seared by gruesome night. (BT 9)

The spectator's experience of a gaze seared by gruesome night is mirrored in the self-blinding of Oedipus, a blindness that is transfigured into epiphanic light by means of the very Apollonian representation of the tragic hero's suffering. For Nietzsche, tragedy's inverted optical effect at once reveals and conceals the Dionysian destruction of the moral world order. The symbolic arc of the play culminates in the pessimistic wisdom that Sophocles's chorus expresses in *Oedipus at Colonus*: "Not to be born surpasses thought and speech./ The second best is to have seen the light/ And then go back quickly whence we came" (ll. 1224–26). In tragic myth, this wisdom undergoes a therapeutic process of "metaphysical transfiguration" (BT 24). Oedipus, blessed by the rays of epistemic illumination he fiercely desires, is cursed by the pitilessness of fate which optimistic science disavows but through an embittered struggle is forced to confront. This

confrontation in tragic art remains indirect, its representation being infused with "metaphysical solace" (BT 18).

Read in the context of *The Birth*, Sophocles's drama symbolically brings to light the deluded blindness of optimistic science, whose unconscious configuration of nature as an intellectual riddle conceals the mythical, Dionysian abyss of nature. Oedipus's intellectual hubris represents the optimistic flight of "scientific man" from the primeval order of religious myth, but his Socratic emancipation from nature leads to his Dionysian return to nature, to a confrontation with his own profound ignorance. By solving the Sphinx's riddle, science is destined to confront the circular pathology of its construction of reality, its inextricability from the mythical order upon whose repudiation it is founded. Viewed from the perspective of Oedipus's epistemic optimism, the riddle signifies access to the unfettered rule of civilization and the sovereign potency of human ingenuity, while viewed from the perspective of Oedipus's tragic pessimism it signifies the mythical negation of civilization and humanity's futile impotence. Oedipus's ability to solve the riddle coincides with the Socratic transformation of reality into a scientific riddle deprived of any mythical significance. Embodying the "mythless man" who finally returns to nature's "mythical, maternal womb," Oedipus's unconscious denial of the riddle's mythical significance is savaged by the ineluctable sovereignty of myth, whose power violently overwhelms his rational capacities.

The tragic irrationality of reason climaxes at the end of the play. Oedipus's discovery of his mother's deceased, dangling body reveals the maternal object that his rationalizing hubris had idealized as a prized possession to be but a corpse. The idealizing

hubris of reason, as a form of daemonic possession, immolates all that it touches. The chorus discloses to the audience how Oedipus rushed inside to discover his mother and subsequently blinded himself with the brooches from her dress. "As he raved/ some god showed him the way . . . Bellowing terribly and led by some/ invisible guide he rushed on the two doors,—/ wrenching the hollow bolts out of their sockets, he charged inside" (ll. 1258–63). In this scene, Oedipus is dispossessed of reason and possessed by a god. His "wrenching the hollow bolts out of their sockets" parallels his self-blinding, whereby Oedipus charges inside of himself. Oedipus's self-knowledge results in blindness, his inner self confined in darkness. Reaping the consequences of his unnatural perversion, Oedipus's self-blinding effects in the audience an enigmatic sensation of being healed. Euben writes:

> Who is more the *pharmakon*, healer and disease, than Oedipus? And what about him is more *pharmakon* than his mind and intellect? The mind that saved Thebes from the Sphinx is also a mind that is oblivious to what it is saying, seeing, and doing. . . . Oedipus uncovers a light so dazzling that only the blind can bear it. It seems that human intelligence, perhaps especially an intelligence unknowingly formed by its origins in space and time, comes to grief. There is of course a paradox in putting it this way. Tragedy does overcome mysterious forces by situating them within its own ordering process and "rational" schema.[417]

Tragic myth exhibits the structure of human understanding that produces the antithesis between appearance and reality, whose dissonance is felt to be overcome by the intellect only through its collapse at the limits of nature's fathomability. The Dionysian abyss of nature exists within the cultural realm of artistic production as a fantasy that attempts to incorporate what lies beyond the limit of human civilization and hence of human

