

DIONYSIAN DISTANCE

DIONYSIAN DISTANCE:  
READING NIETZSCHE WITH JEAN-LUC MARION

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A Thesis  
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree  
Master of Arts

McMaster University

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MASTER OF ARTS (2010)

McMaster University

(Religious Studies)

Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Dionysian Distance: Reading Nietzsche with Jean-Luc Marion

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NUMBER OF PAGES: vi, 133

## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the Dionysian currents in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche through the motifs identified by Catholic philosopher Jean-Luc Marion. Marion's study of Nietzsche, conducted primarily in his text *The Idol and Distance*, focuses on the interest the latter took in sounding out the idols of the metaphysical tradition. Marion suggests that Nietzsche allows the reader to imagine the possibility of a non-idolatrous encounter with the divine, one characterized by, and taking place across, distance. The remainder of the thesis investigates this claim. First, it looks at Nietzsche's style of writing – a philosophical poetics marked by playful and dangerous experimentation – in order to suggest that the style itself opens up distance in his work by fostering receptivity and personal abandon. Second, it studies *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in order to notice how this important text promotes abandon, receptivity and praise as alternatives to idolatry. In reading Nietzsche through the work of Jean-Luc Marion, this paper contributes to the body of scholarship that considers Nietzsche a deeply religious figure, and questions the sharp distinction between Nietzsche's Dionysus and the Christ.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe much to the members of my committee for the time and encouragement they gave towards this project, but even more for shaping my thought over the last several years. I would like to thank Dr. Dana Hollander for her rigor and scholarly zeal, Dr. Peter Widdicombe for his unending support and encouragement, and Dr. Travis Kroeker, my advisor, for essentially giving me these thoughts to think. I would also like to thank Dr. Zdravko Planinc for offering his insights at the defense. I owe nearly as much to my colleagues and friends in the Religious Studies Department for providing both inspiration for, and much needed relief from, academic work. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my wonderful parents, who acted not only as filial support but as extra readers, asking probing questions and correcting punctuation. Thank you.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

Jean-Luc Marion

GB *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*

ID *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*

Friedrich Nietzsche

AC *The Antichrist*

BGE *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*

BT *The Birth of Tragedy*

CW *The Case of Wagner*

D *Daybreak*

DD *Dithyrambs of Dionysus*

EH *Ecce Homo*

GM *On the Genealogy of Morals*

GS *The Gay Science*

HH *Human, All Too Human*

TI *Twilight of the Idols*

WP *Will to Power*

Z *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Der Verächter

Vieles lass ich fall'n und rollen  
Und ihr nennt mich drum Verächter.  
Wer da trinkt aus allzuvollen  
Bechern lässt viel fall'n und rollen,—  
Denkt vom Weine drum nicht schlechter

Scorn

There is much I drop and spill:  
I am full of scorn you think.  
If your beaker is too full,  
There is much you drop and spill  
Without scorning what you drink.

*GS "Prelude in German Rhymes" §10*

## **Introduction: Inheriting Nietzsche in Christian Thought**

In the oft-quoted first essay of his book *The Importance of Nietzsche*, Erich Heller names what he sees as the central paradox in the life of Friedrich Nietzsche: “[Nietzsche] is, by the very texture of his soul and mind, one of the most radically religious natures that the nineteenth century brought forth, but is endowed with an intellect which guards, with the aggressive jealousy of a watchdog, all approaches to the temple” (Heller 11). Nietzsche is well known for denouncing Christianity and its story of salvation, which he believes is based on a reaction against life. He is perhaps rather less well known for his equally vehement denunciation of the supposedly post-Christian soteriologies found in modern science and morality, which he believes duplicate Christianity's

underlying will to nothingness. Heller recognizes the difficulty in which Nietzsche finds himself: he has turned away from the metaphysical comforts of Christianity without allowing himself to adopt any of the “faiths” of the modern world, and yet he remains decidedly religious.

Nietzsche's religiosity is a common theme in contemporary Nietzsche scholarship, although it remains difficult to say which feature of his work establishes it as religious. In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche lists the characteristics of a genuinely religious life as follows: a “microscopic favorite occupation of self-examination and that tender composure which calls itself 'prayer' and is a continual readiness for the 'coming of God'” (BGE “What is Religious” §58). Nietzsche seems an obvious adherent to at least the former characteristic: he was scrupulous in his self-examination and in the demands he made on himself for faithfulness to the earth, to life, and to the god Dionysus. His concern with the discipline of and overcoming of the self – a popular theme amongst Nietzsche scholars after Walter Kaufmann's seminal work, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* – is arguably a religious concern in the most fundamental sense: the self is remade through conscientious observance and commitment. The latter characteristic – that tender composure called prayer, defined as a continual readiness for God – is perhaps more difficult to discern, although it seems Nietzsche was awaiting a redemption of some sort, even if it is

from redemption itself that he needed to be redeemed. In his recent book, *Redeeming Nietzsche: On the Piety of Unbelief*, Giles Fraser insists that Nietzsche is in fact obsessed with the question of human salvation, and that the whole of his project can be understood as an experiment in soteriology in a post-theistic age (Fraser 2). As the whole of the current thesis will show, a careful reader of Nietzsche has good reason to consider him religious in both senses: his self-examination demonstrates a vigilant preparation for the coming of the divine.

Given these characteristics, it has become typical for Christian theologians to show an interest in Nietzsche not only as an opponent, but as a thinker with whom they share a similar set of questions and, occasionally, a similar attempt at faithful answers. What would Nietzsche have thought of those who echo his words and yet remain Christian theologians? Kaufmann offers his opinion: “It is plain what Nietzsche would have thought of that: as little as he would have thought of most movements that have sought the sanction of his name” (Kaufmann vii). In fact, a Christian thinker may be particularly well-suited to reading Nietzsche because his name cannot easily be used as a sanction within Christian thought. Nietzsche did not want to be considered holy, begins Fraser. He was consistent in his distaste for followers and disciples. Those most in danger of making Nietzsche holy, however, are not those who recognize his close affinity to Christianity, but rather those who “construct hagiographies around his anti-

Christianity” (Fraser 3). To expand, Christian thinkers who respond to Nietzsche’s work, especially those sympathetic to Nietzsche’s experiments, have a necessarily complicated relationship with his thought as a whole. Because of his overt disdain for much of what is considered Christian, Christian thinkers cannot easily turn Nietzsche into their saintly leader. Those working within Christian traditions who take Nietzsche seriously as a conversation partner encounter a great deal of tension and contestation in their reading and for this reason might actually be well-suited to the sustained study of his thought. Among these thinkers, Jean-Luc Marion is notable for his bold engagement with, and critique of, Nietzsche that cannot finally be reduced to a straightforward polemic.

Marion has many titles – Catholic philosopher, post-modern theologian, phenomenologist – and his writing clearly demonstrates his allegiance to each of these traditions. He is concerned, above all, with the possibility of a non-idolatrous encounter with the divine. John D. Caputo and Michael Scanlon introduce Marion's task as an attempt to be more faithful to phenomenology than Husserl and Heidegger by allowing the phenomena to give themselves without any prior constraints, particularly the constraint of the transcendental subject of modernity (Caputo & Scanlon 5). Marion is interested in the possibility of phenomena whose givenness saturates and overflows the intention of any receiving subject; he is interested in the possibility of icons. As a theologian, he is

concerned with how one might *write* about God without succumbing to idolatry. The question of divine naming thus dominates his theological texts, and he shows great interest in writers who have also struggled with how one is to speak about God, whether they belong to the Catholic tradition or to the traditions that have informed phenomenology and post-modern thought. Marion sees Friedrich Nietzsche as a dominant figure in this deeply theological conversation.

Many questions arise regarding the relationship between the different disciplinary hats Marion wears. Specifically, how does his phenomenology inform his theology and vice versa? Also, how is his inevitable recourse to the status of the bishop and the centrality of the Catholic Church to be reconciled with his apophatic theological project? The aim of this thesis is not to offer a broad account of Marion's project, and thus we can simply ignore many of these questions. The aim is only to explore the fecundity of Marion's study of Nietzsche, examining what Nietzsche gives him to think and what Marion in turn can "give us to think" about Nietzsche (ID 22).

This limited concern allows us to limit the texts addressed. The thesis relies primarily on two of Marion's texts, supplementing them with a few more recent articles. *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, first available in English in 2001, was originally published in Paris in 1977 as *L'idole et la distance. God Without Being: Hors Texte* was made available in English much more quickly,

originally published as *Dieu sans l'être: Hors Texte* in 1982 and translated by 1991. In his preface to the translation of the latter, the author wishes to place the ideas therein in a much earlier context altogether, that of the crisis in French thought centering around the year 1968, to which *The Idol and Distance* is no doubt also a response. For Marion, that crisis was a matter of navigating the apparent antagonism of philosophy's response to the threat of nihilism and the Christian proclamation of revelation, and also noting where the antagonism all but disappears (GB xix). Marion names many thinkers who have influenced this field of questioning, both his contemporaries and his teachers. In this list, Nietzsche appears as a so-called horizon, making possible the ensuing conversation not only because of his influence on the history of modern philosophy, but because – as will become clear in the course of this project – Marion's own interest in the possibility of a theological phenomenology came about through close personal engagement with Nietzsche's life and work. Marion is thus not only finding areas of overlap between Nietzsche's project and his own, but considers Nietzsche an important theological forebear.

Marion is by no means the first Christian writer explicitly to recognize his theological debt to Nietzsche, though it is perhaps more common in the Protestant tradition. Giles Fraser suggests that the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth have allowed Nietzsche to enter into the 20<sup>th</sup> century theological

imagination not just as an opponent but as someone from whom the Christian thinker has something to learn (Fraser 9). In the first chapter of *Redeeming Nietzsche*, Fraser helpfully summarizes the most noteworthy commentary on Nietzsche from prominent 20<sup>th</sup> century theologians. Both Bonhoeffer and Barth, he claims, recognized a deeply Christian element in Nietzsche's primary anti-moral formulations: "beyond good and evil" in particular was considered an apt summary of the gospel message, which opposes the subordination of God to human moral concepts. The freedom of the overman, the one who operates beyond the dictates of human society, resembles the freedom of the Christian as expounded by Paul and Luther (Ibid. 4-5). Nietzsche himself recognized this kinship between Jesus' anti-legalism and his own anti-morality (BGE "Epigrams and Interludes" §164).

Bonhoeffer's resemblance to Nietzsche advances a step further, for he famously advocated Christianity without religion which, according to the proper definition of "secular", means a Christianity of the world. Fraser recognizes that this demonstrates a commitment to the incarnation more than a commitment to Nietzsche's demand for faithfulness to the earth, but what Bonhoeffer certainly does learn from Nietzsche is "an acute sensitivity to the various subtle guises which disloyalty to the earth can take" (Fraser 7). Taking seriously Nietzsche's assessment, Bonhoeffer seeks a Christianity that does not originate in negation of

the world through *ressentiment* but rather in celebration and affirmation.

Fraser suggests that Barth may be a better exemplification than Bonhoeffer of the indebtedness of contemporary theology to Nietzsche's criticisms of religion and his announcement of the death of God. Christian faith, claims Barth, must confront the same loss of meaning Nietzsche named and "renounce the comfort of human constructions" (Ibid. 9). Faith must do without the assurance of our own concepts; it involves a radical and dangerous commitment without metaphysical ground. The one who attempts to be faithful must take seriously Nietzsche's lesson that the will to truth finds only idols. Marion, via Heidegger and Derrida, comes to the same realization: Nietzsche's indictment of idolatry and concomitant criticism of the idolatrous tendencies of Christianity is profoundly pertinent to the attempt at faithful Christian thought.

Marion begins both of the aforementioned texts with Nietzsche's famous proclamation of the death of God. He insists that Nietzsche's announcement reveals the condition which allows for this death, namely, that what has been called "God" is in fact a metaphysical idol (GB xxi). Marion therefore begins not so much with the death of God as with the "death of God", the quotation marks around the phrase corresponding to the quotation marks around "God" as idol. Following Heidegger, Marion insists that given the qualified nature of "God", Nietzsche's meditation on the "death of God" is not a refutation of God or God's

existence; the “death of God” is not an assertion of atheism. Rather, it is a recognition of what Marion calls “the paradoxical but radical manifestation of the divine,” paradoxical because only manifest in absence (ID 4). The “death of God” signals the withdrawal of the divine, but it is precisely this withdrawal and the distance it intimates which will allow for meeting the divine *without* quotation marks, without what Fraser calls “the comfort of human constructions”. Marion suggests that Nietzsche’s thought lives in the terrain of absence and withdrawal (Ibid. 21). In summary, in positing an absence – the absence, at least, of the moral/metaphysical concept of “God” (examined in more detail in the first chapter) – Nietzsche has opened up a space for a non-idolatrous encounter with the divine.

Marion opens with the “death of God” and immediately thereafter insists that the absence it announces is spoken first in the revelation of God in Christ. There is no greater death of God than Christ’s death on the cross, and no greater instance of the paradoxical manifestation of the divine than the Father’s abandonment of the Son: in Christ God’s withdrawal marks his advance (Ibid. xxxv). Although Marion begins with Nietzsche he also begins here, with faith in the revelation of the crucified Christ and the claim that all our desolations – and all of Nietzsche’s desolations – are repeated “in advance” and with a greater seriousness in the “Trinitarian play” at work in the Christ event (Ibid.). In Christ’s

death, God is made present in his absence or distance.

Marion thus begins with Nietzsche *and* with the proclamation of Christ's lordship. In doing so, he is in part suggesting that these two very different deaths of God – the one announced by the madman in Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* and the one Christians recognize on the cross – are perhaps not as different as they may at first seem. Many, including Barth and Bonhoeffer (as we saw above), have recognized thematic similarities between the two proclamations and what they demand: both announce a radical freedom and simultaneously demand a dangerous commitment to the world.

Marion does not, however, name this dual beginning only in order to conduct a comparison. The complicated matter of philosophical inheritance and interpretation does not allow these beginnings to remain so distinct. As I suggest above, Marion recognizes his theological debt to Nietzsche: Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God has informed Marion's understanding of Christ's death. He insists that Nietzsche has in fact allowed him to conceive of Christianity through the motif of distance (Ibid. 21). Marion has inherited Nietzsche's thought, both indirectly through the whole of contemporary philosophy and directly through personal encounter with Nietzsche's words. At the same time, Marion declares that he is reading Nietzsche starting from Christianity (Ibid. 20).

Marion's commitment to Christianity informs his reading of Nietzsche and his

reading of Nietzsche informs his commitment to Christianity.

By recognizing the mutually determinative nature of his sources, Marion resists an unnecessarily reductive reading of either. His work does not offer a Christian standpoint on Nietzsche which would lower Nietzsche to “the level of [...] a thesis to be decided” (Ibid. 22). Nor does it offer a Nietzschean standpoint on Christianity which, Marion suggests, would also diminish Nietzsche, making his work merely a text to expound (Ibid.). Marion is launching neither a polemic nor an exegesis, insisting that both of these approaches obscure what is truly at stake in Nietzsche’s work and that “Nietzsche deserves more, and ironically, expected more from his readers” (Ibid. 21).

What did he demand from his readers? Nietzsche asked for his work to be read thoroughly but not dispassionately. As mentioned above, he was unambiguously disdainful of those who would seek to become his followers simply by echoing him. His opinion is conveyed in voice B in the following aphorism: “A: 'What? You want no imitators?' B: 'I do not want to have people imitate my example; I wish that everybody would fashion his own example, as I do.' A: 'So?'" (GS III §255). As chapters two and three will demonstrate, Nietzsche suggested that the best disciple has the courage to be an enemy, for the encounter with an enemy is particularly productive. Marion heeds the call for productivity. He suggests that an interpretation is not to be measured against the

intention of the author, for even if he had an intention (which is by no means always the case) the work of a good thinker will undoubtedly exceed his intention. Instead, “the sole criterion for an interpretation is its fecundity” (ID xxxvii). The one who receives what Nietzsche gives to think honours Nietzsche, provided he *does* think and think fruitfully. We inherit Nietzsche’s thought not in order to secure its place in an unchanging philosophical tradition – such a philosopher deals only with what Nietzsche calls “concept-mummies” (TI “Reason’ in Philosophy” §1) – but in order to keep it alive. Marion summarizes his approach: it is “not so much a matter of explicating authors as it is of asking them to explicate the situation in which we find ourselves” (ID 22).

The present project takes seriously Marion's criterion. To reiterate, I seek to explore the fecundity of Marion's study of Nietzsche, examining what Nietzsche gives him to think and what Marion in turn gives us to think about Nietzsche. Chapter One will outline Marion's contained study of Nietzsche in *The Idol and Distance*, covering the latter's major themes through the lens of idolatry and its attempted overcoming. Following Heidegger, Marion finds that although Nietzsche opens up the possibility of the manifestation of the divine in absence by "sounding out" the idolatry of the metaphysical tradition, he nonetheless remains idolatrous because he privileges presence. In a much less Heideggerian vein, Marion insists that although Nietzsche understands and is even sympathetic to the

Christic figure - he who would pour himself out for the revaluation of all values - he cannot imagine the possibility that, in this abandon, one might be met by a divine who enacts a similar abandon.

Chapter Two continues to explore Marion's conceptual pair, idol and distance, now through attention to the nature of writing for both Marion and Nietzsche and to their common struggle with the tendency of language towards idolatry. The chapter will begin by delving further into Marion's phenomenology and its focus on receptivity, and how he imagines the task of the theologian as one of dangerous play. The bulk of the chapter will explore the dangerous play also demanded in Nietzsche's philosophical-poetic project. It has become commonplace to begin any work on Nietzsche with an examination of the importance of writing style in his philosophical pursuits, and I will address several of the more popular treatments of this problematic in order to suggest that Nietzsche's writing style opens up distance in his work. This central chapter will conclude with a brief study of the Dionysian in Nietzsche's thought in order to suggest that the very concept of the Dionysian gestures towards a receptivity that can only take place in distance. Nowhere do I disagree with Marion's accusations of idolatry. Rather, I demonstrate that Marion himself, in his recognition of the dramatic element in Nietzsche's work and his attention to the nature of writing in general, allows the accusation of idolatry to function as the beginning and not the

end of an interesting reading of Nietzsche.

Chapter Three will look carefully at how Nietzsche does in fact proceed with his philosophical-poetic task. I turn to Nietzsche's boldest work, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in order to examine how it might allow us to think distance in four ways: first, through the motifs of abandon and kenosis; second, through the insistence on the dangers of love; third, through the expectant silence and attempt at receptivity that result from abandon; and fourth, through the moments when this receptive abandon becomes praise. Adopting Marion's primary concern, I examine the narrative according to what it might contribute to thinking the possibility of a non-idolatrous encounter with, and speech about, the divine on the terrain of distance.

