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**Time and Value**

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**Introduction: Time, History, and Value**

This seminar goes back to discussions I had many years ago, in the late 1960's with students who were convinced that we were witnessing an epochal change, that this bankrupt modern age was about to give way to a less logo-centric, phallo-centric, Euro-centric postmodern age. Little is left of such conviction. But the need for such change has not disappeared. The world does seem to find itself on a trajectory that in the long run is unsustainable.

Herbert Marcuse figured prominently in these earlier discussions. The "Political Preface, 1966" to *Eros and Civilization* gives you some idea of what was then felt to be at stake. In many ways that time now seems very distant, many of the hopes that surfaced in these years naïve. And yet, it would, I think, be unfortunate if some of the issues raised and criticisms made at the time were now to simply be forgotten. I am more convinced today than I was then that we have to call into question a number of fundamental assumptions, that we have to challenge long cherished values, and that we have to learn to question the very basis of our culture. This is not to suggest that I found myself in agreement with the then prevalent counter-culture, no more than today I find myself today agreeing with its contemporary counterpart. Such critique too, it seems to me, takes too much for granted.

But in this seminar I want to focus on just one aspect of the problem. Both culture and counter-culture seem to me to be linked by a specific understanding of time, an understanding that, as I shall try to show, is ruled by what Nietzsche in his *Zarathustra* calls the "spirit of revenge," which in turn is linked by Nietzsche to a "will to power" than cannot accept our ineliminable "lack of power." The spirit of revenge offers us, I think, a key to the discontent so prevalent in our culture or, to offer a different formulation, to our alienation from ourselves. All attempts to overcome such self-alienation without actually overcoming also what Nietzsche calls the spirit of revenge are bound to fail. I further agree with Nietzsche that to overcome the spirit of revenge, we have to arrive at a changed understanding of time, although I cannot accept Nietzsche's own alternative, the doctrine of the eternal recurrence.

To give you a better understanding of what I am after and to give at least some initial plausibility to the thesis that the spirit of revenge links culture and counter-culture, I would like to begin by taking a look at a few pages in Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*. These pages will enable me to develop a number of points to which I would like to refer throughout this seminar:

Cultural freedom thus appears in the light of unfreedom, and cultural progress in the light of constraint. Culture is not thereby refuted: unfreedom and constraint are the price that must be paid.

But as Freud exposes their scope and their depth, he upholds the tabooed aspirations of humanity: the claim for a state where freedom and necessity coincide. Whatever liberty exists in the realm of the developed consciousness, and in the world it has created, is only derivative, compromised freedom, gained at the expense of the full satisfaction of needs. And in so far as the full satisfaction of needs is happiness, freedom in civilization is essentially antagonistic to happiness: it involves the repressive modification (sublimation) of happiness. Conversely, the unconscious, the deepest and oldest layer of the mental personality, is the drive for integral gratification, which is absence of want and repression. As such it is the immediate identity of necessity and freedom. According to Freud's conception the equation of freedom and happiness tabooed by the conscious is upheld by the unconscious. Its truth, although repelled by consciousness, continues to haunt the mind; it preserves the memory of past stages of individual development at which integral gratification is obtained. And the past continues to claim the future: it generates the wish that the paradise be re-created on the basis of the achievements of civilization. (17–18)<sup>1</sup>

The ideal state is here understood as one in which freedom and necessity coincide. Such coincidence is happiness. Happiness is understood as integral gratification. The goal announced here by Marcuse is in its essentials quite traditional: to give all that is a foundation in freedom. But that is the project to be God, which Sartre, we shall see, declared to be the fundamental human project. The road to culture, to individuality appears here as a road that forces me to sacrifice my wants as I learn to occupy the place I am assigned, i.e, it is a road of alienation. But alienated existence is haunted by dreams

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<sup>1</sup> Page numbers refer to Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974).

or memories of an initial wholeness. These dreams and memories hold the promise of future realization: they generate the wish that paradise be recreated on the basis of the achievements of civilization.