[417] Euben, *Tragedy of Political Theory*, 103, 125.

comprehensibility. Oedipus's vision returns to prenatal darkness, the primordial chaos of nature, the dramatic spectacle of which blinds the spectators with (de)light. Oedipus bears, beyond thought and speech, what is in fact best in life — *not to be, to be nothing* — without paradoxically ceasing to live. He returns to the darkness whence he came, symbolized by his mother's womb, and is reborn into a sacred innerness that dissolves the moral opposition between good and evil. Oedipus's crimes provide a glimpse into the abyss of human finitude that confutes the myth of moral-rational sovereignty, an abyss whose transfiguration results from the hero's saint-like martyrdom. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, the exiled regicide, the incestuous parricide, is blessed by the gods.

It would appear that Nietzsche glorifies Oedipus's crimes, justifying them by the salvific power of art and its capacity to overcome the most abject suffering, inaugurating "a new world on the ruins of the old [moral order] that has been overthrown" (BT 9). This literalist reading provokes a misguided sense of moral indignation. Consider the myth's significance for our contemporary age of techno-scientific enlightenment.[418] Humanity has yet to confront the enormity of its ecological crimes, whose consequences we relegate to the sphere of an abstract problem to solve, as if the cataclysm had not already been accomplished. But for Nietzsche we do not resolve the human conundrum of psychological disavowal by way of its rational, conscious recognition. Rather, his rhetoric confoundingly mimics our endless capacity for self-idealization, whose superficial depths

[418] "This is the story of the Anthropocene: a truly Oedipal myth. And, unlike Oedipus, who was blind to his own actions for so long, as we face the revelation of our past errors we must resist the temptation to blind ourselves anew: we must agree to look at them head on, in order to be able to face what is coming toward us with our eyes wide open" (Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*, trans. Catherine Porter (Polity Press: Medford MA, 2020), 277).

we cannot help but be seduced by, mainly in the form of modern cultural values. Ethically speaking, he challenges us to accept the fallibility of all human knowledge, its inherent contradictoriness, in light of the abyss of subjectivity, that is, our unfathomable finitude. He profoundly undermines the illusion of moral, aesthetic, and rational sovereignty, whose tragic victims we cannot help from becoming, since to a radical extent we remain strangers to ourselves.[419] In today's late stage of voracious corporate capitalism and techno-industrial barbarism, what we pressingly need is an earnest attempt at humility. Despite the prejudicial assumptions we may have about Nietzsche's authorial intentions, or rather because of them, he might yet have something to teach us about making such an attempt, if only by way of our painful exposure as modern subjects.

IV. CONCLUSION

My analysis of *The Birth* focuses on the significance Nietzsche's conception of tragic philosophy, which signifies an aesthetic reconciliation between optimism and pessimism that the tragic pathos of aesthetic rapture achieves. Beneath this apparent resolution, which tragic myth supplies in the illusory experience of metaphysical solace, lies the eternal contradiction between being and becoming. While the healing balm of art appears to reconcile us with nature, this is entirely delusional. My discussion illuminates how the irresolvable quality of the conflict between being and becoming is present in Nietzsche's reading of the Oedipus myth and informs the modern philosophical landscape that Nietzsche projects back on Attic tragedy. I have argued that this antagonism has deep

[419] "We are unknown to ourselves . . . We simply remain strangers to ourselves by necessity, we do not understand ourselves, we *have* to mistake ourselves, for us the proposition 'each is furthest from himself' applies for all eternity" (GM P 1).

cultural implications that underlie Nietzsche's critique of Socratism and an Enlightenment ideal of scientific progress.