Let us return, finally, to the quotation with which we began. Erich Heller asserts that “[Nietzsche] is, by the very texture of his soul and mind, one of the most radically religious natures that the nineteenth century brought forth, but is endowed with an intellect which guards, with the aggressive jealousy of a watchdog, all approaches to the temple” (Heller 11). Marion's concerns colour our reading of this paradox. While Heller himself understands the tension as one between Nietzsche's atheism and his vestigial Christian piety, the quote might also name the central problem of one who wishes to worship without succumbing to idolatry: Nietzsche's struggle with the possibility of practicing faithfulness

without resting in the comfort of the humanly constructed temple. The following chapters trace that struggle without ever finding it resolved, but this need not be a problem, for the purpose here is not to name Nietzsche's success or failure, but only to notice, with Marion, what Nietzsche gives us to think with regard to distance.

## Chapter One: Idolatries and their Overcoming

Jean-Luc Marion takes up three major figures in *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, Friedrich Nietzsche being the first. The study offers a dense and exploratory reading of Nietzsche, advancing several lines of thought rather than one sustained thesis and drawing from the whole of Nietzsche's textual output and biography. Marion reads Nietzsche's corpus according to the theme of idolatry and its overcoming, examining the philosopher's attempts to imagine a non-idolatrous encounter with the divine, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and beyond. Marion finds that in the process Nietzsche not only employs but *relies* on the figure of Christ to act as the location for idolatry's overcoming. Marion finally seeks to explain why,

despite the Christic presence in his work, Nietzsche renounces the God of Christ: he accuses the God of Love of being an idol precisely because his understanding of God remains idolatrous. Marion suggests that Nietzsche is unable to allow for distance in the relationship with the divine, and has therefore failed to overcome the idolatry he abhors. The present chapter serves as an exegesis of the study in *The Idol and Distance*, outlining the arguments of that text as summarized above, but also includes mention of Nietzsche's own work and other of Marion's texts in the interest of clarification. It begins with an introduction to Marion's phenomenological and Nietzsche's genealogical and psychological accounts of idolatry. It ends with mention of the possibilities that arise from Marion's study; given the exploratory nature of the work, he allows the reader to notice not only the exclusion of distance in Nietzsche's work, but also where it remains possible.

### **I. A Phenomenology of the Idol**

Marion's concerns have already been introduced: he begins both *The Idol and Distance* and *God Without Being* with Nietzsche's famous proclamation of the death of God, or rather the "death of God". To repeat, the "death of God" signals the withdrawal of the divine, but Marion insists that it is precisely this withdrawal and the distance it intimates which will allow for meeting the divine *without* quotation marks, i.e. non-idolatrously. The proclamation appears first in the voice of a madman in a frequently cited chapter of the third book of *The Gay*

*Science*. Marion gives the passage much attention, but is more interested in the conditions which have allowed for the announcement and in its aftermath than in the actual narrative in which the announcement is found. The proclamation of God's death is possible, he insists, only because what has been called “God” is in fact a metaphysical idol. In announcing the “death of God” Nietzsche, through his madman, has exposed the need for the quotation marks around “God”; he has unmasked the idol.

In his study of Nietzsche in *Idol and Distance* Marion reads the whole of Nietzsche's work as a project of unmasking idols and, through this undertaking, as an attempt to move beyond idolatry. In doing so, Marion relies on the “precise conceptual pair, idol/icon” but does not provide sufficient phenomenological and cultural description of the distinction, something which he freely admits (ID xxxvi). He never does provide the latter – Marion is engaged in conceptual and not cultural commentary – but he does expand on the former in *God Without Being*, dedicating the first chapter to what he calls a “comparative phenomenology” (GB 9). Before tracing Marion's reading of Nietzsche any further it would be helpful to spell out exactly what Marion means when he speaks of an idol.

The idol and the icon name two ways of seeing, or “manners of being for beings”, and not a difference in “classes of beings” (Ibid. 8). In other words,

things – including words, concepts, and other not strictly material things – might be icons or idols depending on whether and how they are venerated. At the same time, Marion insists that not all things might be icons or idols, but only those beings which, though themselves immanent, signal that which is not immanent (Ibid).

An idol does not induce idolatry. Quite the reverse: the idol is created by the gaze that lands upon it; it exists only because the gaze – by which Marion means the intentional seeing of particular eyes – operates idolatrously. Idolatrous seeing does not only observe a thing, but is consumed by and exhausted in that sight, thus making an idol of that on which it rests (Ibid. 10-13). The gaze finally sees nothing other than itself in the idol. The idol functions as a mirror, and yet even that function is not visible; one sees neither the mirror nor the thing in itself. Instead, the human aim – a word Marion uses synonymously with gaze – finally sees *itself* and is thus fulfilled (Ibid. 12-14). An idol is not exactly a god made in our image, but it *is* a god made out of our own vision (ID 6). The consequence of this difference in definition may be surprising. The idolatrous experience of seeing is a genuine experience of the god; Marion is not accusing the idol of inauthenticity or of representing a false god. Rather, the gaze freezes precisely because it has landed on a visible expression of a prior experience of the divine, and thus fashions a face for the divine (GB 14). Of course, the “advent” of the

divine is limited to what human seeing can support, to what can fully be taken into one's gaze. Because this experience of the divine is so carefully circumscribed (i.e. limited), idols pass away as often as they are made. We do not, for example, find our aims fulfilled in the idols forged by the Greeks for the simple fact that we are not Greek; our experience of the divine is not what theirs was and we will therefore not find ourselves before an invisible mirror when met with that which allowed them to see, and circumscribe, the invisible (Ibid. 27-8).

Marion finds that the plastic arts are now rarely approached with an idolatrous gaze, but this is not to say that the gaze has stopped making idols. He shows particular interest in conceptual idols, the idols of the philosopher, though, of course, no formal philosophical training is required in order to commit conceptual idolatry. That which the philosopher names "God" allows the philosopher's aim to become visible or – to use a word more commonly associated with concepts – graspable. He lays hold of his experience of the divine in a concept, and at the same time limits that experience to that which lies within the scope of his gaze or the grasp of his intellect. The idolatrous concept is "a thought that renounces venturing beyond itself" (Ibid. 30). Whatever is beyond one's grasp is "obfuscated" (Ibid. 18). Herein lies the story of metaphysics, which Marion calls onto-theology. The term onto-theology is found in Heidegger's work and names a particular characteristic of metaphysics, specifically, that it posits a

supreme being on the basis of its own aim, on the basis of its own need for and experience of a supreme being (ID 14-16). The best example of the onto-theological project is one of the most enduring philosophical explanations of and accounts for God: the *causa sui*. Marion is most understandable and straightforward when giving examples, and so we find here a succinct summary of idolatrous phenomenology:

In thinking “God” as *causa sui*, metaphysics gives itself a concept of “God” that at once marks the indisputable experience of him and his equally incontestable limitation;[...] metaphysics indeed constructs for itself an apprehension of the transcendence of God, but under the figure simply of efficiency, of the cause, and of the foundation. (GB 35)

Conceptual idolatry, exemplified in the metaphysical commitment to efficiency and causation, is nothing less than a “global strategy of thought” (Ibid. 36). “God” can only appear within the terms laid out by philosophy and so appears as first cause and efficient mover. There is nothing false about this idol; it is exactly what it claims to be. However, the “God” defended as *causa sui* exhausts the gaze without actually exhausting God. Conceptual and material idols make the god available by collecting our experience of the divine, yet that which is made available erases the foreignness of the divine and thus distorts and loses what it

attempts to grasp (ID 7).

The onto-theological character of metaphysics remains an important theme for Marion. He inherits the expression from Heidegger, and finally suggests that Heidegger's thinking of the ontological difference involves a capitulation to onto-theology. Although this is not the place to address Marion's dependence on and critique of Heidegger, it must be said that in advancing a critique of philosophy based on the folly of onto-theology, both are following what Nietzsche has given them to think. Marion offers a phenomenology that sets the terrain for what Nietzsche explains genealogically.

## **II. A Genealogy of the Idol**

Marion credits Nietzsche with imagining a distance beyond onto-theology (Ibid. 21). It is immediately apparent that Nietzsche's genealogical inquiry is attentive to the human process of god-making, that is to say, of idolatry (Ibid. 31). His philological and historical account of gods rests on the recognition that these gods are human concepts. It is not immediately apparent, however, whether Nietzsche finds god-making at all problematic. In fact, he insists that humans are human by virtue of their ability to value and so to invent gods – a drive he eventually calls the will to power – and finds that idolatry has been remarkably useful in the history of humanity.

It becomes ever more obvious, however, that Nietzsche is looking towards

a new humanity that might value without succumbing to idolatry; idolatry becomes that in humans which is “all too human”. This opinion is made most explicit in the preface of *Ecce Homo*, in which Nietzsche announces that his task is not to create new idols but to overthrow the idols (EH “Preface” §2). The sort of overthrow he imagines does not seek to pass judgment on the whole of human god-making; in fact, it does not even seek to refute idols. Idols, he insists, are not overthrown through refutation, but simply by keeping oneself free of the stains of idolatry (Ibid. §3). *Twilight of the Idols* and its famous subtitle, *How to Philosophize with a Hammer*, further support this interpretation. In the editor’s preface Kaufmann opposes the common assumption that the hammer with which Nietzsche does philosophy is a sledgehammer, intended for destruction (TI p. 464). Instead, as Nietzsche’s own preface to the text clarifies, the hammer operates as a tuning fork, intended for “sounding out idols” by demonstrating their emptiness (TI “Preface”). Nietzsche wants to pose questions with this “hammer” in order to “hear as a reply that famous hollow sound”, particularly of those idols most hollow of all, those “eternal idols” (Ibid.)

While the phrase “eternal idol” may at first seem contradictory not only to the phenomenological account of idols above but to Nietzsche’s own interest in the ever-changing history of the idol, the details of that history show a remarkable continuity in human god-making. Nietzsche’s genealogy does not uncover a series

of unrelated idols, but traces the development of the “God” of the metaphysician (the eternal idol of which he speaks), from the pre-Socratics concerned with unchanging being, to the Platonic interest in an ideal that would guarantee the world of appearances, to the development of the Christian “God” of morality. This “God” remains after the Christian designation has been abandoned, for it is the “God” of all morality and metaphysics.

Nietzsche insists that for thousands of years philosophers have concerned themselves primarily with “concept-mummies”, concepts they have de-historicized and thus turned into idols (TI “Reason” in Philosophy §1). That which they cannot grasp as an idol – namely, becoming – is ignored, denied, and considered false and that which does not become at all, the *causa sui* named “God,” is considered the most real being (Ibid. §4). Nietzsche offers a psychological explanation for this error: when the real is posited as something other than the apparent, the philosopher is avenging himself against life (Ibid. §6). Like Marion, Nietzsche does not accuse the idol of inauthenticity. The error is not one of seeing the wrong *thing* but of *seeing* wrongly. In Nietzsche's own words, “error (faith in the ideal) is not blindness, error is *cowardice*” (EH “Preface” §3). In Marion's phenomenological language, the gaze succumbs to fatigue and rests in the idol; to quote Marion once again, the idolatrous concept is “a thought that renounces venturing beyond itself” (GB 30).

Nietzsche finds the errors of cowardice and resentment compounded in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Here the concept of God – and Nietzsche makes perfectly clear in *Antichrist* that he is speaking always of the “concept of God” – becomes an otherworldly justification, a contradiction of life “instead of being its transfiguration and eternal Yes!” (AC §18). In *Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche examines the psychology of what he calls the “priestly type”, those who, in response to their weakness, successfully raise up the values of the weak. To the “truth” of the metaphysical God is added the “goodness” of the Christian God.

The “God” who has died is much more than a simple caricature of the Christian “God”, for it appears already in antiquity and remains after the Christian designation has been abandoned, as long as morality and metaphysics continue. Marion argues that the “God” who dies is the “God” of onto-theology: “God” envisaged as the supreme being (Truth, Goodness, etc.) who is the ground of all beings. When the madman announces the “death of God” it thus pertains to the “God” who has loomed large in Western thought, “the idol forged by the will to truth and morals,” and not to any other possible god (ID 32). Those who pay attention to the idolatrous process Nietzsche names will thus hardly confuse the “death of God” with common atheism. The death announced is the death of an idol, albeit a dominant and pervasive idol. The “God” of onto-theology, in its own moral demand for rigorous truthfulness, has demanded that we take it into view

and in doing so we have killed it – we have seen its idolatrous nature. The moral “God” has, via the demand for truth, necessarily overcome itself, and thus the murder is at the same time a suicide (Ibid. 33). An idol survives only as long as our gaze meets itself and nothing more. When instead we see the formerly invisible mirror and recognize the way in which we have constructed our own “God”, then we have already surpassed the idol. The dissolution of the Christian God does not in itself mark the impotence of this idol, for the error of the priest lives on in the idealist. As Nietzsche writes in *Antichrist*, “[t]he idealist, exactly like the priest, holds all the great concepts in his hand” (AC §8).

However, where the eternal idol really has been unmasked, the result can only be called nihilism. Nietzsche recognizes that the death of the onto-theological “God” also brought about the end of the world of appearances: he insists that “*with the true world we have also abolished the apparent one*” (TI “How the ‘True World’ Finally Became a Fable”). The concept of “God”, as the very ground of beings, was the perspective from which the world was seen. The madman in *The Gay Science* calls the death of God an unchaining of the earth from its sun (GS III §125).

### **III. Nietzsche’s Task: Overcoming idolatry**

Giles Fraser is critical of the strain of Christian thought that reads Nietzsche according to Heidegger’s interpretation of the death of God: namely,

that the God who dies is but the God of modern metaphysics (Fraser 12). Fraser recognizes two competing Christian interpretations of Nietzsche's rejection of God: on the one hand, taking a cue from Heidegger, that Nietzsche rejects a false god and thus frees up theological reflection to approach the true Trinitarian God and, on the other hand, that Nietzsche in fact rejects the God of Christ. Fraser is more sympathetic to the latter, suggesting that Nietzsche both understands and rejects the Christian grammar of faith (Ibid. 13). He objects to the Heideggerian interpretation of Nietzsche because it tends to "render Nietzsche's thought theologically innocuous": the Christian theologian too often uses the Heideggerian Nietzsche to assassinate the Cartesian god and eliminate himself in the process so that he causes no further trouble (Ibid. 17). Marion notably does not choose between these two options: his reading rests on Heidegger's earlier interpretation, but he does not use this interpretation as protection against Nietzsche's writings. The announcement of the "death of God" is the beginning of Nietzsche's task and not its end, and Marion gives considerable attention not only to the madman's announcement but to the manner in which Nietzsche addresses the consequences.

The "death of God" is not enough, for the overcoming of the metaphysical/moral idol leads only as far as nihilism. For Nietzsche, nihilism names the end of valuing and the attendant disappearance of the cohesiveness that

allows us to call the world “world”, but it is still a negative moment and thus still relies on the idol, even if only to negate it (WP §2). Only a grave misreading of Nietzsche could end with nihilism and Marion’s reading in some sense begins *after* nihilism, with the proposal that the dissolution of the idol opens up a space for a different sort of encounter with the divine. Marion suggests that onto-theology operates such that what is proved and rigorously defended is only thereafter baptized “God”, and thus a gap remains between that which is defended and *God*. Instead of narrowing the gap or *hiatus*, the onto-theological project of metaphysical or moral justification only masks the gap (ID 35). By sounding out the idol Nietzsche has unmasked the gap, opening a distance between the conceptual idol and the divine. Recognizing this distance is not a Christian privilege and Nietzsche himself feels this space acutely. Marion notices that, deserted by “God”, Nietzsche finds himself already in “expectation of a new presence”, of new gods (Ibid. 36). The madman’s announcement in *The Gay Science* is filled with desperation and longing, and, as will be explored in chapter three, the entire narrative of *Zarathustra* demonstrates the desperate circumstances of the one who recognizes the death; the old “God” dies and one experiences an immediate expectation of new gods (Ibid. 37).

Yet for Nietzsche the “death of God” is accomplished and the new gods have not arrived; this horrible moment is also the high point of humanity,

expressed in *Zarathustra* as the hour of noon. Noon is the time without perspective and thus for Nietzsche, who insists that perspective makes the world, noon names the moment when the world ceases to be a world, when that which would value and thus order things has been put to death (Ibid. 39). Around “God” everything becomes “world”, Nietzsche suggests in *Beyond Good and Evil* (BGE §150); the metaphysical/moral “God” provided a point outside the world that put the world into relief. Without that point and the perspective it provided we find ourselves in the blinding light of midday. Marion describes the noon hour: the world “finds itself alone with itself”, without the supreme being of ontology to guarantee its value. As we see in both *Zarathustra* and *Twilight of the Idols* – “(Noon; moment of the briefest shadow; end of the longest error; high point of humanity; INCIPIT ZARATHUSTRA)” (TI “How the ‘True World’ Finally Became a Fable”) – Nietzsche hopes that Zarathustra may be the one to endure the noon (ID 38). Zarathustra appears as the one who might now make a world through valuing “with uncovered face—not idolatrously” (Ibid. 40). Instead of universally refuting idols, Nietzsche hopes only for one who will remain free of the stains of idolatry. To value non-idolatrously involves making the world its own supreme being rather than setting a new idol apart from the world.

As we saw above, Nietzsche attributes the creation of ideals/idols to the errors of cowardice and vengeance. In fact, *ressentiment* and revenge underlie the

whole of Nietzsche's genealogy, but these are from the start metaphysical matters, or at least this is Heidegger's contention. In his short essay titled “Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?”, Heidegger insists that revenge opposes in advance that on which it takes revenge: it opposes persecution and suffering (Heidegger 71). This opposition is, at bottom, an opposition to transience and to the cessation of being; revenge manifests itself in idealism, in opposing becoming with an ideal being. Even without exploring Heidegger's precise definitions of beings and being, we can take from this brief summary an important insight: for Nietzsche psychology and metaphysics are not mutually exclusive. Nietzsche considered himself a psychologist, but in addressing psychological phenomena such as revenge or *ressentiment* he is also commenting on humanity's basic relationship to the world. Anytime a metaphysical ideal is posited, one is enacting revenge against the character of the world.

If valuating has until now been a process of god-making, how might one value without creating new idols? Marion summarizes Nietzsche's position: in order to operate non-idolatrously one must understand the relationship of the one who values to that which is valued. Man creates the world through will to power, and yet will to power is nothing other than the unfolding of the world; the valuating man and the valuated world “unfold in concert” (ID 41). The will to power does not stand apart as ego but makes the world only if it does not separate

itself from the whole (Ibid. 40). Valuating must accept its condition of possibility – the constant and inseparable becoming of world and will – if it hopes to function non-idolatrously. In order that the gaze not rest and become idolatrous, it must succeed at making a whole world and to make a *whole world* requires absolute affirmation, even of the mediocre, for to negate or exclude anything would be to deny the whole (Ibid. 42).

The demand for affirmation brings us to two of Nietzsche's central thoughts: *amor fati* (the love of fate) and the eternal recurrence. *Amor fati* appears for the first time in Nietzsche's work at the opening of Book Four of *The Gay Science*, which also offers one of the best summaries of affirmation found anywhere in his writings. Nietzsche explains his wish for himself:

I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who make things beautiful. *Amor fati*: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse those who accuse. *Looking away* shall be my only negation. An all in all and on the whole: some day I wish to be only a Yes-sayer. (GS IV §276)

The yes-sayer affirms and even loves that which he first finds abhorrent, and only thus does he value without repeating the idealism of the whole history of truth and

morality. To exclude even one part is to take vengeance on life itself. The quotation above also speaks to the creative nature of affirmation: one's relationship to the world is simultaneously a matter of discovery and creation.<sup>1</sup>

The eternal recurrence is the necessary extension of the attempt to become a yes-sayer. While many have construed it as a cosmological doctrine, it is more often referenced in regards to its psychological implications, which, according to Alexander Nehamas, do not of themselves commit Nietzsche to a cosmological hypothesis (Nehamas 1985, 142). Nietzsche shows greater interest in the impact of the thought of the eternal recurrence on the one thinking than in its cosmological plausibility, suggesting that it is best if his readers do the same. The eternal recurrence says a great deal about the experience of time, regardless of whether or not it is taken as a statement about the nature of time as such.

Nehamas argues further that the oft-quoted passage from *Will to Power* in which Nietzsche calls the eternal recurrence “the most scientific of all possible

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1 Alexander Nehamas explores the relationship between creativity and discovery in Nietzsche's thought in a brief article entitled “Nietzsche, Modernity, Aestheticism”. In order to understand the necessary conjunction of the created and the discovered, we must recognize that Nietzsche's understanding of truth is based on an aesthetic model, and thus affirmation can involve creativity and the production of a world without entailing falsification. Nehamas elaborates:

Taking artistic activity as our paradigm for understanding our interaction with the world and with one another, as Nietzsche does, does not at all imply that all our interactions involve falsification. The notion of falsification is not directly applicable to the arts in the first place. But the artistic model does imply that we can no longer lay claim to a clear-cut distinction between what is perfectly real and what is purely fictional. (Nehamas 1996, 243)

The second chapter of the current thesis will give further attention to Nietzsche's aesthetic paradigm for truth.

hypotheses” need only be looked at in context in order to see that “scientific” means simply nonteleological (WP §55; Nehamas 1985, 145). Paul Valadier calls the eternal recurrence a “religious thought” rather than a typically cosmological or scientific one: it operates as “a reflection on the most profound nature of reality”, and as such can find many different forms of expression so long as it structures practice (Valadier 253). In the terms of the present study, the thought of the eternal recurrence is the consequence of non-idealist thinking.

The thought of the eternal recurrence was Nietzsche's proclaimed purpose for writing *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and its unfolding within that text is examined in greater detail in the third chapter of this thesis. Here we must only note that the most decisive announcement of eternal recurrence found in that text makes apparent the thought's existential rather than cosmological implications. After summoning courage, Zarathustra speaks the thought in the form of a decision: “Was *that* life? Well then! Once more!” (Z III. 2 §1).

The eternal recurrence itself is therefore necessary in order to avoid idolatry: only one who has embraced this most abysmal thought (in this case, that even all that is weak and life-denying is necessary to life), and done so cheerfully and without resentment, has managed to value without making idols. Marion finds the task spelled out most clearly in *Zarathustra*, but also finds that the title character fails to accomplish the task commanded: he has not managed to make

the thought his own and has therefore not made himself his own and the world its own (ID 44). Zarathustra cannot shoulder the burden of the eternal recurrence and thus in the fourth part seeks higher men who might succeed, or at least accompany him. The higher men, however, return endlessly to the “ass festival” and Zarathustra with them (Z IV. 18; ID 44). They require the ass, an idol, in order to love the world; they fail to love the world alone with itself. Marion expresses the failure in terms of the three metamorphoses explained in the first of Zarathustra's speeches (Z I. 1). Zarathustra does not become the innocent child, ready to affirm the world without exception, but remains a lion, attempting to pronounce his “yes” in opposition to his adversary; he attempts to reverse values but in doing so cannot take his eyes off that which he seeks to reverse and thus remains idolatrous (ID 48).

The move beyond idolatry commands not godlessness but a different manner of experiencing the divine, and Nietzsche baptizes this absolute yes-saying with the divine name of *Dionysus*. It is not that the one who affirms becomes a god, but the yes is said divinely. Only in affirmation does the world become its own supreme being – and the will to power with it – and affirmation is therefore a divine task (Ibid. 44). It would seem that the god Dionysus is encountered without recourse to idolatry: Dionysus is not a “God” set apart from the world, but the divine met in the lightness of the world’s totality. Quoting *Will*

to *Power*, Marion offers an account of Zarathustra's inability: "The thought of the Eternal Return is Dionysian. But 'Zarathustra himself is quite simply an old atheist: He believes neither in old nor in new gods'" (WP §1038; ID 48). What Zarathustra lacks is faith.

#### **IV. Nietzsche's Drama: Overcoming Zarathustra**

Marion has articulated the Dionysian demand as an overcoming of idolatry and also recognized Zarathustra's failure to become non-idolatrous, and now he traces the disappearance of this Zarathustra from Nietzsche's text and the subsequent profusion of names for the one who may yet fulfill the Dionysian yes-saying. Thus far, Marion's reading has not ventured far from orthodoxy, if there can be said to be an orthodox interpretation of Nietzsche. In identifying the theme of idolatry he follows what Nietzsche has explicitly declared. Marion's analysis of Nietzsche's naming is far more ambitious; it provides Nietzsche's thought with what Jill Marsden calls the "connective tissue" not only intra-textually or even inter-textually, but for a narrative that includes Nietzsche's life (Marsden 30). Marion observes a movement in the Nietzschean text towards an ever more personal account of the task of affirmation – the Dionysian demand is finally leveled at Nietzsche and no other – and, paradoxically, the recognition that no *person* can fulfill the task – the Dionysian demand is met by Dionysus alone. A chronological account is necessary.

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, the work immediately following *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche's desperation for the ones who will complete the yea-saying is apparent, but now he calls them the "new philosophers" (BGE §42-3; ID 46). These new philosophers are manifestly a mask for Dionysus, who appears as the philosopher in one of the final aphorisms of this text (ID 47). The god philosophizes, and recognition of the divine philosophizing is what sets the "new philosophers" apart from the old (BGE §295). The philosopher abandons his attempt to master the divine – the onto-theological or metaphysical/moral project – and instead is "welcomed in" to the divine task of philosophy, which always exceeds human thought. The "new philosophers" recognize what Zarathustra never could, that the work of affirmation is the work of Dionysus; yet they too are stripped away.

In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche instead employs the first person pronoun (ID 50). He no longer writes from the mouth of another, as in *Zarathustra*, nor does he look to another to give himself to the divine task, but implicitly (and occasionally explicitly) accepts that "I" am the one of which everything is demanded (Ibid. 51). The failure of the many substitutes – Zarathustra, the higher men, the "new philosophers" – is occasion and "quasi anecdotal reason" for a stronger mandate, one Nietzsche cannot foist onto another. The emphasis on making something instinctual and inscribing it in the body is present already in Nietzsche's early

writings, and he seems finally to accept that *he* must inscribe the affirmation in his own body; ultimately “no proxy frees Friedrich Nietzsche from giving a body to the ‘abyssal thought’” (Ibid.).

The body given is at the same time dispossessed of its identity as Friedrich Nietzsche. Near the end of his cognitive life “anonymity is replaced by an equivalent polyonymy”: he has no name and then every name (Ibid. 52). The letters he wrote at the time bear a wide variety of signatures, including Julius Caesar, the Crucified, the Immoralist, and, of course, Dionysus. Of particular interest to Marion is the name of Ariadne. One of Nietzsche’s final undertakings was the revision and re-naming of what has been published as *Dionysian Dithyrambs* but was previously titled *Songs of Zarathustra*. Marion believes the changes corresponding to the re-naming of the text reveal something of what is involved in the departure from Zarathustra, and pays particularly close attention to “Ariadne’s Lament”, the poem culled from the section called “The Magician” in the fourth part of *Zarathustra*. The lament – a plea to a desperately desired and yet unknown god, who wounds wherever he is encountered – is first spoken by a man who does not so much suffer as *imitate* the suffering of one who expects the god, but in the revised version the sufferer becomes a female who yearns desperately and, it would appear, honestly (Z IV. 5; DD “Ariadne’s Complaint”; ID 52). Ariadne, who mythically and erotically encounters the god Dionysus, does

not only mimic or aspire to the desire, but *actually* desires and receives Dionysus.

Ariadne names the end of the story. She enters the text decisively and shortly thereafter Nietzsche succumbs to the madness that would last for the remaining decade of his life. In *Daybreak* Nietzsche declares that madness is itself something of the divine, and Marion boldly brings this to bear on Nietzsche's own so-called madness: his collapse is a collapse into the site of the divine (D I. §14; ID 54). Marion reads the collapse as a "becoming god", which alone allows one to speak the yes of affirmation and the eternal return. This is not to say that the one identified as Friedrich Nietzsche has now become divine. Rather, he falls away so that the divine may speak.

Marion's interpretation of Nietzsche's collapse is not unique; Nietzsche gave sufficient commentary on madness and the dissolution of the self to lead many of his readers in this direction. Paul Valadier also names the Dionysian quality of Nietzsche's demise. Ariadne's increased presence in the text is indicative of an encounter between Dionysus and man, one that crosses the distance between them without identifying them (Valadier 249). In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche insists that he alone possesses the secret of this encounter – "Who besides me knows what Ariadne is!" (EH "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" §8) – and in "Ariadne's Lament" we hear the earnest call for the advent of the divine – "Oh come back, my unknown god! my *pain!* my last happiness!..." (DD "Ariadne's

Complaint” 57). Valadier suggests that Ariadne's appearance and Nietzsche's idea of Dionysian sacrifice allows us to interpret his madness as an “assent to unfathomable reality”(Valadier 252).

Marion concludes the section with two questions. First, “cannot the ultimate *Yes* be pronounced by man, that he collapse also within the plunge into darkness, such that it is never *man* who pronounces it but indeed the divine in whom he must lose himself?” (ID 55). Marion is pointing his reader towards the dispossessive nature of the Nietzschean narrative, in which the famous will to power is not expressed in egoism but in a loss of the ego, a theme to which we will return at the end of the chapter. The second question moves Marion’s study in another direction: one seeks the divine through dispossession, but what is the nature of the divinity thus encountered? In particular, what has this divinity to do with the God of Christianity? What is the relationship between Dionysus and the Crucified?

#### **V. Nietzsche’s Christ: The unsurpassable figure**

Nietzsche is famous for his venomous condemnation of Christianity, and Christianity certainly is the target for the greater part of Nietzsche’s censure. Nietzsche’s most vehement opposition is directed at that which is closest to him; the pious nature of his childhood and youth is well-documented, and his tirades against Christianity involve the same sort of attack against himself most clearly

seen in his later writings on Wagner. The genealogical story of the metaphysical/moral “God” told above demands that Nietzsche’s antagonism be further nuanced. He implicates the whole of metaphysical philosophy and modern morality – in some sense, the whole of the western tradition of thought – in the idolatry perpetrated by Christianity. The critique of Christianity is also brought to bear on the positivist sciences and the Socratic tradition; it is plain that the problem of “Christianity” is in no way limited to that which openly confesses Christ. Still, the popular opinion on the matter is not wrong: Nietzsche opposes Christianity violently and often.

Christ (or Jesus – Marion, for one, does not demand a distinction) has a rather more complicated role in the text (Ibid.). The significance accorded to Christ in Nietzsche’s writings demands attention, and not only the attention of those who profess to read Nietzsche from a Christian standpoint. Marion offers his thesis before leading the reader through the evidence: “Jesus, as the Christ who dies on the cross, perhaps offers the insurpassable figure, even for Nietzsche—especially for him—of the unavoidable trial imposed by man’s meeting with the divine” (Ibid. 56). He is not arguing that Nietzsche was unsuccessful in his critique of Christianity, nor is he arguing that the man Christ remains after Christianity is abolished. In fact, Nietzsche has successfully stripped away the materiality of the Christ, be that “historical, textual, institutional”, but something

which Marion calls the *figure* of Christ remains, both inevitably and intentionally (Ibid.).

That the figure is *intentionally* encountered should be clear from the themes, structure and style of Nietzsche's texts. *Zarathustra* is modeled closely after the Synoptic Gospels: the title character speaks to the crowds in parables and sermons, he calls disciples who then misunderstand him, and Nietzsche even had a section planned which included the death of Zarathustra following the betrayal of the disciples (Ibid. 57). Nietzsche's employment of the story and style of the Biblical text may in part be understood as satire, or (more generously) as a means of rhetorically emphasizing the difference between these two prophets of redemption. There is also an element of supersessionism at work: Zarathustra traces the steps of Christ in order to supersede Christ. The figure of Christ is therefore intentionally but also inevitably present: the one who would hope to redeem – here, Zarathustra – must follow the way of that other redeemer, if for no other reason than that, as Marion insists, "the anteriority of the Christian event thoroughly structures the refutation by imposing on it the terms of the debate" (Ibid. 59).

Nietzsche's conscious imitation of the Christic structure extends beyond the narrative of Zarathustra. Marion finds that *Antichrist* fulfills the same eschatological function as the Antichrist announced in the New Testament,

preceding and hastening the return of Christ through negation. *Ecce Homo*, too, has a Christological function, announcing “here is the man” (the words Pontius Pilate speaks to Christ in John 19:5) necessary for the arrival of the divine, for it is in this work that Nietzsche definitely takes the task of affirmation on himself (Ibid. 57). Moreover, the yes-sayer “does not merely comprehend the word ‘Dionysian’ but comprehends *himself* in the word ‘Dionysian’” (EH “Why I Write Such Good Books” §2). In Marion’s reading, absolute affirmation thus unmistakably calls to mind the Christ, who does not only comprehend God but comprehends *himself* as God (ID 58). The Christic nature of affirmation should already be apparent in *Zarathustra*, when the *Yes* is accompanied more than once by the *Amen*. Nietzsche consciously employs a Hebrew word, the word pronounced when the Father is reconciled to the world through the Son, and makes it functionally equivalent to his *Ja-sagen* (yes-saying).

The broad formal similarities are unmistakably intentional, but a closer reading will show that the Christ-like nature of the anticipated Dionysian redeemer is more than formal. As mentioned in the introduction, Nietzsche frequently contrasts Christ with Christianity, for the latter in fact “lies on its knees before the opposite of that which was the origin, the meaning, the *right* of the evangel” (AC §36). Christ, somehow sundered from the religion which bears his name, explicitly informs Nietzsche’s Dionysian expectation; Marion notices that

Nietzsche invests Christ with characteristics that are otherwise reserved for the one who is yet to come. In *Beyond Good and Evil* Christ is defined by an all-encompassing, if rather naïve, love; he is the one for whom love has become natural or instinctual and not imposed externally as law, and who is thus confident in his own valuation and not weighed down by alien morality (BGE §164; ID 62). In *Antichrist* his actions on the cross appear as a decisive triumph over *ressentiment*, for despite his suffering, Christ refuses “to bring any accusation against the world” and in so doing makes both himself and the world innocent, not in the sense of being without fault, but in the sense in which innocence means what Marion calls “a perfect ignorance of the alternative between culpability and nonculpability” (AC §40; ID 63 f.). Marion asks that the reader at least entertain the notion that *Christ* becomes the innocent and affirming child that Zarathustra never could become, that *Christ* is the one who remains strong in the face of the abysmal thought. Nietzsche’s writings finally name no other who has accomplished the overcoming of *ressentiment* (ID 64).

Nietzsche also names no other who has overcome the idolatrous relationship to the divine. Marion finds only two pieces of evidence to support this claim, but perhaps this is enough. Twice Nietzsche uses Christ’s cry on the cross – “my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” – as an example of non-idolatrous relation to God. First, in *Daybreak* he recognizes that with such a cry of

separation and abandonment, any notion that Christ conceives his own divinity idolatrously becomes untenable (D II §114; ID 65). Distance remains, and thus Christ does not contain or limit God. Second, in *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche finds that in this cry God is met as a discrete and beloved person and not as Christ's own mental representation (the very definition of idolatry) (HH II "The Wanderer and His Shadow" §80; ID 66). Nietzsche awaits the one who will overcome *ressentiment* and idolatry, and yet it seems Christ has already accomplished this task (ID 64).

Marion's thesis seems justified: in the Nietzschean text Christ is not only "unavoidable" but "insurpassable." The Dionysian affirmation demands a particular location; it must be "pronounced eschatologically and corporally by a man who risks, in that game, everything of himself" (Ibid. 59). In demanding a location but failing to provide one, Nietzsche does not advance beyond Christ. Marion thus returns to the story of Zarathustra's overcoming and Nietzsche's eventual collapse. Zarathustra never accomplishes the death Nietzsche had planned for him, and perhaps for this reason disappears from the text. Nietzsche accomplishes only a half death – his body remains. Neither underwent the trial with the divine that results in death (Ibid.). Nietzsche's attempt to realize Dionysus can only be read as a failed adoptionism, which results in a half-death because it could attain only a half-god, as does all adoptionism ultimately (Ibid.

60). Marion concludes that the Nietzschean text – in which his collapse plays an important role – best achieves coherence when understood in the light of Christ as its unsurpassable figure. Finally, “Christ haunts Nietzschean thought more profoundly than as an adversary or a reference—he remains the typical and ultimate place where that thought lives, whether consciously or unconsciously” (Ibid. 61). Marion’s interpretation offers what Nietzsche himself demanded: a reading that takes the whole of the text into view. His reading shows that Nietzsche’s relation to Christ is more “decisive and intimate” than simple critique and disavowal (Ibid. 21).

#### **VI. Nietzsche’s “God”: Reading with a hammer**

Why, given the closeness of his thought to Christ and his demand for a meeting with the divine, does Nietzsche fail to see the divine in Christ? Or to reverse the question, why, despite being obviously sympathetic to Christ’s task, does Nietzsche insist that Christ fails to meet the divine? Marion examines Nietzsche’s assertions regarding the nature of the Christian God and concludes that, although Nietzsche did not misunderstand Christ, he grossly misunderstands the God whom Christ approaches, and Nietzsche does so because he remains idolatrous. Marion now takes what Nietzsche has given him to think – the enacted opposition to idolatry made possible in the “death of God” and the continual sounding out of idols aimed at a non-idolatrous encounter with the divine – and

turns it to offer a critique of Nietzsche.