We have seen how Nietzsche embeds a post-Romantic critique of Enlightenment values in his reading of the Oedipus myth. He weaves the social-political significance of the myth with his cultural representation of the Western philosophical imagination, which beholds nature as a scientific riddle to be solved. However, nature cannot be understood apart from our aesthetic construction of it, bounded by the limit of human subjectivity. We apprehend what lies beyond our cultural imagination as an unknowable void, which for Nietzsche points not to the *Ding an sich* but to the ineluctable human need for myth. Nietzsche's reading of the Oedipus myth reflects the process of aesthetic transformation characteristic of his tragic philosophy, wherein the optimistic quest for objective knowledge comes to wreck upon the pessimistic insight into the (imaginary) abyss of nature, from which the healing balm of tragic myth emerges. The moral cataclysm that Nietzsche embeds in the depth of his first tragic philosophy, that of *The Birth*, undermines the Christian-Romantic expectation of cultural redemption, instead challenging us to recognize the all too human fallibility that belies the self-righteous tartuffery of our moral-rational ideations. Failing to achieve this type of recognition, we delight in the blindness of self-ignorance, whose abysmal consequences Oedipus embodies but whose significance is lost on us, as we float away in imaginary solace.

CONCLUSION

In Chapter 1, I began this study by elaborating the parallel narratives of Jewish and Greek slave revolt in Nietzsche's *Genealogy* and *The Birth*, identifying ritual human sacrifice as the social-political mechanism by which the slave revolt achieves its success in the West in a process Nietzsche calls incorporation, that is, the psychosocial and psychophysiological integration and transmission of cultural values. The asceticism of Christian-Platonic morality emerges from the historical synthesis of these specific Greek and Jewish value systems, both of which are inaugurated by the martyrdom of their founding figures, Socrates and Jesus. The mechanism of slave revolt is essentially mythopoetic; it immortalizes the martyr as a mythical hero who transcends death. Each figure challenges the customary morality of his society by espousing new values that Nietzsche links with the emergence of ascetic ideals. Socrates engenders the religious faith in reason characterizing scientific optimism, while Jesus engenders the transcendent value of compassion. The emergence of value-laden myths, whose asceticism is finally found to infect the ideal of modern science, thus constitutes the cultural horizon of Western history.

For Nietzsche, Schopenhauer's pessimistic denial of life's value marks the culmination of ascetic morality in the West, the nihilistic loss of meaning that haunts the horizon of nineteenth century European culture. In Chapter 2, I analyze Schopenhauer's conception of salvation as it results from the will's return to nothingness, the *nihil negativum*. I argue that Nietzsche targets this soteriological doctrine in his critique of the *will to nothingness* that characterizes the asceticism of modern science and its will to

truth. While contemporary proponents of philosophical nihilism seek to emancipate this position from what Nietzsche diagnoses as its religious origins, I maintain that even — perhaps even especially — its most secular form has its basis in an ascetic moral disposition, which Nietzsche parodies in his fable from "Truth and Lying" as a form of masochistic self-laceration. I continue to engage Nietzsche's rebuttal of Schopenhauer in the next chapter.

In Chapter 3, Nietzsche implicitly contrasts a pre-Socratic antiteleological view of nature with the Socratic idealist who advocates a teleological one that grounds the value of moral perfectibility. Both reject the stance of pessimism that Schopenhauer's philosophy exemplifies in its response to the antagonism between teleological and antiteleogical worldviews. Nietzsche's tragic ideal apparently reconciles this antagonism in the form of a music-making Socrates, who emerges from the depths of pessimism but affirms existence as an aesthetic phenomenon. Tragic affirmation overcomes both the pessimistic view that life is not worth living along with the optimistic belief in our capacity for universal knowledge. I argue that the metaphysical antagonism between teleological and antiteleological worldviews persists despite its apparent reconciliation in the form of Nietzsche's tragic ideal, which proves illusory. Nietzsche highlights the anthropomorphic character of all knowledge. Philosophy, no less than science and religion, projects human qualities onto nature, imbuing the world with metaphysical meaning.