Nietzsche brings a host of accusations against the “God” of Christ, particularly against the distinctive Christian name for that God – Love. He insists that love is inseparable from hate, something demonstrated and yet denied by the Christian God; the claim to be characterized by love alone is simple hypocrisy (Ibid. 71). The more important critique, however, is that love is not the highest manifestation of the divine. Love is but another idol, set apart from that force – what Nietzsche calls life or, later, the will to power – that alone names divinity (Ibid.).

Marion seeks to show that it is not love but will to power which continues to participate in idolatry. Nietzsche has placed conditions on the encounter with the divine, conditions which, in resisting the “eternal idol” of the metaphysical/moral tradition, simply posit its inverse. Following Heidegger, Marion insists that the project remains metaphysical: if the “death of God” names the death of a metaphysical idol, and if Nietzsche posits new gods in response to this death, then Nietzsche cannot yet abandon the field of metaphysics – to negate something is to remain tied to it (Ibid. 74). Is it not the case, asks Marion, that “proofs” and “disqualifications” of something are two sides of the same discourse (Ibid. 75)?

Limiting moments litter Nietzsche's texts, particularly *Will to Power* and

his other more polemical writings; to quote from *Antichrist*: “there is no other alternative for gods; *either* they are the will to power, and they remain a people's gods, *or* the incapacity for power, and then they necessarily become *good*” (AC §16; ID 71). The only alternative to the religion of decadence, which makes God “loving” and “good” to the detriment of all else (an idolatry in which the drama of the Christ finally participates, regardless of Christ's more Dionysian moments), is the will to power. In *Will to Power* Nietzsche suggests that the only way by which the designation “God” can remain meaningful is if it names a “maximal state” in the “evolution of will to power” (WP §639; ID 72). “God” must take its place in the will to power, referred to in the same section of the text as “the totality of becoming.” For Nietzsche, God can only ever be the concept of “God”, but Marion wants to insist that the name God only becomes pertinent when we “experience his radical foreignness” (ID 75).

The experience of God's radical foreignness is a condition of possibility in speech about the divine; Marion uses “distance” and “absence” to describe this experience, and to name that which Nietzsche ignores. At the beginning of *Idol and Distance* Marion says of Being that it “announces itself in presence,” and thus secures the world (Ibid. 14). Nietzsche, in positing a strict opposition between the metaphysics of Being and his own doctrine of the will to power, retains the privilege of presence; *becoming* thus announces itself in its presence and secures

the world. Nietzsche never recognizes the potential in the *absence* that the announcement of the “death of God” makes plain. Whereas for Marion the absence of the divine is the very condition of the divine’s manifestation – the play of absence and presence marking that which he calls distance – Nietzschean distance finally appears only between valuated elements *within* the will to power – for example, the distance between the higher man who might speak the *Yes* and the masses of weak humanity (Ibid. 77). The distance that constitutes relationship is *only* the distance of valuation. In *Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche names the most original and constitutive form of human relationship as that between creditor and debtor (GM *Second Essay* §8; ID 67). Thus he finds in the Christian God of love nothing but another relationship of valuation: in the Christian story of redemption God makes payment to himself, discharging the debt on himself (GM *Second Essay* §21). Nietzsche does not allow for the possibility that the God Christ approaches is himself characterized by distance, and that the abandon of Christ on the cross is, in the Trinitarian drama, in fact a *mutual* abandon – a relationship not founded on valuation but arising from dispossession (ID 68).<sup>2</sup>

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2 Marion is not the only Christian theologian to find Nietzsche's genealogical account of human relationship particularly problematic. David Bentley Hart structures his opus *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* as a comparison of the Nietzschean philosophical “tradition” and the Christian heritage. The key difference, he suggests, is one between violence and peace: while Nietzsche assumes that a basic valuated violence constitutes the original human relationship (that between creditor and debtor), Christians insist that the fundamental relationship is one of peace, as witnessed in Christ. Hart considers Nietzsche an exciting opponent and the most “spirited” voice in support of what John Milbank calls an ontology of violence; Nietzsche offers a brazen articulation of a prejudice prevalent in so-called postmodern thought (Hart 33). Within this prejudice, peace appears only as the

Marion's theological phenomenology offers the possibility of the icon, a possibility that Nietzsche's genealogy, insofar as it relies on presence, cannot recognize. In distinguishing the icon from the idol, Marion is seeking a discourse that does not function onto-theologically. Like Nietzsche, he does not assume that he is able to break decisively with metaphysics, either in triumphant overcoming or conceptual regression to a moment prior to metaphysics. Yet his response to the idols of the metaphysical tradition is not to posit an opposing god. Marion's suggestion is instead "to travel through onto-theology itself all along its limits—its marches" (Ibid. 19). He is interested in the possibility of moving along the edges of metaphysics, not in order to buttress its defenses, but instead to expose oneself. Exposure belongs to the phenomenology of the icon. The visibility of the icon differs from that of the idol because the former never ceases to point beyond itself – that to which it points is never reached, grasped, taken within one's gaze, and in that sense nothing is seen. Instead of showing us something, the icon "teaches the gaze" not to settle, not to exhaust itself in an idol, but to move

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reactive or negative moment; the prior active moment is a violent competition of wills (Ibid. 40). Hart's Nietzsche becomes rather dialectical; he finds that Nietzsche's attempt at total affirmation (in which even the "no" becomes a "yes") in fact retains its dismissal of all that is reactive and negative, including the peace of Christ (Hart 65). While this reading is not without warrant, Hart could benefit from Marion's commentary on the presence of the Christic figure in Nietzsche's writing. It should be clear from the present study that Nietzsche entertained the possibility that Christ was a yea-sayer; the peace of Christ, insofar as it names his freedom from *ressentiment*, is not opposed to positive willing but participates in it. Nietzsche assumes that peace names stasis, and in that respect vociferously opposes it, but Hart does not imagine peace statically, and therefore does not actually speak of the peace Nietzsche opposes. See for example §2 of the "Preface for the Second Edition" of *The Gay Science*.

infinitely from visible to visible (GB 18). In other words, the icon teaches the gaze to continually overcome itself and its own fatigue, and thus to continually expose itself.

To what does one expose oneself? Any easy answer to this question would involve a return to idolatry, but to offer a phenomenology of iconic seeing requires making certain claims about *how* the beyond of metaphysics is encountered. The personal nature of the invisible is of great importance for Marion, and in *God Without Being* he speaks of the icon as the encounter with a face: man becomes the mirror on which another face is reflected (Ibid. 22). Whereas idols are created by the human gaze, that which is met in the icon in effect creates the human by taking it into *its* sights: “in reverent contemplation of the icon... the gaze of the invisible, in person, aims at man” (Ibid. 19). The move from idol to icon therefore marks a reversal – Marion calls this a phenomenologically precise inversion – of aim or intention (Ibid. 21). The human is no longer the seer, but the seen.

Marion proposes that abandon separates relation with God as a person from relation with God as an idol. Nietzsche seems to recognize this, even demanding this dangerous abandon, but does not follow the thought through “to admit that abandon offers one of the faces of communion—perhaps the highest” (ID 66). He does not acknowledge that abandon might name not only a way of

seeing, but a way of being seen by a God that *also enacts such abandon*.

We might conclude that Marion and Nietzsche differ irreconcilably on the nature of idolatry. Granted, they both conceive of idolatry as cowardly seeing; instead of following that which is given, the gaze rests comfortably on that which it can understand and control. However, for Nietzsche idolatry occurs when one lacks the courage to see the whole, whether we call that life or will to power, while for Marion idolatry occurs when one lacks the courage to recognize a distance that confronts even the whole. Perhaps this disagreement is necessary: the distance Marion names seems at first like the transcendence Nietzsche opposes and, as we have seen above, Marion finds in the will to power another privilege of metaphysical presence.

## **VII. Nietzsche's Poetics: Intimations of distance**

Still, Marion insists that Nietzsche has allowed him to think distance. He concludes his study in *Idol and Distance* by asking whether Nietzsche's collapse may be his "sole authentic deviation from metaphysics" (Ibid. 77). The awaited and potentially accomplished arrival of Dionysus may genuinely deviate from idolatry; it might name Nietzsche's communion with, or attempt at communion with, a personal and beloved god. Marion says nothing more, for he suggests that one can say no more about Nietzsche's leap outside of discourse. Paul Valadier is bolder; he insists that Dionysian religiosity "would not reduce the unnameable

reality either to a concept or to a totality of being. Here, it is a question of letting it speak for itself, fleetingly, transiently, in the way of the tempting God, Dionysus” (Valadier 248). He finds in Dionysian affirmation not only a recognition of the ubiquity of the will to power, but also the intimation of encounter with a foreign other. He continues: “Affirmation thus belongs to a move that lessens the value of the self [...]; it is an invitation to enter into the game where someone plays with us” (Ibid. 251). Valadier is confident that Dionysus names a transcendence, one not otherworldly and life denying, but profoundly this-worldly. In the drama of expectation outlined earlier we see that Marion also recognized that Nietzsche's project, particularly his interest in the Dionysian, exceeds the genealogies of the will to power.

The remainder of this thesis will explore the moments of distance in Nietzsche's work, turning first to the matter of writing style and the creativity and receptivity it demands, and finally addressing in more detail the least genealogical of his major works, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in order to trace the recurring demand for self-emptying and the encounter that takes place in this kenotic act. Marion suggests that distance is embraced rather than erased in a relationship of mutual abandon and I will show that Nietzsche's writings also recognize the encounter possible in abandon.

## Chapter Two: Writing and its Overcoming

In the first chapter we studied Marion's work in *Idol and Distance*, which explores Nietzsche's attempt to overcome idolatry. In its most basic form, Marion's reading of Nietzsche imitates Heidegger, finding in Nietzsche a critique of metaphysics and yet concluding that Nietzsche himself continues to participate in that metaphysical project. In other words, Nietzsche repeats the idolatry he brings to light. Yet Marion does not depend on Heidegger for the whole of his study; for Marion, Nietzsche is not *only* a metaphysician, but also a madman and a poet.

This thesis does not (and simply *cannot*) include a detailed treatment of Heidegger's work, but several criticisms of his work are so common in the

secondary literature as to deserve mention. Despite its posthumous assembly and publication, Heidegger considers *Will to Power* the most important of Nietzsche's texts. While Nietzsche certainly did privilege the all-explanatory concept of the will to power later in life, Marion recalls that he *also* privileged poetry and the Dionysian in his final years. In an article titled “Nietzsche’s Zerography,” Rudolf E. Kuenzli objects that Heidegger is able to make Nietzsche into the last and ultimate Platonist only by constructing *Will to Power* from Nietzsche's notes and ignoring his *style* altogether (Kuenzli 101). Kuenzli is not alone in suggesting that Heidegger's high estimation of *Will to Power* is unwarranted; Bruce Ellis Benson agrees, citing prominent Nietzsche scholars Bernd Magnus and Kathleen Higgins in his defense (Benson 36). Kuenzli is also not alone in suggesting that Heidegger ignores Nietzsche's playful writing style to his great detriment; Gianni Vattimo makes a similar claim in *Nietzsche: An Introduction* (Vattimo 5).

Nietzsche's emphasis on aesthetics and style is difficult to overlook. He began his publishing career with *The Birth of Tragedy*, which originally bore the subtitle *Out of the Spirit of Music*. This commentary on ancient aesthetics lauds tragedy, in which suffering is addressed musically rather than morally. Nietzsche's understanding of music changes significantly in the span of his writing career; he quickly renounces the influence of Schopenhauer on *The Birth of Tragedy*, particularly the idea of music as a sublime redemptive unity beyond individuation.

Yet the centrality of music to tragedy and the centrality of tragedy to life are never renounced. In granting music such importance, Nietzsche does not treat it only as the object of study; rather, music determines the very shape of Nietzsche's writing. He was as much a poet as a philosopher, beginning in childhood and ending with the publication of his last work, *Dionysian Dithyrambs*. Marion gives considerable attention to this final book – a collection of poems written over the course of the last six years of his productive life – and to the god to whom they are dedicated, thus firmly distinguishing his Nietzsche from the Heideggerian Nietzsche.

It has now become common practice for any study of Nietzsche to begin by addressing his unique writing style and the demands it makes on the reader. In dedicating the *central* chapter of this thesis to considerations of style, I am suggesting that these matters are central to Marion's discussion of idolatry and distance. Concern with the nature of writing and the role of the theologian dominate all of his work, and while he provides only cursory commentary on Nietzsche's writing style, the whole of Marion's project is clearly informed by that style. The present chapter will again follow an inverted chronology, first addressing Marion's work in order then to give attention to similar themes in Nietzsche's writing. While the previous chapter dealt primarily with Marion's explicit study of Nietzsche and thus mostly confined itself to the text in which that

study is found, the current chapter names Marion's *implicit* debt to Nietzsche and can therefore explore a broader range of texts.

The chapter begins with an exploration of Marion's phenomenology and how it allows him to imagine writing as the work of receptivity. Next we will examine the character of Nietzsche's writing and how he sought to overcome idolatry through a literary style that resists closure and security. The chapter will conclude with a brief investigation of the Dionysian in Nietzsche's corpus and will suggest that his new style can finally be understood as faithfulness to a new god.

### **I. Marion on Writing and Receptivity**

We are reading Nietzsche with the help of Jean-Luc Marion, and thus it will be helpful to examine in greater detail how Marion attempts to move beyond idolatry in order to see how Nietzsche's work might participate in a similar project. The penultimate section of the previous chapter offered the notion of the icon as an alternative to the idol. While a concrete definition of the icon would be its own undoing, Marion does speak to how iconic seeing functions. Iconic seeing involves an encounter with a personal other, an encounter wherein the human does not *see* but is *seen*. Marion calls this a phenomenologically precise inversion of aim or intention; whereas the human gaze creates the idol, in an icon the human is created by the gaze (GB 21). The role of the philosopher and theologian cannot

be to define the icon, which would only duplicate the idolatry committed in onto-theology. Rather, Marion seeks to overcome idolatry through exposure.

To be exposed is to be dangerously receptive, and Marion imagines the work of phenomenology and theology as the work of receptivity. He published several articles in the 1990s in which he summarizes what he intends by the term phenomenology. First, in “The Other First Philosophy and the Question of Givenness” he insists that phenomenology is a philosophy concerned only with immanence and *deployed* in immanence (Marion “The Other First Philosophy” 793). Unlike ancient philosophy, phenomenology need not differentiate appearance from being, and unlike modern philosophy, it need not differentiate the thinking subject from the world. Marion writes of the phenomenological reduction, which eliminates all transcendence and thus secures the whole world in the same way Descartes secured the self, by basing it on the given as it gives itself to be thought rather than on thinking itself (Ibid. 794). Ironically, Marion insists that what appears is not appearance, or at least not insofar as appearance might be distinguished from reality. What appears is simply itself; it gives itself without any hidden remainder or, as Marion colloquially writes, “[w]hat appears pours itself out, so to speak, totally” (Ibid. 793). Phenomenology follows after the phenomenon; it is a philosophy that responds to a prior act or event that imposes itself and thus summons thought (Ibid. 795-6).

Phenomenology need not discover different *things* than did metaphysics, but the way in which these things are encountered differs markedly. In “Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology” Marion argues that phenomenology is the philosophy that “works with an open method and bare thought”, whose motto might be “prohibition is prohibited” (Marion 1995, 585). He therefore disagrees with many other proclaimed phenomenologists who insist that this philosophy admits no God, insisting instead that the rigorous phenomenologist must admit the *possibility* of encountering God (Ibid. 587). Many assume that talk of God undoes phenomenology by making recourse to a prior cause, namely, God as the ultimate giver of what is given. Marion suggests an alternative: what if our encounter with God is *not* as the first cause but as the intensification of the first principle of phenomenology, as “being-given par excellence”? Marion continues: “[God] gives himself and allows to be given more than any other being-given. In short, with 'God' it is a question of being-abandoned” (Ibid. 588). Marion is interested in the possibility of phenomena whose givenness saturates and overflows the intention of any receiving subject.

His equation of “being-given par excellence” with “being-abandoned” allows Marion to think distance within immanence. He suggests that the most wholly given exceeds fixed attention and thus is notable by its absence. Whereas other phenomena, once given, become available, visible and manipulable, the

being-given par excellence is *always* given and thus never fully visible or available (Ibid. 589). God's invisibility is therefore a result of donation rather than sublimity; we approach God not as a height beyond appearance but as an immanent mystery, constantly given but never finally available to our faculties. Although Marion's phenomenological vocabulary is only occasionally present in *Idol and Distance*, the dangerous exposure he advocates in that earlier text speaks to the same expectation of encountering God as donation.

Within phenomenology proper, encounter with the wholly given (i.e. God) remains only a possibility; once an encounter has taken place one enters the terrain of revealed theology. Marion becomes a theologian the moment he attributes a name to this wholly given. The challenge facing the theologian is to offer a name without offering a definition, and to witness to an encounter without fixing that which is encountered in his sights, thus rendering it visible and reducing it to an idol. Marion insists that the danger of idolatry should not inhibit speech about God, nor should it demand only negative pronouncements. In fact, he is consistently critical of negative theology for retaining the predicative structure of onto-theology; claiming that God *is not* x differs little from claiming that God *is* x (Marion "In the Name" 26). He imagines naming as an alternative to predicative speech. Consider proper names: "Now what is proper to the *proper* name consists precisely in the fact that it never belongs properly – by and as his

essence – to the one who receives it. [...] The name that I bear simply reproduces after the fact the name with which others first called me” (Ibid. 29). In assigning a proper name to God, one does not define God but functionally denies the possibility of definition, gesturing instead towards the distance and separation in every personal encounter. Proper names resist the grasp of conceptual understanding. Marion plays with the term “denomination” in order to emphasize the anonymity that accompanies naming; naming “de-nominates” and makes absent that to which it bears witness (Ibid. 32). Marion's most common name for God is charity because it names nothing other than donation (GB 102). He likewise uses the names *agape* and love to speak of God, for love is not *known* and “*is not—but gives (itself)*” (Ibid. 106). Charity is not a predicate but an event of donation, and speaking this name involves praise rather than definition.