My discussion of the music-making Socrates in Chapter 3 carries into Chapter 4, which discusses how Nietzsche's essay "The Greek State" unfolds the social-political

implications of his tragic ideal. Nietzsche interprets the significance of Plato's noble lie in the context of a tragic culture that affirms art as the highest value and justifies the virtual slavery of the masses. In relation to *The Birth*, I take Nietzsche's tragic ideal to function as an immanent critique of the modern German nation-state that exposes the hypocrisy of bourgeois society, whose culture flourishes on the back of capitalist exploitation while promulgating ideals of social-political progress. I elaborated the nature of Nietzsche's seduction in the form of his music-making Socrates, who reconciles the antithesis between science and myth, thereby inaugurating a synthesis of Socrates and Dionysus. I argued that this synthesis persists throughout Nietzsche's oeuvre, whereby an optimistic Socrates is transfigured in the process of confronting the depths of pessimism, from which he emerges as a Dionysian hero who tragically affirms life. The amoral sensualism of Nietzsche's Dionysianism inversely mirrors the moral-rational Dionysianism of Plato, both of which function as mytho-metaphysical *pharmaka* for suffering and cultural decline. While Plato's Socrates seduces his followers with the promise of a transcendent good and moral-rational enlightenment, Nietzsche's Socrates seduces his followers with a tragic ideal that affirms the innocence of becoming as an aesthetic phenomenon. Nietzsche conceives of his tragic ideal as a type of noble deception that exposes Plato's sophistry and perversely leads to self-ruination rather than moral elevation. The seduction of Nietzsche's music-making Socrates thereby aims to expose the irrational basis of our belief in scientific progress, which for Nietzsche may lead to a barbarism sanctified by the promise of cultural renewal. Nietzsche's tragic ideal ironically exposes this promise for the self-destructive fantasy that it is.

In Chapter 5, I outlined the religious horizon of metaphysics as we find it in Schopenhauer's philosophy, and how this is reflected in *The Birth*. Nietzsche's conception of the primordial unity with its eternal contradiction reflects Schopenhauer's distinction between the universal will and the apophatic mystery beyond it, the transcendent will-lessness achieved by the saint. On my reading of *The Birth*, Nietzsche's depiction of mystical-aesthetic rapture reflects that of Schopenhauer's saint, albeit deprived of moral meaning and projected onto the horizon of German cultural renewal. The nature of mystical-aesthetic experience in *The Birth* is nonetheless ambiguous. Given Nietzsche's anti-metaphysical stance, discussed in earlier chapters, I argue that this experience collapses the myth of metaphysical transcendence at the limits of subjectivity, a myth that is reified in the seductive illusion of cultural-historical redemption. This illusion conceals the inner barbarism fueling the modern ideal of social-political progress. I examined the illusory basis of Nietzsche's tragic ideal and its ironical, self-undermining character. Under the influence of Lange, Nietzsche formulates a tragic ideal whose character is inherently duplicitous. I argue that Nietzsche's early position is consistent with his later writings, which aim to expose the complicity between enlightenment science and the mythopoetic instincts that it opposes. Throughout his career, Nietzsche's tragic ideal seduces his readers with the glorious appeal of life-affirmation. I argue that this seduction masks his critique of our chiefly unconscious tendency toward self-idealization, which forms the religious basis of our belief in scientific progress.

In Chapter 6, I discussed Nietzsche's implicit subversion of this ideal in his treatment of the Oedipus myth. In *The Birth*, he models his treatment of the myth after

Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will that assimilates the neo-Platonic distinction between the one and the many, infused with a Christian-Romantic redemption narrative that emerges from the pessimism upon which Oedipus's Socratic optimism is wrecked. Interpreted as a religious martyr, Nietzsche's Oedipus combines the features of both Socrates and Christ in the figure of a tragic hero whose self-abasement blinds the spectators with Dionysian rapture. Nietzsche anachronistically infuses the ancient myth with modern cultural values, whose bewildering tensions weave a tragic ideal that forms the messianic horizon of Western culture and which appears to sanctify Oedipus's horrible crimes. However, I argue that it actually exposes our largely unconscious process of self-idealization, the delusive seduction of metaphysical comfort.

FINAL REMARKS

Taking up and extending Porter's challenge to the common periodization, a central component of my thesis examined what I interpreted as a key symbolic clue to the connection between *The Birth* and Nietzsche's later work, namely, that of a mythical ouroboros. We have seen that at the end of his career, Nietzsche signposts a thread of continuity that bends his corpus into a circular motion of return, connecting polar extremes. "And with that, I touch again on my former point of departure — the *Birth of Tragedy* was my first revaluation of all values: with that, I put myself back into the soil from which grow my will, my *ability* — I, the last disciple of the philosopher Dionysus — I, the teacher of eternal recurrence" (TI "Ancients," 5). An ellipsis suggestively carries this thought off into its own concealed depths. Like an ouroboros, the head of Nietzsche's corpus bites its own tail by returning to its beginning, mirroring the circular passage of

time that his famous doctrine of eternal recurrence communicates. This serpentine symbol punctuates Nietzsche's oeuvre, representing a paradoxical unity of opposites. In *The Birth* and beyond, the transformation of science into art reveals this unity, collapsing the antagonism between myth and metaphysics, poetry and philosophy.

Nietzsche writes in an early letter that "knowledge, art, and philosophy are now growing into one another so much in me that I shall in any case give birth to a centaur one day" (BVN-1870 58).[420] The centaur's hybridity encapsulates the unity of science and art that structures Nietzsche's work. In keeping with this insight, my analysis considered key poetic images and metaphors in terms of their philosophical significance. Specifically, I focused on a series of connected mythical monsters: satyrs, sirens, and the Sphinx. Each of these figures manifests the contradiction between beast and human that results in a supernatural hybrid. This expresses a fundamental ambivalence concerning the distinction between nature and culture, emphasized in *The Birth* by the contrast between "Dionysiac man" and "cultured man" (BT 8). The former embodies a virile, mythopoetic instinctiveness that springs from nature's primordial core, while the latter, synonymous with "theoretical man" (BT 17), embodies an impotent, artless intellectualism that signals a rationalistic falling away from nature. Roughly speaking, Nietzsche's bald dichotomy associates myth with natural fecundity and science with cultural sterility.

What are we to make of such a blatant binarism? I have argued that Nietzsche subverts the type of opposition that he erects as he probes the psychological fabric of his culture's collective fantasies. Paradoxes ensue. In what we might call a schema of

[420] Translated by Christopher Middleton, *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, 63.

paradox, contradiction playfully persists through an inversion of opposites that renders their relation ambiguous. Paradox pushes the logic of contradiction beyond a neat contrast of opposites without annulling their tension, whereby opposites coincide in their perverse interpenetration, forming an identity constituted by dialectical dissonance. Less abstractly, let us consider the above dichotomy in these terms. Nietzsche identifies "theoretical man" with a drive for knowledge that he christens Socratic, propelled by a moralistic faith in the transcendent value of scientific truth, whereas "Dionysiac man" ecstatically affirms life in its amoral, irrational fury. However, a form of "Socratism" predates the historical Socrates, emblemized by tragic heroes like Prometheus and Oedipus no less, whose transgressive lust for knowledge culminates in unfathomable agony. By now we are most familiar with the case of Oedipus, whose pursuit of knowledge does not alleviate suffering but only compounds it. *The Birth* tells us that in tragic art, the transfiguring powers of mythopoetic instinct emerge through this painful spectacle to sanctify existence.

This picture already problematizes the dichotomous relationship between Socratic science and Dionysian poetry, since a desire for truth inheres in both. But why should tragic life-affirmation presuppose a rigorous intensification of rational investigation? Nietzsche supposes that it does, since only Kant's so-called Copernican Revolution begins to herald its modern resurgence from the soil of Greek antiquity, where a similar pattern purportedly played itself out. Why this intimate link between poetry and science? Or, as Nietzsche puts it, "supposing that truth is a woman — well?" This famous image from the Preface of *Beyond* sets up the questions that follow in §1, where Oedipus

confronts the problem of the value of truth that takes the form of a Sphinx. We know that Oedipus, having solved the Sphinx's riddle, joyfully returns to his genetic point of origin, fertilizing the womb that once held him. His ability to solve the Sphinx's riddle wins him Queen Jocasta as a prize. And Nietzsche's questions — "suppose we want truth: *why not rather untruth*? And uncertainty? Even ignorance?" — echo Jocasta's attempt to evade the truth about her son's criminal identity that would expose the abomination of their marital bed. After it is too late to heed them, Oedipus effectively personifies these questions by gouging out his eyes. He grasps the value of *untruth* only after having satisfied his lust for truth, whose abrupt reversal reveals the unconscious blindness of desire that binds these opposites together, the one emerging retrospectively from the other.