In both *Idol and Distance* and *God Without Being* – the dominant texts of the previous chapter – Marion explores a theology of divine names, only to assert that the divine names have “strictly no other function than to manifest [the] impossibility” of comprehending God without quotation marks (Ibid. 106). The theologian writes himself to a place where writing is no longer possible, not because theology attains the divine but because it reveals that no theology will *ever* attain the divine (Ibid. 157). Marion writes only in order to deserve silence. He anticipates the readers' question: why does he speak or write at all if silence is

the aim? Marion seems to believe that writing, if done well, can facilitate receptivity, a receptivity that distinguishes the silence towards which he writes from the silence he initially breaches; the silence of receptive distance supplants the silence of idolatry (Ibid. 107).

Writing receptively is not equivalent to writing tentatively. Rather, writing theology requires the courage to make claims that cannot be epistemically proven. *God Without Being* begins and ends with an exploration of the nature of confessional claims, wherein the validity of the claim cannot be empirically verified or confirmed, but neither can the subject speaking the claim assure its validity through performance (Ibid. 184-9). “Christ is Lord” cannot be assured through the authority of the speaker except if Christ is Lord; only if Christ traversed the distance between the human and the divine can human claims about the divine not seek simply to mask that distance, which would return us once again to idolatry. The theologian is neither justified by the claim nor by his own authority. Marion confesses that no authorial ego validates his work; he who would attempt to speak – or, in this case, write – of what is holy is always saying more than that for which he could actually answer (Ibid. 2).

Additionally, the theologian is not offering a succession of arguments but attempting to conform his speech to the characteristics of donation, or charity (Ibid. 184). The theologian forgoes mastery for the sake of love, which does not

give assurances but gives only itself. Marion is confident that this does not mean foregoing certainty in favour of “undetermined, ambiguous, and sterile groping” but rather in favour of “the absolutely infinite unfolding of possibilities already realized in the Word but not yet in us and in our words” (Ibid. 158). Words cannot speak the Word; rather, the Word gives itself to be spoken in words (Ibid. 141). Theology, if it wishes to do something other than establish idols, must play in the distance between words and the Word, a distance it cannot securely cross but only ever transgress (Ibid. 1). Writing theology with the characteristics of charity means that theology must give itself as radically as possible; as Marion explains, “a gift that gives itself forever can be thought only by a thought that gives itself to the gift to be thought” (Ibid. 49). He insists both at the beginning and the end of *Idol and Distance* that distance resists representation and must therefore involve language in a different sort of play. He claims that “language does not express distance, since it expresses itself in distance, just as it receives itself from distance” (ID 205). Marion likens the distinction to that between reading a map and actually clearing a path; distance is discovered only through making one's way across it and never from a neutral vantage point (Ibid. 199). In order to avoid representation and instead discover a path, our discourse concerning God must “work language deeply enough that it not enter into a methodological contradiction with that which it dares claim to express” (Ibid. xxxvi). Distance is

therefore radically asymmetrical, stated only on the basis of one of the two poles – human words – and traversed only when those words venture beyond themselves in exploration, confession, and praise.

## II. Nietzsche on the Danger of Writing

Nietzsche precedes the rise of phenomenology, but much of what Marion says of this 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy could well be said of Nietzsche. He certainly aims at a philosophy of immanence, willing to think whatever is given to think and prohibiting only prohibition. As we saw in the previous chapter, Marion and Nietzsche find idolatry wherever thought settles. Like Marion, Nietzsche also recognizes that *how* one writes is fundamental in any attempt to overcome idolatry. Like Marion's theologian, Nietzsche does not consider his work justified on the basis of the authority of the thinking subject, nor does he advance an externally verifiable argument. His writing does not secure what it ventures, but risks and exposes itself. David B. Allison's introduction to *The New Nietzsche*, a 1977 collection of articles by prominent continental philosophers, provides a simple summary of the challenge Nietzsche faces in writing at all: “[t]o construct a text, much less to have it understood, on some basis other than the reactive tradition of theology, metaphysics, and morality—this requires both a new style of expression and a new audience” (Allison xii). Nietzsche's “new style of expression” is poetic, playful, and dangerous, and it demands an audience willing

to participate in that dangerous play.

Nietzsche keenly recognizes that idolatry is a function of our words and grammar. The presuppositions of reason – that reality is characterized by permanence, identity, cause, etc. – are inherent in our very language: language believes in *things* and, just as calamitously, in a doer for every deed. The “metaphysics of language” would find a subject as the cause of every action and therefore prior to every action (TI “Reason’ in Philosophy” §5). Though we might attempt to reject this “God” we cannot easily rid ourselves of this faith in an ultimate ego, a static being to which will adheres as a capacity, because we still have faith in grammar. In fact, it is our faith in an underlying doer, in one’s own ego, that has created the very concept of stable being (“The Four Great Errors” §3). The transcendent subject is an error of grammar not easily overcome insofar as one continues to communicate within the structures of language.

The object is as much a mistake as the subject, and Nietzsche struggles with the problem of naming. In yet another section of *Twilight of the Idols* he writes: “[w]hatever we have words for, that we have already got beyond. In all talk there is a grain of contempt. Language, it seems, was invented only for what is average, medium, communicable” (TI “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man” 26). Nietzsche considers language insufficient, not because it fails faithfully to represent an order that exceeds language, but because it *creates* a false order. The

previous chapter addressed idolatry through the figure of sight, suggesting that idolatry involves *seeing* wrongly rather than seeing the wrong *thing*. The same can be said of language: language participates in idolatry not when it makes a false claim, but when the *manner* of its claims is false. The example provided in the first chapter is pertinent here as well: historically, philosophers have attempted to define concepts, a process that involves de-historicizing and thus killing what they seek to study (TI “Reason’ in Philosophy §1). Nietzsche expresses a similar sentiment in Book Four of *The Gay Science*, mourning the words that seize and thus put to death every exciting insight (GS §298). He finds that language as a whole has a tendency towards this conceptual idolatry.

Nietzsche is not troubled by the metaphorical nature of language or the equivocity of meaning; what he finds troubling is when metaphor and equivocation are forgotten in an attempt to define and thus secure truth. As a philologist, Nietzsche is determined that the history of language not be ignored; his genealogies show the original meaning of concepts such as “good” and “punishment” not in order to *restore* their original meaning but in order to demonstrate the constant *reinvention* of meaning. While he occasionally does seem to be advocating a return to a more ancient understanding of, in particular, “good” and “bad”, Clayton Koelb rightly insists that he more often “works on the assumption that all available meanings are equally useful” (Koelb 146). Koelb

continues: “From this assumption comes a strategy for writing (in this case, writing a kind of philosophy) that derives from reading” (Ibid.). Nietzsche is attentive to a whole history of meanings and metaphors, and his writing plays with these meanings.

This is not to say that Nietzsche's writing is deliberately ambiguous. While his thought certainly did develop and change throughout his life, it returns ever again to the same themes and questions and remains remarkably cohesive. Two extended passages serve to show the unity that Nietzsche demands in a philosopher's work, and the very real danger of decadence that everywhere threatens that unity. First, in the preface to *On the Genealogy of Morals* he writes in a personal plural of what is fitting for a philosopher:

We have no right to *isolated* acts of any kind: we may not make isolated errors or hit upon isolated truths. Rather do our ideas, our values, our yeas and nays, our ifs and buts, grow out of us with the necessity with which a tree bears fruit—related and each with an affinity to each, and evidence of *one* will, *one* health, *one* soil, *one* sun. (GM “Preface” §2)

The philosopher, in other words, must belong to those Nietzsche calls strong, those whose activity is born of necessity and those whose self is in their deed such that the deeds are not isolated and hence decadent.

Nietzsche describes the decadence of the writer in an oft-cited passage from the brief text *The Case of Wagner*:

What is the sign of every *literary decadence*? That life no longer dwells in the whole. The word becomes sovereign and leaps out of the sentence, the sentence reaches out and obscures the meaning of the page, the page gains life at the expense of the whole—the whole is no longer the whole. But this is the simile of every style of *decadence*: every time, the anarchy of atoms, disgregation of the will... (CW §7)

One can hardly help but read this as a description of Nietzsche's own writing style. The popular Nietzsche, communicated to the world through vehement sound bites and controversial tropes, is undoubtedly a decadent, and in the preface to *The Case of Wagner* Nietzsche *admits* his own penchant for decadence. However, he also trumpets his successful resistance to this popular problem (Ibid. “Preface”).

The alternative to decadence is not systematization; Nietzsche is not a systematic philosopher and memorably renounces system in *Twilight of the Idols*, insisting that “[t]he will to system is a lack of integrity” (TI “Maxims and Arrows” §26). Elsewhere in the text he takes a further step:

The philosopher supposes that the value of his philosophy lies in

the whole, in the structure; but posterity finds its value in the stone which he used for building, and which is used many more times after that for building—better. Thus it finds the value in the fact that the structure can be destroyed and *nevertheless* retains value as building material. (TI “Mixed Opinions and Maxims” §201)

This is not to say that good philosophy is necessarily fragmentary – in fact, Nietzsche still insists that no one can understand him who does not read all of his texts – but it does emphasize the importance of active interpretation and reevaluation. The building materials are not isolated or unrelated, but each new reader rearranges and even remakes them.

Walter Kaufmann argues that this is possible because the unity of a text is existential rather than systematic. Kaufmann combats the charges of obscurantism, inconsistency, and atomism in his book *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*. To choose an obvious example, Nietzsche's apparently contradictory statements regarding Socrates, Wagner, and even Christ – often praise, often censure – are not intended to confuse but to perform the self-overcoming that Nietzsche continually demands (Kaufmann 16). Self-overcoming rather than ambiguity is the defining characteristic of Nietzsche's work and the key to a proper reading. He is always questioning what came before and, as we saw in the previous chapter, sounding out idols. Socrates, Christ, and Wagner are

the most enigmatic subjects because they were closest to Nietzsche; in resisting the dialectical approach to philosophy, the priestly morality of Christianity, and the romanticism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Nietzsche is resisting *himself* and sounding out his *own* idols.

Overcoming involves valuing anew and these new valuations arise from literary play, which is not to be confused with frivolity. Nietzsche's playfulness does not belie all seriousness, and certainly not all struggle. He has an exceptionally demanding approach to philosophy in general, which he describes in the preface to the second edition of *The Gay Science* as giving birth to thoughts out of pain and, like a mother, endowing them with all “blood, heart, fire, pleasure, passion, agony, conscience, fate, and catastrophe” (GS “Preface” §3). Nietzsche writes not because he wishes to, but because he must. He calls writing “a pressing and embarrassing need,” something he must do in order to rid himself of his thoughts (GS II §93). This sounds not in the least like play as we imagine it. While the aim is a cheerful wisdom (or gay science), the route to joyousness requires rigour and risk, much like any good experiment.

Nietzsche spells out the experimental nature of his task several times in Book One of *The Gay Science*. He insists that experiment and, concomitantly, risk are necessary for good thought: “[a] thinker sees his own actions as experiments and questions—as attempts to find out something. Success and failure are for him

answers above all” (GS I §41). He personally commits himself to such risky thought in aphorism 51: “Truthfulness.—I favor any skepsis to which I may reply: ‘Let us try it!’ But I no longer wish to hear anything of all those things and questions that do not permit any experiment. This is the limit of my ‘truthfulness’; for there courage has lost its right” (GS I §51). Kaufmann concludes from such passages that the experimental quality of Nietzsche's writing is at the same time the *existential* quality of the writing. Nietzsche conducts all his experiments on himself, trying to live according to the answer, and thus setting a daunting standard for philosophy. Kaufmann says it well: “Only problems that present themselves so forcefully that they threaten the thinker's present mode of life lead to philosophic inquiries” (Kaufmann 89). Hence the aforementioned existential unity: Nietzsche's writing is not decadent because *life* does indeed reside within the whole. His *own life* resides in the whole of his work.

While Kaufmann is willing to invoke existentialism (not as a particular philosophical school but rather as descriptive of a commitment of one's person) to show Nietzsche's consistency, he is not willing to admit the possibility of existential truth. He suggests that Nietzsche's failure to systematize his thought has prevented the probable truth of his hypotheses from being established and proceeds to separate Nietzsche's philosophically relevant claims from his irrelevant ones in an attempt to substantiate Nietzsche's work (Ibid. 94). The many

quotations above should prove that such a project is misguided; Nietzsche's writing is not a series of propositional statements to be corroborated. While there may be a pedagogical need for a more systematic approach to the matters Nietzsche addresses, the system cannot justify the claims; only the continued life of the whole and the continued *living* of the whole can uphold his work.

Kaufmann misconstrues the role of the reader. Jill Marsden fares much better in her brief study of the art of aphorism, focusing on Nietzsche's aphoristic style to explain what is required of his readers. She defines an aphorism, first, as “a short expression of a general truth or pointed assertion” but argues that its brevity is only one of its critical features (Marsden 23). Nietzsche's writings often include extended series of distinct statements, like the chapter “Maxims and Arrows” that begins *Twilight of the Idols* and part four of *Beyond Good and Evil*, titled “Epigrams and Interludes.” Marsden suggests that Nietzsche's aphoristic style is not restricted to sections such as these, but is in fact the best way of understanding his writing more generally. She finally calls the aphorism a “bastard species of philosophical assertion, allergic to intellectual resolution” and to the conceptual prodding typically afforded by philosophical propositions (Marsden 36). We recall that Marion defines the idolatrous concept as “a thought that renounces venturing beyond itself” (GB 30). The aphorism seems to be the opposite: it is a thought that necessarily ventures beyond itself.

One finds the term aphorism first in the writings of the ancient physician Hippocrates, who used the form to convey advice for good health, gathered through experience and experimentation (Marsden 24). Aphorisms were from the first a diagnostic and educative tool, and Marsden is certainly right to find this function still at work in Nietzsche's aphorisms. To say they are based on experience is not to say they are confessional or personal in any straightforward way. Nietzsche avoids a signature style or tone and moves easily from pronoun to pronoun, such that a unified authorial ego does not take shape (Marsden 28). Nietzsche's work is deliberately polyphonous, but this belongs to the nature of experiment and is required in order for the aphorism to affect the reader as it should, specifically, as a shock. The aphorism must overwhelm expectation, avoiding the common repertoire of speech and sensation and so expressing a thought "without it coalescing into a familiar conceptual form or cliché" (Marsden 29). An aphorism is a particular arrangement of words which, like poetry, cannot be summarized or elaborated; the reader cannot easily conform them to prior habits of thought and speech.

The reader must, however, *do* something with them. Where a text does not develop a systematic argument, the "connective tissue" must come from the one who receives the ideas. Kaufmann finds that each aphorism is self-sufficient and yet simultaneously throws light on all other aphorisms, which means the reader

must always read for more than simply the literal meaning of the sentence or paragraph (Kaufmann 75). Nietzsche recognizes the difference between the passive reader, for whom the most disturbing aphorism remains harmless, and the active reader, who uses his own resources to come to grips with the thought (Marsden 31). In the preface to the second edition of *The Gay Science* Nietzsche admits the futility of trying to *explain* a text to the passive reader: “This book may need more than one preface, and in the end there would still remain room for doubt whether anyone who had never lived through similar experiences could be brought closer to the *experience* of this book by means of prefaces” (GS “Preface to the Second Edition” §1). The text has meaning when brought to bear on life *and* when life is brought to bear on the text; as Zarathustra articulates dramatically in the first part of that text: “whoever writes in blood and aphorisms does not want to be read but to be learned by heart” (Z I. 8). Interpretation is therefore hardly a matter of discovering the latent meaning in an aphorism; instead, a very different interpretation may arise with each re-reading (Marsden 33-4).

Nietzsche himself reads boldly, valuing texts for the thought they inspire rather than for the justified claims they make. The most personal bits of Nietzsche's published works are often found in prefaces, and in the preface to *Genealogy of Morals* he gives a personal account of his own reading practices. He

says of *Human, All too Human* that it was something of a response to Dr. Paul Ree's 1877 text, *The Origin of Moral Sensations*. Of the latter Nietzsche says: "Perhaps I have never read anything to which I would have said to myself No, proposition by proposition, conclusion by conclusion, to the extent that I did to this book: yet quite without ill-humor or impatience" (GM "Preface" §4).

Nietzsche values even a text with which he wholeheartedly disagrees, offering his response not as refutation – "what have I to do with refutations!" he proclaims – but as a constructive alternative. Whereas refutation belongs to dialectical discourse, Nietzsche's discourse instead experiments with ever new forms of expression. In demanding engagement and reinvention rather than agreement, Nietzsche's writing does not secure itself, but constantly ventures beyond itself. In Book Three of *The Gay Science* he asks "[w]hat good is a book that does not even carry us beyond all books?" (GS III §248).

Nietzsche works language deeply in order to avoid crafting his own concept-mummies. Like Marion's theologians, he gives *himself* in this playful writing. It remains to be seen whether he also considers writing an act of receptivity.

### **III. Dionysian Truth**

Little has so far been said of Nietzsche's poetic inclinations. Because style is inseparable from content, the new audience Allison identifies must be sensitive

to several resources of language typically overlooked by philosophy, namely rhythm, tempo, tone, image and metaphor (Allison xvii). Poetry obviously requires attention to these elements, as does prose, for poetry and prose are also inseparable. Nietzsche's major works attest to that: *The Gay Science* includes “a prelude in rhymes and an appendix of songs”, *Beyond Good and Evil* concludes with a long poem or “aftersong”, and of course *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* includes verse throughout. Moreover, the prose itself is poetic; Nietzsche considers good only the prose that is written “face to face with poetry” (GS II §92). He suggests that prose and poetry are intended to be at combat with one another, a combat driven more by prankishness than hostility. It must be said that attention to rhythm and melody are not only poetic, but Dionysian. Dionysus is the proper name Nietzsche gives first, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, to that which exceeds representation and later, less specifically, to the god beyond idolatry. Dionysus names an aesthetic truth beyond words and yet performed in words.

“Whatever is good makes me fertile. I have no other gratitude, nor do I have any other *proof* for what is good” (CW §1). This quote from the beginning of *The Case of Wagner* reveals Nietzsche's broader approach to valuation and ultimately to truth. In resisting the idolatry of metaphysics and morality, he resists propositional truth claims and instead aims for fecundity in his reading and writing. Nietzsche famously questions the utility of truth altogether and speaks

often of the value of falsity. Moreover, he encourages the creation of new values, leading many to conclude that he embraced a simple relativism in which all are encouraged to make their own truth. However, Lawrence J. Hatab finds that Nietzsche still advances positive notions of truth in a number of ways. While he frequently argues for a perspectivalism resulting in a pluralized truth (which already differs from relativism because it demands that one be able to see from *many* perspectives), he also makes clear that this perspectivalism is itself a function of the aesthetic nature of truth. Nietzsche insists that art speaks the truth; it creates – and discovers – meaning and yet does not “presume to be a metaphysical closure” (Hatab 46).

The aesthetic nature of truth has become a more prominent theme in the secondary literature in the last decades due in large part to Alexander Nehamas, who argues that Nietzsche has not relinquished the demand for truth but simply imagines truth artistically rather than absolutely (or metaphysically). Nehamas finds that Nietzsche takes artistic activity as the “paradigm for understanding our interaction with the world and with one another”, which folds creativity into our conception of reality, thus complicating the distinction between the purely fictional and the purely real (Nehamas 1996 243).

The aesthetic alternative to metaphysics and moralism is introduced already in *The Birth of Tragedy*, a text dominated by the gods Apollo and

Dionysus. Hatab insists that Nietzsche's interest in Apollo and Dionysus is religious at the same time as it is aesthetic. He writes well on the religious meaning of tragedy and is worth quoting at length:

The historical association of tragedy with the worship of Dionysus, together with Nietzsche's articulation of a divine dyad at the core of tragedy, indicates that the Greeks (and Nietzsche) experienced tragedy as expressive of certain truths about existence that call for responsive reverence. In other words, the disclosures of tragedy, stemming from 'divine' sources, are not simply 'human' meaning, but rather elements of the world *to* which humans must respond, and which they are called to affirm. (Hatab 52)

In other words, while humans do participate in the creation of meaning, they also *receive* meaning from beyond themselves. Nietzsche's aesthetic understanding of truth does seem to involve both creativity and receptivity, and Dionysus names the convergence of these qualities.

Kaufmann is undoubtedly right to insist that while the Dionysus of *The Birth of Tragedy* stands in contrast to the illusory individuation of Apollo, the Dionysus of Nietzsche's mature writings regularly refers to the synthesis of the Dionysian and Apollinian described in his earlier work (BT "Attempt at a Self-Criticism" §3n). Nietzsche does not always retain a distinction between the

sublime power of music and the created beauty of the plastic arts, and employs Dionysus as the inclusive name for the excess of life and strength responsible for all genius (TI “What I Owe to the Ancients” §4-5). Dionysus comes to mean the Greek affirmation of “the total character of life”, realized tragically and musically (WP §1050).

As Nietzsche's later attacks on Wagner make clear, not all poetry and music is Dionysian. Many of the aphorisms in Book Two of *The Gay Science* address the intoxicating effects of music, theater, and art in general. Art may be an expression of praise for life, or it may serve as a distraction from life and a momentary intoxication for the weak (GS II §89). Nietzsche impugns music when it operates as a narcotic, but not when it functions as a compulsion. Originally poetry was used in an attempt to compel the gods, much as we are compelled and overpowered when we listen to music (GS II §86; §84).

Rhythm is a compulsion, and the first postscript to *The Case of Wagner* names degeneration of rhythm as one of the most despicable effects Wagner has on the German people (CW “Postscript”). This and other similar passages lead Bruce Ellis Benson to find in decadence a “de-cadence”, or falling out of rhythm. He suggests that Nietzsche attempts to adopt a new rhythm, one in step with life; the yes-saying for which Nietzsche aims is only made possible in the “ecstatic transcendence” of music (Benson 5). Benson writes in *Pious Nietzsche* of this

musical training and self-overcoming as a form of *askesis*, a set of spiritual disciplines intended not to renounce the world but to train the instincts towards a new Dionysian Pietism (Ibid. 12). Musical training is indeed training for ecstasy, but ecstasy means literally to stand outside of the self and need not mean emotional delirium, the latter of which is the sort of intoxication Nietzsche censures. To train for a new rhythm is to train as a dancer, making each movement instinctual but hardly unconscious. Zarathustra insists that when he has learned to become light on his feet, then a god dances through him (Z I. 8). Here music and rhythm are no longer employed to compel the gods, but practiced in order to welcome the divine.

The name Dionysus is more than a short-hand for the concept of affirmation; it also functions as a proper name. Nietzsche calls himself a disciple of the philosopher Dionysus – the title “philosopher” is repeated in the preface to *Ecce Homo* – and also refers to Dionysus as the highest of the strange and dangerous spirits with whom he has crossed paths (BGE §295). Whether as philosopher or spirit, encounter with Dionysus is encounter with a personal other. Nietzsche admits to taking liberties with the name itself, asking “who can claim to know the rightful name of the Antichrist?” (BT “Attempt at a Self-Criticism” §5).

Perhaps Dionysus is the Antichrist, but as his madness set in, Nietzsche began signing his letters both “Dionysus” *and* “the Crucified.” One might

attribute this polyonymy to confusion, yet there is reason to question the unmitigated opposition of these two characters far earlier in Nietzsche's career. Benson argues that Nietzsche was simply not an atheist, but a pious and faithful man who abandoned the “God” of his youth, the otherworldly moralistic “God” of Christianity, in favour of Dionysus, an immanent deity. The relationship he cultivated with the Dionysian retains all the marks of his German Pietism: the demand for a personal “change of heart” rather than a program of salvation, the emphasis on praxis over doctrine and general doubt about the usefulness of knowledge, and even the radical affirmation of all that takes place through the emphasis on “God's will” or *amor fati* (Benson 17-21).

Benson makes a compelling argument, and even leaving aside the similarities and dissimilarities between Nietzsche's early Christian faith and his Dionysian faith, the point remains that Dionysus *does* name a personal faith in an immanent mystery. In Dionysian faith, which Nietzsche calls the highest of all possible faiths, all that gives itself is affirmed and only prohibition is prohibited; this faith leads one to “stand amid the cosmos with a joyous and trusting fatalism” (TI “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man” §49). The Dionysian is not a philosophical assertion and cannot be reached through systematic argument. Rather, Nietzsche reaches towards Dionysus through the dithyramb, a passionate hymn in irregular form originally used in the Bacchic celebrations of ancient Greece. The dithyramb

becomes the speech best suited to meet eternity (in the affirmation of eternal return) for it does not offer its subject to the grasp of the intellect, but instead offers praise.

Nietzsche's praise of Dionysus need not lead us to retract Marion's accusations of idolatry. There are many times when Dionysus seems nothing but another human construction in which the gaze finds security. Even in 1887 and 1888, the last two years of his productive life, Nietzsche calls the Dionysian a “concept” and “a formula” (EH “Thus Spoke Zarathustra” §6; WP §1005). The most obvious concern is Nietzsche's regular assertion that he has indeed created the new gods, fashioning them from the will to power (AC §16). Yet in the middle of 1888 he writes the following: “And how many new gods are still possible! As for myself, in whom the religious, that is to say god-forming, instinct occasionally becomes active at impossible times—how differently, how variously the divine has revealed itself to me each time!” (WP §1038). God-forming, though it may bring idolatry to mind, is in fact equivalent to valuing, and the passage above actually demonstrates again how Nietzsche imagines non-idolatrous valuation. It is ever changing, ever dancing, and ever receptive to a divinity too abundant for definition. If, as suggested above, Dionysus names the convergence of creativity and receptivity, the reader need not conclude that Nietzsche's creations deny the distance of the divine. Nietzsche's readers are readers of poetry and aphorisms,

and they may find that what he creates is instead constituted by distance, a distance his creativity traverses and therefore affirms.

Marion insists that in announcing God's death, Nietzsche has opened a space for non-idolatrous relation with the divine. In looking to Nietzsche's style of writing and his embrace of the Dionysian, we find that Nietzsche did more than sound out idols; he also began to explore that space, or distance, in which the given always exceeds one's ability to receive it. The final chapter supports this point through a closer study of Nietzsche's most Dionysian text, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

### **Chapter Three: Distance in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra***

*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is a rich and complicated text, and despite the wealth of Nietzsche scholarship, very few compelling studies of the book exist. Philosophers often seek to explain *Zarathustra* in more conventional philosophical terminology, or to harmonize it with Nietzsche's more historically explicit texts, thus providing precise conceptual or historical explanations, but the scholar who seeks to explain a story or a poem must ask herself about the function of that explanation. If its intended function is to make the meaning of the text fully present, and thus to offer the meaning to the human gaze or to the grasp of the intellect, then ultimately it functions only to obscure the irreducibility of style and the inexhaustibility of meaning. *Zarathustra*, perhaps more than any of

Nietzsche's other texts, resists reduction and instead continually ventures beyond itself.

What follows does not offer an explanation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Instead, it offers an *exploration* of one of the text's most obvious themes, that of courage. As we have seen in both the first and second chapters of this thesis, Nietzsche explicitly demands courageous seeing and courageous writing in his attempt to overcome idolatry. He also demands courageous reading, and the genre of *Zarathustra* makes this demand particularly pertinent. In telling a story of courage courageously, the narrative of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* achieves a union of style and content. Marion focuses on the fourth part of *Zarathustra* and the apparent failure it recounts. In focusing instead on parts one through three of the text, we concern ourselves less with the title character's failure, and more with the character of the task he sets before himself. The story I tell in this chapter is one of kenotic gift-giving and love of man, of receptivity found in solitude, and of the praise that results from abandon and reception. We turn to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in all its variety, to see how it is that Nietzsche in fact writes across distance.

### **I. *Zarathustra*'s Unique Achievement and the Courage of Interpretation**

Nietzsche's attitude towards *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is well known; he is unabashed in naming it not only his most important and ambitious work, but a

truly great work. In *Twilight of the Idols* he calls *Zarathustra* the most profound book humanity possesses (TI “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man” §51). In *Ecce Homo* he insists that the work stands “altogether apart”, residing far above that which has heretofore been considered great and sacred – including Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, and even the Vedas – and living in “distance” and “azure solitude” (EH “Thus Spoke Zarathustra” §6). While a writer is not necessarily his own best interpreter and critic, and while the committed reader of Nietzsche need not agree with the audacious assertions of *Ecce Homo*, *Zarathustra* is undoubtedly unique among Nietzsche's works and, it is safe to say, in the history of Western thought.

Nietzsche considers *Zarathustra* a great achievement, but what it actually achieves is not immediately clear. The character Zarathustra is introduced at the conclusion of Book Four of *The Gay Science* in a section entitled “*Incipit tragoedia*” (GS IV §342); his story is recognized from the first as a tragedy in which one finds no redemptive resolution. Nietzsche amends this genre designation in the preface to the second edition of *The Gay Science*, suggesting that *Zarathustra* is at the same time a parody (GS Preface §1). Robert Gooding-Williams, who gives one of the most influential readings of the text in recent years in his book *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism*, is particularly attentive to the book's parodic elements and shows how Nietzsche's playful use of common

Biblical, Platonic, and Wagnerian tropes repeats these images in order to reinvest them (Gooding-Williams 51). Thus the genre, simultaneously tragedy and parody, itself introduces what Gooding-Williams helpfully names as one of the book's basic themes: the tension between intention and repetition, between Zarathustra's announcement of new values – the emphasis on novelty being that which makes it modern – and the recognition of the apparent impossibility of the new in a world where all value seems to already have been made (Ibid.15). In aiming for novelty, Zarathustra must constantly rely on the old. Gooding-Williams suggests that *Zarathustra* ends without resolving this antithesis: “The book’s conclusion shows Zarathustra believing that a creation of new values is imminent, yet hardly insists that his modernist optimism is well founded” (Ibid. 20). Gooding-Williams' emphasis on novelty is misleading: Nietzsche never aimed for novelty for its own sake, nor did he imagine his new valuations as independent from the whole theological and philosophical tradition. Nonetheless, he is right to identify a tension between Zarathustra's expectations and achievements. As we have seen, Marion argues much the same thing: although Zarathustra does not ultimately succeed in overcoming idolatry in the child-like affirmation of the earth, he continues to await the one who will.

Nietzsche attributes the task of creating new values to one named Zarathustra even after the book's completion. The brief history of the error of the

“true world” included in *Twilight of the Idols* (a passage already addressed in the first chapter), in which Nietzsche diagnoses the nihilism that follows the simultaneous abolishment of the true and apparent worlds, concludes by once again invoking Zarathustra: “(Noon; moment of the briefest shadow; end of the longest error; high point of humanity; INCIPIT ZARATHUSTRA)” (TI “How the ‘True World’ Finally Became a Fable”). Zarathustra is charged with the task of making a comprehensive world after the perspective provided by belief in a “true world” has dissolved in the perspective-less moment of noon.

Marion, we remember, suggested that Nietzsche later recognized Zarathustra's failure and appealed instead to other figures. The most important example of this change is the late rejection of the name *Songs of Zarathustra* in favour of *Dionysian Dithyrambos*. While Nietzsche's attention did turn decisively toward Dionysus and Ariadne and away from the character Zarathustra, in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche suggests that the text *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is the most successfully Dionysian of his pursuits; although Zarathustra may have been unable to embrace the tragic character of life and may have to give way to Dionysus, *Zarathustra* is already deeply Dionysian. In this text, claims Nietzsche, his concept of the Dionysian “became a *supreme deed*” (EH “Thus Spoke Zarathustra” §6). One finds in this chapter several hints as to what is meant by this claim, supported by the study of the Dionysian undertaken in Chapter Two.

First, Nietzsche tells how the work was preceded by a marked change in his musical taste, and was born of this new, more exuberant way of hearing. Perhaps, he suggests, “the whole of *Zarathustra* may be reckoned as music” (Ibid. §1). The present chapter explores the musicality of the text in greater detail. Second, this exuberant way of hearing is manifest in the text as a fullness of metaphor, an expansiveness that includes even contradiction. The text's good-natured approach to *all* things is an unequivocally Dionysian quality (Ibid. §6).

The expectation *Zarathustra* articulates remains central to Nietzsche's project, and the *manner* in which *Zarathustra* articulates this expectation is never surpassed in Nietzsche's work. The true success of *Zarathustra*, then, is its style. Richard Schacht insists that the unique accomplishment of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is the aesthetic education it provides. *Zarathustra*'s many speeches serve to educate his audience, but more importantly, *Zarathustra* as a text serves to educate its audience not through instruction but through its structure and narrative. *Zarathustra* educates as myth educates, forming “our aspirations, valuations and sensibilities” (Schacht 232). Lawrence J. Hatab agrees, and helpfully provides a brief definition of myth as “an existential narrative disclosing a sacred dimension of the world that prompts a certain way of life” (Hatab 47). The actual speeches of *Zarathustra* aid in this formation, suggests Gooding-Williams, by employing a “perlocutionary” mode of speech; the character intends

to announce, incite, and inspire, and not to name a state of affairs that has already been achieved (Gooding-Williams 69). Inspiration and provocation are not synonymous with persuasion. In an article titled “The Rhetoric of Zarathustra”, Gary Shapiro contrasts Greek rhetoric, which was a play (*Spiel*), with the Roman rhetoric of Cicero which attempted to convince. While Western philosophy has inherited the latter approach, Nietzsche, with his emphasis on the child and his turn away from morality and normative argument, definitely considers rhetoric as *Spiel*. Shapiro says of *Zarathustra* that it is “a rhetorical *Spiel*. It plays with serious affairs of the understanding but does not aim at persuasion” (Shapiro 170).

Strictly speaking, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is a fictional narrative. In a radical departure from his usual prose, Nietzsche omits historical references altogether, using the name of the ancient Persian prophet, but setting him in an imagined place and time. *Zarathustra* thus marks a change in Nietzsche's relationship to history; Gooding-Williams suggests that Nietzsche has lost confidence in the possibility of radical cultural change within historical development and thus turns to the poetic imagination as the medium through which he might engage the promise he sees, the promise which Gooding-Williams restricts to cultural innovation but which we have been describing more ambitiously as the possibility of overcoming idolatry (Gooding-Williams 7).

While not explicitly historical, *Zarathustra* undoubtedly functions as

allegory, and Gooding-Williams finds parallels between *Zarathustra* and Nietzsche's more explicitly historical writings in order to locate the criticisms and problems encountered in *Zarathustra* within European history. While this may be a worthwhile exercise, allegory always loses something in translation. The fictional and mythological character of the text cannot simply be done away with in order to name a precise historical meaning. Despite the modest language he uses to describe Nietzsche's goal, Gooding-Williams does recognize the quasi-eschatological function of *Zarathustra*: "Envisioning historical time as discontinuous, Nietzsche writes a fiction that assumes the end of the old as it beckons the advent of the new. As he depicts it, *Zarathustra* occupies the *interregnum* between past and future" (Ibid. 46). As myth, the story is able to break into historical time, so instead of reconciling the work with historical development, the reader should allow it to remain in this perpetually annunciatory moment.

Nietzsche's writing is often esoteric in nature, and *Zarathustra* also stands as the culmination of his esotericism, a theme obvious already in the text's subtitle, *The Book for All and None*. There are two ways to understand Nietzsche's esotericism. Gooding-Williams, leaning heavily on the pervasive parody in the text, makes a particular textual history necessary to understanding *Zarathustra*. While Nietzsche's many allusions do serve at least in part to weed out the

uneducated reader, Nietzsche himself does not claim priority for the parodic element of the text, but for the musical. He *was* looking for a particular sort of reader, but not necessarily one who would understand all references to the religious and philosophical traditions. Although Nietzsche does exhort his followers to serious and even industrious study, “of which, to be sure, not everyone is capable”, this seriousness is eventually overcome by the gay science and the comedy and drama of the Dionysian (GM “Preface” §7). Nietzsche strongly believes that the height of education is learning to think as one would learn to dance (TI “What the Germans Lack” §7). The particular reader Nietzsche seeks is one sensitive to melody and rhythm, one who thinks with grace and nuance. Only the musical reader will *experience* the text rightly, for as Nietzsche says of *Zarathustra* in the preface to *Genealogy of Morals*, “I do not allow that anyone knows that book who has not at some time been profoundly wounded and at some time profoundly delighted by every word of it” (GM “Preface” §8).

A reading of *Zarathustra* would therefore do best not to attempt to distill what Nietzsche is *really* saying, for he is *really* telling a story, a story intended to create a certain experience for the reader and that will thus always exceed whatever summary or account we offer. Keeping in mind what Nietzsche expected of his readers, it is important that the excessiveness of the text not lead us to give a tentative reading. If *Zarathustra* functions aesthetically, then anyone

offering a reading, however partial and exploratory, must bring with them the courage of their own good taste.

## II. “On the Gift-Giving Virtue”: The Courage to Speak

The first part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* contains two distinct sections: the memorable prologue, in which the title character descends from his solitude in the mountains and is disappointed by his reception in the towns below, and the series of speeches delivered in the vicinity of the town called The Motley Cow, through the course of which Zarathustra acquires his first followers. He approaches the people as an evangelist bringing good news, and not as the madman of *The Gay Science* pronouncing in despair that God is dead. In the prologue Zarathustra expresses surprise upon learning that the saint has not heard of God’s death (Z I. “Prologue” §2). Laurence Lampert finds this astonishment instructive: Zarathustra does not descend to the people in order to announce the death of God, for he assumes that all already know (again, Nietzsche *begins* with the death of God rather than arguing to it); rather, Zarathustra is prepared to announce that which gives meaning to the world now that God is dead (Lampert 17). Many are not ready to hear this evangel, but Zarathustra offers it nonetheless. The announcement is not descriptive but performative; through his task Zarathustra enacts the response to the death of God. The first part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* contains a unified performance, for while the set of speeches hardly advance the

action of the narrative (especially in contrast to the dramatic prologue), the two sections are united by common imagery and a common depiction of Zarathustra's task as a radical giving of himself.