This background contextualizes the aphorism that begins the Third Essay of the *Genealogy*. "Heedless, mocking, violent — that's how wisdom wants *us*: she is a woman and only ever loves a warrior." The description suits Oedipus perfectly, a philosopher king whose capacity for truth slays the Sphinx and wins him the woman, a courageous warrior who conquers by virtue of his intellect alone. But this warrior's drive for truth is tragically incestuous. Wisdom rebounds upon truth's victor, resulting in his self-mutilation. In this sense, wisdom resembles the "double-natured" Sphinx, that hybrid monster who stands at the gate of Oedipus's sexual transgression. The enlightened hero represses the blind, fornicating beast within himself, whose revelation results in the shame that is the anguished exposure of this very repression. The hero's split identity mirrors the Sphinx's, ultimately exhibiting a troubling fecundity. Oedipus embodies an

excessive bifurcation of intellect and instinct that intensifies their extremity: knowledge increases in proportion to beastliness as these spheres inextricably magnify one another. Oedipus firmly believes in the salvific power of his intellect with which he delivered Thebes from the Sphinx's tyranny. He once again promises to alleviate Thebes by embarking on a judicious inquiry into the causal ground of the plague that blights it, eager to display his powers of rational discernment. However, it turns out that this Socratic tendency itself bears responsibility for the city's curse. Or is Oedipus's repressed, bestial criminality the real cause? Both answers remain true while contradicting one another; their dialectical dissonance constitutes the duplicity of Oedipus's tenuous identity, his self-revelation impaled by oblivion.

This is a crucial, perplexing moment in Attic tragedy that Nietzsche memorably emphasizes in *The Birth* and to which I point for guidance in interpreting the significance of his tragic philosophy.

> [I]f we once divert our gaze from the character of the hero as it rises to the surface and becomes visible — fundamentally, it is no more than an image of light (*Lichtbild*) projected on to a dark wall, i.e. appearance (*Erscheinung*) through and through[421] — if, rather, we penetrate to the myth which projects itself in these bright reflections, we suddenly experience a phenomenon which inverts [*umgekehrtes*] a familiar optical one. When we turn away blinded after a strenuous attempt to look directly at the sun, we have dark, coloured patches before our eyes, as if their purpose were to heal them; conversely, those appearances of the Sophoclean hero in images of light [*umgekehrt sind jene Lichtbilderscheingungen des sophokleischen Helden*], in other words, the Apolline quality of the mask, are the necessary result of gazing into the inner, terrible depths of nature — radiant patches, as it were, to heal a gaze seared by gruesome night.

[421] Plato, *Republic*, 518a *et seq*.

Though Oedipus destroys "every law, all natural order, indeed the moral world . . . [through these very actions] a higher, magical sphere of effects" comes into play, namely those phantasmal images of light that elevate the hero through "infinite transfiguration" (BT 9). In §230 of *Beyond* we again find the steeled intellectual who gazes "with undaunted Oedipus eyes" into nature's abyss, all the while pondering "'why knowledge at all?'" And in §56, the gruesome night that annihilates the moral world again gives rise to a *vision* of the *inverse ideal* (*umgekehrte Ideal*), represented by "the most world-affirming human being . . . insatiably shouting *da capo* not only to himself but to the whole play and performance, and not only to a performance, but at bottom to the one who needs this performance." This connects back to §9 of *The Birth*, where Nietzsche evokes the spectacle of a tragic hero whose apparition on stage as an inverted image of light exists solely within the audience's imagination, a seductive fantasy of redemption. With the staging effects in full view, Nietzsche describes the form of aesthetic manipulation by which the seduction operates, namely by inverting a representation of horror whose transfiguration fills the audience with metaphysical comfort. In this context, Oedipus takes on the role of a messianic martyr whose self-annihilation marks the moment of Dionysus's communal revelation, itself indistinguishable from a blinding illusion that deceives the play's enraptured audience.