Part one of *Zarathustra* is widely recognized to be the most linguistically unrestrained. Shapiro's article on the rhetoric of the text names different rhetorical textures in each of the parts, and finds that the first makes extravagant use of metaphor (Shapiro 171). Stanley Rosen agrees: he calls part one the most enthusiastic section of the text, adding that it “contains the full impetus of the energy accumulated by Zarathustra during his ten years on the mountaintop” (Rosen 18). Zarathustra's gift is, from the first, his very speech. “Speech is the medium of Zarathustra's action,” insists Rosen (Ibid. 25). Shapiro finds in Zarathustra's initial garrulity the first attempt at creating new values; the flood of images and metaphors in part one *are* new valuations (Shapiro 171). Not only do the variety and creativity of the metaphors show a certain lack of restraint, the particular images used foster an impression of uninhibited generosity. Both *Zarathustra* and its title character demonstrate and demand personal abandon.

Several of the dominant images and phrases are worth exploring. The phrase “*Also begann Zarathustra's Untergang*” – translated either “Thus Zarathustra began to go under” or “Thus began Zarathustra's going-under” – announces both phases of his task, appearing at the end of the first chapter of the

prologue and at the very end of the prologue (Z I. “Prologue” §1 §10). That he must *twice* begin his going-under is testament to the regular frustration of Zarathustra's expectation, which Gooding-Williams refers to as the “stammer” of the plot: Zarathustra's first going-under is a false start and he must soon recommit to his task (Gooding-Williams 23). What sort of task is Zarathustra twice beginning? *Untergang* is notoriously difficult to translate, meaning either a setting (as the sun), a sinking (as a ship) – both of which may well be translated as “going-under” – or, figuratively, ruin and decline. In this context, *Untergang* is explicitly linked to solar patterns, but also intimates potential destruction.

The prologue begins with our protagonist in the mountains, giving an ode to the sun. Zarathustra wishes to give of his abundant wisdom as the sun gives of its abundant light and in order to do so he must “descend to the depths” as the sun does (Z I “Prologue” §1). He is speaking at least in part of a literal descent, of his journey to the populated lands that lie below his current home. He likens this expedition to an overflow, and the distinctly Neoplatonic image of the overflowing sun is a perfect example of *Zarathustra's* parody. Gooding-Williams argues that the sun does name a certain superabundant origin for Zarathustra’s giving, but instead of the otherworldly origin of the Neoplatonists, Nietzsche's/Zarathustra's locus is decidedly temporal. Nietzsche eventually names the origin Dionysus, “the ‘god’ whose epiphany he describes time and again in his

mature writings with the metaphors of fullness, overfullness, and overflowing fecundity” (Gooding-Williams 54).

Zarathustra's dramatic ode to the sun is never repeated, but solar imagery continues to appear throughout the text to name an abundant giving. In fact, part one is framed by this image. The speeches of the first part culminate in Zarathustra's speech to his disciples on the highest of virtues, the gift-giving virtue, which he calls “a golden sun” (Z I. 22 §1). Again, giving is imagined as overflow. Instead of contrasting giving with selfishness, Zarathustra contrasts healthy selfishness with sick selfishness. The latter names the one whose envy turns to feeble resentment: he will want what others have and resort to thievery. Healthy selfishness, on the other hand, openly strives for everything so that it may give everything; the one whose selfishness is healthy makes all things and values his own so that he might, in his love for all, give himself. The overflow of the gift-giving soul is depicted as a deluge: he is like a well that does not conserve water but flows out; he is like a broad and full river, “a blessing and a danger to those living near” (Ibid.).

The image of overflow is present in several of Nietzsche's other texts, notably in his discussion of genius in *Twilight of the Idols*. The genius, whether artistic or otherwise, squanders himself in his work and deed, setting aside the sickness of self-preservation; “the overpowering pressure of outflowing forces

forbids him any such care or caution” (TI Skirmishes of an Untimely Man” §44). Nietzsche likens the work of the genius to the flooding of a river, a necessary and yet dangerous deed.

With the images of well and river we begin to see the destructive elements of Zarathustra's task. In his initial ode to the sun, Zarathustra speaks of overflow also as an emptying: “Bless the cup that wants to overflow” is quickly followed by “Behold, this cup wants to become empty again, and Zarathustra wants to become man again” (Z I. “Prologue” §1). Gooding-Williams recognizes a double parody at play, both Neoplatonic and Pauline. To become empty and at the same time to become man calls to mind the first half of the hymn found in Philippians 2, one of the earliest and most influential Christological formulations. While verse seven, found in the second stanza of the hymn, is the clear referent, it will be helpful to show it in context. The first three stanzas of the hymn are translated as follows:

5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,  
6 who, though he was in the form of God,  
    did not regard equality with God  
    as something to be exploited,  
7 but emptied himself,  
    taking the form of a slave,

being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
8 he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5-8 NRSV)

The word “emptied” is translated from the Greek verb *kenóo*, a form of *kenosis* (Gooding-Williams 56). In some formulations of Christian Trinitarian theology, *kenosis* is one of the principle means by which the relationship between Christ's divinity and humanity is explained. Leaving aside the derivative doctrinal meaning of the term, the hymn itself closely links *kenosis* to Christ's death; by emptying himself and becoming human, Christ gave himself up even to death. Zarathustra's emptying deliberately develops the third meaning of *Untergang* listed above; in emptying himself, Zarathustra exposes himself to calamity and devastation. The giving he advocates is kenotic, for it involves a dangerous abandon and dispossession of the self.

This interpretation finds support both in Zarathustra's actions in the prologue – his descent from the mountains quickly brings him into danger – and in the speeches of the first part; through his exhortation to his hearers we begin to understand what he demands of himself. Once he enters the marketplace, the first gift Zarathustra gives is his teaching on the overman, for whose sake man shall be

overcome. He employs further aquatic imagery to explain man's relation to the overman: man is a polluted stream and the overman the great sea required to receive such a stream. In the overman the “great contempt” of man can “go under” (Z I. “Prologue”§3). If man is a stream, he necessarily loses himself for the sake of the sea; emptying thus challenges the notion of the static subject.

Zarathustra speaks also of man as a bridge to the overman, but this image is finally no more static or stable than that of the river. Rather, man must simultaneously be the bridge and, as we see dramatically (though allegorically) enacted in the tightrope walker, the one dangerously venturing across the bridge. As witnessed in the death of the tightrope walker, the one who would cross over or go under risks perishing, but Zarathustra claims to love this man precisely for his dangerous vocation (Ibid. §6). The teachings in the marketplace continue to contrast the men whom Zarathustra loves – those who do not want to preserve themselves, who are actively passing away – with the last men, who are not able to act as a bridge to anything for they seek only stability and self-preservation, (Ibid. §4). Never remaining long with one image, Zarathustra describes the one who might act as a bridge variously as perishing and going under, as one who shoots the arrows of longing beyond himself, as one who squanders himself, and as one who “does not hold back one drop of spirit for himself” (Ibid.). This language both demonstrates and demands a total lack of restraint, and evidences a

strong opposition to self-protectionism.

Zarathustra could have preserved himself had he stayed in the mountains, but he had to go under, to pour himself out in his announcement to the people. Going under and overcoming stand in sharp contrast to self-preservation and thus necessarily involve exposure to danger and ruin. In naming gift-giving as the highest virtue, Zarathustra is clearly naming that which is highest in himself, although his giving is continually interrupted in the text. At the end of Part One he does that which is most difficult for the giver and “close[s] the open hand” of his giving, leaving his disciples and returning to solitude (Z I. 22; Z II. 1). The prologue began with Zarathustra in solitude, overfull of his wisdom “like a bee that has gathered too much honey” and wishing to overflow and become empty again (Z I. “Prologue” §1). The second part begins much the same way: after years of solitude Zarathustra’s full wisdom must once again pour out, but whereas his earlier solitude was joyful, now his solitude and the overfullness it produces actually cause him pain (Z II. 1). In his solitude, the well has become a whole lake and a roaring stream must now flow out of that lake, down into the valleys. The flow of the river is here explicitly related to speech; as the title of the text itself indicates, Zarathustra’s gift is his speech, which he considers a *new* speech, one that flows much faster than the old tongues (Ibid.). Nietzsche combats idolatry in his writings through the abandon of gift-giving speech; Zarathustra initially

responds to the death of God in the same way.

## II. “On the Friend”: The Courage to Love

Zarathustra speaks often of what he loves, and what he intends by that word is simply the kenosis or out-pouring just described. Love is neither affection nor compassion, but this unrestrained giving of oneself. When Zarathustra meets the old saint on his journey down from the mountains, he explains his descent with a simple phrase: “I love man.” The saint objects to the love of something so imperfect and Zarathustra answers “Did I speak of love? I bring men a gift.” Again the saint objects, insisting that the people would rather have their burden relieved than receive anything; if Zarathustra must give, he is to give alms. Zarathustra will have none of this, claiming that he is not poor enough for alms (Z I. “Prologue” §2). This brief conversation serves to relate Zarathustra's love to his generosity, and simultaneously to distinguish it from pity. He does not love man except in his gift to man, in his unrestrained out-pouring of speech. Yet the saint is correct: man does not want such a gift. Zarathustra does not endear himself to others in his giving, but confronts them and even makes enemies of them. Gift-giving is an act of love, *great* love, which in loving demands *more* than love (Z IV. 13 §16). The speeches of the first and second parts address the “*more*” of great love through strong rejections of pity and neighbour love, and through affirmation of hate and of the love of the distant.

Zarathustra's gift-giving is born of creative joy rather than pity. Nietzsche's disdain for pity is articulated most concisely in the preface to *Genealogy of Morals*, where he argues that pity belongs to the will to nothingness for it involves saying no to the world (GM "Preface" §5). In the third and fourth parts of *Zarathustra* the title character undergoes several struggles to rid himself of this pity, but his contempt for the sentiment is well documented throughout the text. In his speech "On the Pitying" near the start of the second part, he determines that pity breeds resentment in both the one who is pitied and in the bad conscience of the one who pities; we do better for those who suffer when we feel joy and not pity, for in joy and not in pity does one pour out one's wisdom on the friend and enemy. Great love, he continues, has a creative height beyond pity. He recounts a conversation with the devil, in which the devil announced: "God is dead; God died of his pity for man" (Z II. 3). We should remember that Marion draws precisely on this point: Nietzsche attributes God's death to the anemia of his love, to his inability to demand *more* than love. The *more* is the creative moment, a moment requiring not pity and compassion, but joy and hate.

Zarathustra speaks concisely on the inextricability of love and hate in his speech "On the Way of the Creator": "The lover would create because he despises. What does he know of love who did not have to despise precisely what he loved!" (Z I. 17). Marion confirms that hatred and love are concomitant for

Nietzsche, in *Zarathustra* and elsewhere, for one can only love that which one can also contest and with which one can also struggle. In the prologue Zarathustra declares his love for those who squander themselves and thus act as bridges to the overman, and in the speeches he declares his love for his “brothers in war” (Z I. 10). Zarathustra values the warrior because he squanders himself in a dangerous vocation. The warrior better demonstrates gift-giving love than does the neighbour, for his love includes hate and therefore struggle.

The speeches of the first part include many a demand for a warrior, for one who is able to stand in the way of the evil *and* the good (Z I. 8), to suffer the depths of evil and not renounce the world (Z I. 9), and to embrace the loneliness of enmity. Zarathustra begins to elaborate on the realization that concludes the prologue, that his disciples will come not out of the herd, but will be those who enjoy solitude, those he calls “the lonesome and the twosome” (Z I. “Prologue” §9; Z I. 11). The warrior must be one of these lonely ones and not one of the herd men or the last men, for whom relationship functions only as a matter of mutual protection. The warrior hates as much as he loves; his relationship with his foe is one of hate *and* love for he loves the one who allows him to be at war (Z I. 10).

Zarathustra’s speech on the friend reiterates this point: the friend and the enemy are one and the same, for the friend is not the one who protects but against whose hardness we might break (Z I. 14). Love does not preserve, but risks itself

*and* that which it loves: “What matters long life? What warrior wants to be spared? I do not spare you; I love you thoroughly, my brothers in war!” (Z I. 10).

The friend/foe thus aids in overcoming, acting for the other as “an arrow and a longing for the overman” (Z I. 14).

Love of the neighbour first appears in Zarathustra's description of the last man, where it is already clear that this love is not the agonistic love of warrior and friend. The last man's love is a simple matter of self-preservation: he rubs up against his neighbour in order to keep warm (Z I. “Prologue” §5). The speech “On the Love of the Neighbor” contrasts neighbour love with love of the overman; continuing the theme he began in the prologue, Zarathustra insists that “higher than love of the neighbor is love of the farthest and the future” (Z I. 16). The contrast between these two sorts of love underlines one of the most basic and prevalent oppositions in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, that between security and risk. The last man is the apex of all that Zarathustra finds most contemptible, for he has eradicated his creativity and his passions; he is “no longer able to shoot the arrow of his longing beyond man” (Z I. “Prologue” §5). Gooding-Williams identifies the last man as the biggest threat to the success of Zarathustra's task. The last men are too complacent to participate in the creation of new values for they have destroyed the Dionysian preconditions for self-transformation (Gooding-Williams 88). The values of the cowardly are mediocrity (which they call moderation),

domesticity, and contentment, and in fostering these “virtues” they tame the foot with a constant tick-tock so that it no longer knows how to dance or even to stand still (Z III. 5 §2). Complacency is a dulling of the receptive faculties, and thus it abolishes the Dionysian sensitivity to rhythm and melody.

Complacency, though not a dominant theme in this project, is one of Nietzsche's dominant charges against his contemporary society. To quote from the beginning of *The Gay Science*:

To stand in the midst of this *rerum concordia discors* and of this whole marvelous uncertainty and rich ambiguity of existence *without questioning*, without trembling with the craving and rapture of such questioning, without at least hating the person who questions, perhaps even finding him faintly amusing—that is what I feel to be *contemptible*. (GS I. §2)

This passage describes the last men who, in their dispassion, speak of happiness and blink (Z I. “Prologue” §6). Complacency is the end result of the drive for security, of which Nietzsche is consistently critical, not only in the drama of *Zarathustra* but also in the history of civilizations. Later in *The Gay Science* Nietzsche compares Europe’s “feminine” dissatisfaction that drowns itself in the intoxication of art, alcohol, and religion – which he later called decadence – with the Chinese dissatisfaction which would strive only to make life better and safer.

The latter, in which dissatisfaction initiates an attempt for security, is far more problematic because it extinguishes the possibility of change. Europe's turbulence, on the other hand, fosters overcoming: Europe's affliction has “generated an intellectual irritability that almost amounts to genius and is in any case the mother of all genius” (GS I §24). Even the regular targets of Nietzsche's tirades – Christianity, Wagnerian romanticism, Schopenhauerian pessimism – are to be preferred to any culture that would aim only for stability and preservation. The last men in *Zarathustra* name the consummation of the drive for security, which, in denying transformation, denies life.

While the speeches of the first and second parts of *Zarathustra* deal also with many other enemies of life, the last men – those least courageous – remain the antithesis to the ones Zarathustra loves best – those most courageous. The predominant mood in these sermons is one of derision: he is calling attention to the false claims that seem to govern our world, claims of strength where there is only weakness and of goodness where there is only defensiveness. Real strength is demonstrated where defensiveness is abandoned for the sake of love of the distant.

We remember that Marion accuses Nietzsche of imagining all relationships on the model of creditor and debtor, but the relationships between warriors and friends seem to function otherwise, stemming from the uninhibited

giving of oneself rather than from calculation and judgment. Giving does not provide solace – Zarathustra insists that “[w]here there are oases there are also idols” (Z II. 8) – but provokes antagonism and, through the resulting struggle, overcoming. The two warring parties never attain a perfect intimacy, but retain distance, and in doing so, reach towards that which is yet more distant. As the narrative continues, one begins to sense that in loving that which is distant, the one who goes under is not only giving, but receiving.

### **III. “The Night Song”: The Courage to Receive**

At the end of Part One, Zarathustra encourages his followers to lose him, and even deny him, in order to find themselves. In order for his disciples to become friends whose love and enmity reach towards that which is distant, they must no longer simply be pupils. The beginning of Part Two therefore finds Zarathustra withdrawing from men and returning to the solitude of his cave. He claims he has done what is most difficult for him, closing the open hand of the giver out of his love for man (Z II. 1). Despite the deliberate separation from his disciples, Zarathustra despairs of what has happened to his teachings; while he has remained in solitude, his teachings have been so distorted that his followers are not friends at all. Stanley Rosen finds the first section of Part Two indicative of the paradox inherent in Zarathustra's preaching: if his preaching is believed then it prevents its own fulfillment (Rosen 137). The dilemma Rosen identifies

exists only if Zarathustra's preaching demands unconditional assent or dissent, a characteristic found in the parasitic attention of the marketplace but not in the companion Zarathustra seeks (Z I. 12). Zarathustra's demand for courage and risk undoes itself only if it becomes a teaching in which his followers seek security.

This potential paradox certainly does not put an end to Zarathustra's preaching – the second and third parts of the text are filled with his long-winded speeches, first on the blessed isles and then in the solitude of his mountains – and yet the dramatic development of the text demonstrates a reconsideration of gift-giving speech. Zarathustra's descent does not continue indefinitely, but is complemented by what we might call an ascent. At key moments in the plot, we find Zarathustra encouraging stillness, retreating to solitude, and singing and dancing rather than preaching. He does not renounce uninhibited donation, but begins to gesture towards, and prepare himself for, receptivity.

Gary Shapiro notices a shift in texture between the first and second parts; whereas the first is overflowing with metaphors, the second uses metaphor more sparingly and instead begins to focus on the creative will (Shapiro 171-2). In the first of the speeches on the blessed isles, the gift-giving virtue itself becomes the will to create, which alone propels one towards the overman. The will to create urges Zarathustra to leave his solitude and return to people as the hammer moves to stone (Z II. 2). We saw that the second part of the text begins with the same

kenotic metaphors as the first, only now speech is said to flow more quickly (Z II. 1) We also saw that creation requires being able to speak in new ways, for to do so is to posit new virtues and new values. Now in sections five through eight Zarathustra emphasizes the separation between the creator and the rest of humanity, and thus becomes increasingly concerned with height. In “On the Tarantulas” Zarathustra insists that all beauty requires steps and climbers, contradiction and differentiation (Z II. 7); in “On the Rabble” he welcomes his listeners to the the mountain tops, their home high above the nausea-inducing crowds (Z II. 6). Instead of allowing his speech to flow like a river into the valleys, Zarathustra looks to the mountain tops where the story began, for these heights are characterized by a “blissful silence” in which the old words can be unlearned and something altogether new might be met (Ibid.).

Whereas speech is central to the first part of *Zarathustra*, stillness and solitude become prominent in the second and third. In addition to the attention paid to the silence of the heights, Zarathustra announces his great distaste for the noisy in the section “On Great Events”, in which he tells his disciples what he has told the revolutionary (whom he calls the fire hound): the creation of new values – which is, of course, the highest thing on earth – happens not with much clamor and bellowing, but *inaudibly* (Z II. 18). Moreover, the great drama at the end of Part Two, in which Zarathustra first begins to confront eternal recurrence, comes

to pass only when speaking ends. Zarathustra's dream in "The Soothsayer" allows him finally to recognize that from which humanity must be redeemed: revenge on the past. Zarathustra hears the pessimistic announcement of the Soothsayer – that resentment of the past can lead only to nihilism – and grieves; he does not sleep, eat or drink for three days, and, most importantly, he loses his speech (Z II. 19). Only after losing his speech does he dream the dream that allows him to approach his most abysmal thought, the eternal recurrence, and thus to imagine an eternity redeemed from *ressentiment* and revenge.

The centrality of stillness to the eternal recurrence is reinforced in the final section of the second part of *Zarathustra*, titled "The stillest hour". In it, the stillest hour speaks to Zarathustra nine times *without voice*, once in a whisper, and once laughing (Z II. 22). Part Two ends with Zarathustra as yet unable to heed this laughing command; he is both too proud – he lacks the innocence of the child – and too cowardly – he lacks the courage to command – which in this context means no less than commanding the past. The stillest hour commands him to speak his most difficult thought, the eternal recurrence, and one gets the sense that only stillness can command proper speech. Stillness is more than the absence of noise, for it has its own voice. With increasing frequency, Zarathustra is depicted in stillness and solitude, confronted by voices not his own.

This is not to say that Zarathustra's own speeches end; he continues to

sound out idols and to speak their alternatives, even, or especially, if he is speaking to himself. The speeches in the first half of Part Three are delivered in solitude, and return resolutely to the matter of new values creation. First Zarathustra reconsiders the supposed evils of sex, lust for power, and selfishness (Z III. 10 §2), then he denounces the heavy burden of alien valuations such as the universality of good and bad (Z III. 11 §2), and thereafter launches into the series of speeches that make up “On Old and New Tablets”, the longest chapter in the book. This chapter begins with the task of revaluation partially completed; many old tablets, or old valuations, already lie broken, and Zarathustra sits among new tablets half filled with writing (Z III. 12 §1). Still, Zarathustra finds many remaining values that are antithetical to life, and all of these must yet break, whether they are old denunciations – for example, the commandments prohibiting robbery and killing which, in their attempt to preserve life, in fact deny the violence inherent in life (Ibid. §10) – or new proclamations of world-weariness – for example, the liberal unlearning of all violent passions in the social contract (Ibid. §16, §25). Christ appears in Zarathustra's speech (not by name, of course) as one who breaks old values and “writes new values on new tablets” (Ibid. §26).

At issue in Zarathustra's speech “On Old and New Tablets” is the possibility of redeeming the past in a new future, and the threat posed to redemption by the last men, who have lost all ability to create. The speech

addresses the same concerns as the prologue; Zarathustra has not cast aside his interest in gift-giving speech. However, it becomes increasingly clear that Zarathustra must listen as much as he speaks, and receive as much as he gives.

To understand the change in tone we must examine the set of three songs found in the middle of Part Two. Gooding-Williams calls this set of songs a moment of conversion. “The Night Song” begins after Zarathustra likens his spirit to a violent wind for the second time (Z I. 6, 8). Suddenly, however, Zarathustra seems to have wearied of this constant emptying – now as a river, now as a wind – and longs instead to receive. Gooding-Williams reads “The Night Song” as Zarathustra’s realization that the lion spirit is not yet able to create new values because he has “disowned his power of receptivity” (Gooding-Williams 163). The conversion involves Zarathustra’s recognition that in moving, he must also be moved. Gooding-Williams says: “by discarding his will to truth and ceasing to be a lion, Zarathustra can look beyond his quasi-idealist view of reality and acknowledge his capacity to be moved by Dionysus” (Ibid. 164). Even without identifying its stage in the metamorphoses outlined in Part One, “The Night Song” obviously calls into question the text’s earlier imagery. Zarathustra laments the fact that he must always be a sun, always spilling out and never drinking. With a wail he announces his thirst: “Light I am; ah, that I were night! ... I do not know the happiness of those who receive ... This is my poverty, that my hand never

rests from giving” (Z II. 9).

Zarathustra does not simply bemoan his own inability and move on. Rather, “The Night Song” functions as a change in direction for the text. First, its position as the first of many songs in the book is not incidental. The songs plainly belong to a different genre than the speeches or sermons, in part because of differences in audience: whereas the latter combine critique with injunctions upon the hearers, the former are not directed at particular hearers but are voiced in solitude. One finds in parts three and four increasing attention to what Zarathustra speaks and also hears as he wanders alone in his mountains. Of course, the distinction between song and sermon is not *only* one of audience. In “The Night Song” Zarathustra sings: “A craving for love is within me; it speaks the language of love” (Ibid.). That his longing must appear in a song suggests that the language of love he refers to *is* song, and as we saw in the previous chapter, Nietzsche unquestionably considers song a Dionysian art. The following section, “A Dancing Song”, only furthers the idea that we have reached a newly Dionysian section of the text. “The Night Song” thus demonstrates that a Dionysian love (a love that sings) also wishes to receive. In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche reprints the whole of this song, calling it “a dithyramb of solitude”, and insists that the answer to this poem is Ariadne, who alone meets Dionysus (EH “Thus Spoke Zarathustra” §7).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The mention of Ariadne, particularly as she appears in this passage from *Ecce Homo*, raises a whole set of concerns this thesis is unable to address. As we saw in the first chapter, Marion is willing to read the encounter between Ariadne and Dionysus as an encounter with

At the start of Part Three, after his songs and his stillest hour, Zarathustra has left his followers once again, not for the ease of solitude, but for its struggle. Nietzsche himself conceived of much of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* while wandering alone in the mountains. He insists that the images came to him unbidden and fully formed; the images were not calculated but necessary. Nietzsche can only describe the experience through “the concept of revelation”; he claims “that suddenly, with indescribable certainty and subtlety, something becomes *visible*, audible ... One hears, one does not seek; one accepts, one does not ask who gives ... I never had any choice” (EH “Thus Spoke Zarathustra” §3). When Zarathustra speaks in solitude he does so as one receiving a similar revelation. Lawrence Lampert notices that Zarathustra speaks differently to himself than he does to his disciples, becoming even more abrupt and nearly prophetic, as if he is delivering a revealed message (Lampert 140).

Nietzsche suggests in *The Gay Science* that “those who live alone do not speak too loud nor write too loud, for they fear the hollow echo—the critique of the nymph Echo. And all voices sound different in solitude” (GS III §182). The

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the divine. He pays little attention to the fact that this is a highly erotic encounter and that Nietzsche often writes of the giver and the receiver as if these are sexual roles. Marion does not exclude *eros* from the love and praise that cross distance, but nor can *eros* alone cross distance. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche writes of life and wisdom as women, and Zarathustra encounters these women as mysterious, demanding, and desirable others. If these are primarily erotic encounters, how does that change the current discussion on distance? Dionysus is, among other things, a lustful and virile god. These qualities need not negate his relationship to what Marion calls distance. Still, a closer study of the sexual component in Nietzsche's work and the place of *eros* in Marion's theological phenomenology might tell a very different story than the one being told here.

hollow echo he mentions brings to mind the emptiness of the idols, discovered with a tuning fork. The voices of solitude wish to speak without echo and without the hollow sound of idolatry, and Nietzsche considers *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* an experiment in the voices of solitude, saying in *Ecce Homo* that not only “The Night Song”, but the whole of *Zarathustra* is “a dithyramb on solitude” (EH “Why I Am So Wise” §8). In Part Three, Zarathustra's solitude speaks to him as his dearest friend, and it says of itself:

Here all things come caressingly to your discourse and flatter you, for they want to ride on your back. On every parable you ride to every truth. Here you may talk fairly and frankly to all things: and verily, it rings in their ears like praise when somebody talks straight to all things. (Z III. 9)

Whereas the constant talk of the city prevents listening, the speech of solitude is happy and tender and allows all being to speak. Zarathustra then dreams that the world offered itself to him, not as a possession or as an object of study, but as a shrine, a place of devotion (Z III. 10 §1). In solitude Zarathustra is able to approach the earth with adoration. The earth offers itself, “not riddle enough to frighten away human love, not solution enough to put to sleep human wisdom” (Ibid.). That which offers itself to Zarathustra, and which he is ever better able to receive, inspires love and invites human creativity, underlying the necessity of

receptivity to Zarathustra's creative task.

Shapiro notices the change in tone that accompanies Zarathustra's retreat to solitude. He finds that speech in this section of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* demonstrates a peculiar way of knowing, one fundamentally different from the options provided by philosophy; understanding does not grasp everything, as per Hegel, but nor does it continually run up against the impenetrable thought, as per Kant. Shapiro insists that “[t]alk in solitude is wholly adequate to things—Zarathustra can speak to them now and they will speak to him” (Shapiro 180), but he is careful to distinguish adequacy from identification. He says, “Zarathustra and his solitude, Zarathustra and his animals, Zarathustra and things belong to one another without collapsing into an unqualified identity” (Ibid. 181). Shapiro's description of Zarathustra's knowing brings to mind Marion's description of phenomenology. This chapter is not the place to address further the similarities of these two approaches, yet in reading the second and third parts of *Zarathustra*, it at least becomes clear that the title character does not come to know through a particular deductive method, but instead gives himself so that he might meet the given as it gives itself.

Marion suggests that Nietzsche's conception of God does not allow for the possibility of mutual abandon. When speaking in particular of the Christian God, this does seem to be the case, yet when inhabiting the sphere of poetry and myth,

Nietzsche is quite comfortable imagining a communion between the protagonist and a distant interlocutor. Much has already been said of the abandon with which Zarathustra gives himself, and now it seems that in that abandon he meets that which also gives itself.

#### **IV. “The Yes and Amen Song”: The Courage to Sing Praise**

What finally gives itself is that most Dionysian thought, the eternal recurrence. Zarathustra does not only listen to the thought as it presents itself, but praises it. Addressed briefly in the first chapter of this thesis, the eternal recurrence is Nietzsche’s proclaimed purpose for the writing of *Zarathustra*. However, the ‘doctrine’ does not suddenly appear fully formed but emerges from the dramatic narrative, and its storied unfolding shapes how we are to understand its significance. Zarathustra faces the eternal recurrence in dreams and visions rather than as the logical outcome of philosophical argument, and ultimately he faces the eternal recurrence in the courage of the shepherd who bites off the head of the black snake and in his own seven day struggle (Z III. 2, 13). In each of these cases, the thought is not come upon through intellectual scrutiny, but appears from without and confronts the individual.<sup>4</sup>

The thought is first voiced by the dwarf on Zarathustra’s back, the spirit of gravity, who claims that “all truth is crooked; time itself is a circle” (Z III. 2).

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<sup>4</sup> The following analysis of the eternal recurrence owes much to Lawrence Lampert’s exegesis in *Nietzsche’s Teaching* and to Gianni Vattimo’s book *Introduction to Nietzsche*.

Zarathustra's response is telling: "do not make things too easy for yourself!" The dwarf spoke the thought, but he did not give himself to the thought and thus he has not in fact faced the eternal recurrence; Zarathustra corrects him with the riddle regarding the shepherd and the snake. When, in "The Convalescent," Zarathustra finally struggles with the black snake himself, and finally bites off its head and spews it out, his animals are quick to sing a song similar to that of the dwarf: they speak of the bent path of eternity and the endlessly rolling wheel of being. Zarathustra scolds them (though in a manner more kindly than his response to the dwarf) for making his struggle into "a hurdy-gurdy song" (Z III. 13). Gooding-Williams notices that the "hurdy-gurdy songs" they sing are literally lyre songs in the original German, and the lyre is the instrument of Apollo (Gooding-Williams 252). The songs of the animals *represent* Zarathustra's redemption, but the animals do not sing the experience of redemption. Zarathustra's own songs must be Dionysian.

Paul Valadier suggests that the unfolding of the "doctrine" in the text shows us that eternal recurrence, emptied of its mystery, is no longer eternal recurrence. For this reason it must be expressed not in language that seeks transparency and equivalence with the signified, but in the song of benediction, a form of speech that welcomes and expects (Valadier 258). When Zarathustra speaks the eternal recurrence himself it looks nothing like a cosmological claim.

Instead, his courage proclaims: “Was *that* life? Well then! Once more!” (Z III. 2). He voices the “doctrine” of eternal recurrence through an exclamation of praise. Valadier concludes that “a reserve and veneration based on the pathos of distance constitute [the doctrine's] very core” (Valadier 257).

The eternal recurrence demands that one be so well-disposed towards everything as to wish it all again. This most abysmal and exacting thought does not solve the riddle of the earth, but affirms it without exception. “The Seven Seals”, originally the last section of the text, includes the most confident praise found in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The passage is also called “The Yes and Amen Song” and is divided into seven sections, each ending in the declaration “*For I love you, O eternity!*” (Z IV. 16).

The “Yes and Amen” also appear in “Before Sunrise”, an earlier song of praise. Zarathustra, standing in solitude, speaks to the open sky, which becomes the image of the “uncanny, unbounded Yes and Amen”, and he laments all that would mar this sky with its nay-saying (Z III. 4). Zarathustra's encounter with the sky is an encounter with an affirming other; he wishes to match its Yes and Amen with a Yes and Amen of his own, and his own joyous affirmation and blessing is only possible when he is surrounded by the sky that blesses. The clouds that stain this sky are alien valuations, the idols of good and evil, and the lies of eternal reason and purpose; the blessed sky is free of the cobwebs of reason, of both

metaphysics and morality. The sky is not, however, free of divinity. Zarathustra's benediction, the “Yes and Amen”, praises the divine heights where he encounters eternity, free of the stains of idolatry.

A benediction is not a resolution; Zarathustra's praise and affirmation does not achieve the overthrow of all idolatry. In the final part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* the title character is once again in the vicinity of the cave where the story began, struggling to find companions in his quest for Dionysian affirmation. As mentioned in the first chapter, Zarathustra's disciples do not meet his expectations; they are actors and idolators, aping lamentation rather than experiencing it in “The Magician”, and affirming not the whole earth but only the idol in “The Ass Festival” (Z IV. 5, 18). Still Zarathustra preaches to his would-be companions: “You higher men, the worst about you is that all of you have not learned to dance as one must dance—dancing away over yourselves! What does it matter that you are failures? How much is still possible?” (Z IV. 13 §20). Part Four was written several years after the rest was completed and only made public posthumously, and the very existence of this last part demonstrates the irresolvable and inexhaustible nature of Zarathustra's task; it suggests that much more is still possible. “The Yes and Amen Song” at the end of Part Three is a jubilant benediction, and a similar verse is sung at the end of the penultimate section of the fourth part, and yet the very last lines of the whole text tell how

Zarathustra is once again standing at the mouth of his cave, “glowing and strong as a morning sun” (Z IV. 19, 20). The character starts out once again as a gift-giver, having made few visible achievements along the way. Zarathustra does not discover distance by charting a course towards a given destination, but only by embarking on a mysterious path with courage and with reckless abandon. Along the way, much is spoken and much is loved, much is heard and much is praised. In writing all this, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is itself the achievement; Nietzsche writes across what we, in the last two chapters, have learned to call distance.

## **Conclusion: Dionysus and the Crucified**

The aims of this thesis are modest. First, it demonstrates that Jean-Luc Marion gives a compelling and complicated reading of Nietzsche, a reading absorbed in the latter's announcement of the death of God and the possibility it creates for a non-idolatrous encounter with the divine. Second, it demonstrates that Nietzsche did not only open this space, but sought to traverse it anew, no longer with metaphysical or onto-theological claims, but through radically experimental writing. Finally, the third chapter explores distance as discovered in Nietzsche's most daring text, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. This paper is more exploratory than argumentative; it does not prove the value of one reading over another, but only shows that Marion has good reason to find distance in Nietzsche's work. Marion describes distance as characterized by danger,

individual abandon (or kenosis), excess, and receiving what is given, and all of these themes are prominent in Nietzsche's writings.

In his short article “Dionysus versus the Crucified”, mentioned in each of the three chapters above, Paul Valadier corroborates Marion's description of distance. Although Valadier does not employ the term with the same regularity as Marion, he considers distance central to Nietzsche's Dionysian religiosity. First, Valadier sees in Nietzsche's praise of the Dionysian an attempt at conceptual flexibility: Nietzsche wants to address unnameable reality in a way that does not reduce it to a concept or a totality of being, but allows it to speak for itself. Dionysus names that which would speak without pinning it down (Valadier 248). Second, Valadier suggests that Dionysian religiosity attempts an identification with life but does not claim such identification as definitive or final. Even in the figure of Ariadne, the only location given for the encounter with Dionysus, the identification with the god does not become final; her encounter names a crossing of the distance but not an eradication of all distance (Ibid. 249). Nietzsche's task – abandon, struggle, overcoming – always “keeps a respectful distance from the ultimate reality”; none of his pursuits deliver the unnameable in an easy way (Ibid. 250). The eternal recurrence demands constant reiteration of the yes; it allows for no “once and for all” salvation (Ibid. 255).

This paper began with a quote from Erich Heller: “[Nietzsche] is, by the

very texture of his soul and mind, one of the most radically religious natures that the nineteenth century brought forth, but is endowed with an intellect which guards, with the aggressive jealousy of a watchdog, all approaches to the temple” (Heller 11). Heller identifies a tension between Nietzsche's intellectual atheism and his residual Christian piety, but this thesis presents another option. Nietzsche does not struggle to rid himself of religiosity; rather, his struggle *is* his religiosity. The Dionysian faith of which Valadier speaks so eloquently requires a constant overcoming, a constant vigilance against idols, and a constant affirmation. Nietzsche is religious because of, and not in spite of, his resistance to the security of human constructions.

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