In both *The Birth* and *Beyond*, Nietzsche associates Oedipus with the intellectual gaze that apparently penetrates to the heart of reality and into the abysmal depths of nature. But in *The Birth*, Oedipus instinctively transgresses the limits of nature by reversing the natural order, effectively abolishing it. His intellect unnaturally magnifies

the bestial criminality that it later uncovers. To make sense of this, we can consider the play's political significance. On this level, Oedipus personifies the psychosocial tensions within the Greek state, whose high culture flourishes on a foundation of slavery and imperial conquest, its repulsive "instinctual" ground. Cultural enlightenment flourishes in proportion to these forms of tyrannical domination, the dubious price of civilizational progress. Hence, the question "why knowledge at all?" concerns the violence that fuels the cultural production of knowledge rather than the discovery of nature's undiluted secrets. The latter prospect simply functions as a justification for the former process. Sophocles's play displays this perverse interpenetration of nature and culture, wherein nothing "natural" remains. Our attempt to grasp nature's depths not only confronts us with our own repressed violence but reveals the incestuous womb of cultural production into which the appearance of any purely natural order dissolves.

The redemptive vision that Nietzsche describes in *The Birth* and *Beyond* shields us not from the terrors of an untamed wilderness but from the violence of civilization. A collective cultural fantasy whose communal hallucination functions instinctually as a means of psychological repression, the vision blinds the audience with emotional consolation. If and when the psychological effects of this fantasy wear off, Nietzsche's virile, life-affirming human being comes to resemble nothing less than a parody of the bourgeois intellectual's heroic self-justification. Nietzsche thereby confronts our attraction to such fantasies and aims to expose the instinctual blindness that fuels them: the belief in the salvific power of rational enlightenment; the equation of knowledge with unconditional goodness; the notion that to excel in reason is to excel in virtue. A most

uncanny paradox persists here. While Oedipus's redemptive transfiguration emerges from the apparent collapse of these values, our faith in them increases, since this same faith hallows the hero's Titanic quest for knowledge *despite* its destructive consequences. Nietzsche probes the unconscious cultural formation of a desire whose irrational delight conceals the intellect's self-destructive cruelty at the very moment of its supposed revelation. We cannot behold the dissonance that we are except through a veil, imperfectly.

Nietzsche diagnoses a violently destructive myth that emerges from the pathos of rational enlightenment: humanity's sovereign emancipation from old religious codes of morality through the realization of its constitutional perfectibility. In other words, the myth of humanity at a stroke godless and divine. He attempts to seduce us with this myth so as to expose our susceptibility to it, which we may very well disavow under the illusion of enlightened intellectual immunity, blind to the nightmare that our consoling dream conceals. Hence, there is a psychoanalytic dimension to Nietzsche's project that aims to illuminate the pathological element in our destructive beliefs, desires, and fantasies. The success of such therapeutic work relies on indirect means of communication, the only method available for accessing what is unconscious. Of course, achieving some small degree of self-recognition never frees us from the ineluctable allure of communal beliefs, desires, and fantasies, though their destructive element, actual or potential, might thereby be curtailed. Nietzsche thus teaches us to remain suspicious of authorities who promise to *free us* once and for all. He does so precisely by manipulating our desire for perfect health and lucidity, itself a pathological symptom of the failure to

accept our ineradicable fallibility and frailty as human beings. On that score, what gets left out of Nietzsche's portrait of Oedipus is most telling. Shamefully shattered by his own insane pride, having let go of his possessive lust to rule and dominate, Oedipus experiences a profound and moving vulnerability that evokes the transformative power of humility, not violence. When in the sightless dark Oedipus reaches out to grasp the hands of his children, the hands of his little sisters, we witness a love born of tragedy, one only tragedy can bear. Here, in the monster's gaping wounds, we gently glimpse the finite face of a human being.

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