We should note that Marcuse here places himself in that millennial tradition that from the very beginning has attended the orthodox mainstream of Christian thought like a shadow.<sup>2</sup> Marcuse knows of course about these connections. Indeed, he himself points them out for us:

If we follow this train of thought beyond Freud, and connect it with the twofold origin of the sense of guilt, the life and death of Christ would appear as a struggle against the father—and as a triumph over the father.<sup>3</sup> The message of the Son was the message of liberation: the overthrow of the Law (which is domination) by Agape (which is Eros). This would fit in with the heretical image of Jesus as the Redeemer in the flesh, the Messiah who came to save man here on earth. Then the subsequent transubstantiation of the Messiah, the deification of the Son beside the Father, would be a betrayal of his message by his own disciples — the denial of the liberation in the flesh, the revenge on the redeemer. Christianity would then have surrendered the gospel of Agape-Eros again to the Law; the father-rule would be restored and strengthened. In Freudian terms, the primal crime could have been expiated, according to the message of the Son, in an order of peace and love on earth. It was not; it was rather superseded by another crime—against the Son. With his transubstantiation, his gospel too was transubstantiated; his deification removed his message from this world. Suffering and repression were perpetuated. (69–70)

In its essentials the Christian message here is accepted. What is rejected is its removal from this world:

This interpretation would lend added significance to Freud's statement that the Christian peoples are 'badly christened,' that 'under the thin veneer of Christianity they have remained what their ancestors were, barbarically polytheistic.'<sup>4</sup> They are 'badly christened' in so far as the accept and obey the

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<sup>2</sup> If you are interested in these antecedents, you may want to look at Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Messianism in Medieval and Reformation Europe and its Bearing on Modern Totalitarian Movements* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

<sup>3</sup> See Erich Fromm, *Die Entwicklung des Christusdogmas* (Vienna, Internatinaler Psutchoanalytischer Verlag, 1931). Marcuse's footnote

<sup>4</sup> Freud, *Moses and Monothism*, p. 145. Marcuse's footnote

liberating gospel only in a highly sublimated form, which leaves the reality unfree as before... Equally open was the armed struggle of institutionalized Christianity against the heretics, who tried or allegedly tried to rescue the unsublimated content and the unsublimated objective. (70)

Marcuse suggests here the possibility of a Dionysian reading of Christ. Like Nietzsche, he takes our rationality, and that is to say also the ruling reality principle, to be essentially repressive. This repression leads to Dionysian explosions. Consider these passages from Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*.

In the same work [*The World as Will and Representation*]

Schopenhauer has described for us the tremendous terror which seizes man when he is suddenly dumbfounded by the cognitive form of phenomena, because the principle of sufficient reason, in one of its manifestations, seems to suffer an exception. If we add to this terror the blissful ecstasy that wells from the innermost depths of man, indeed of nature, at this collapse of the principium individuationis, we steal a glimpse into the nature of the Dionysian, which is brought home to us most intimately by the analogy of intoxication.

Either under the influence of the narcotic draught, of which the songs of all primitive men and peoples speak, or with the potent coming of spring that penetrates all nature with joy, these Dionysian emotions awake, and as they grow in intensity everything subjective vanishes into complete self-forgetfulness. In the German Middle Ages, too, singing and dancing crowds, ever increasing in number, whirled themselves from place to place under this same Dionysian impulse. In these dancers of St. John and St. Vitus, we rediscover the Bacchic choruses of the Greeks, with their prehistory in Asia Minor, as far back as Babylon and the orgiastic Sacaea. There are some, who, from obtuseness or lack of experience turn away from such phenomena as from "folk-diseases," with contempt or pity born of the consciousness of their own "healthy-mindedness." But of course such poor wretches have no idea how corpse-like and ghostly their so-called "healthy-mindedness" looks when the glowing life of the Dionysian revelers roars past them.<sup>5</sup>

Marcuse recognizes that there were rational motives behind the bloody wars against the Christian revolutions that filled the Christian era: these revolutions threatened the very foundations of an establishment still struggling to define itself:

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<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 36–37.

However the cruel and organized slaughter of Cathari, Albigensians, Anabaptists, of slaves, peasants, and paupers who revolted under the sign of the cross, the burning of witches and their defenders—this sadistic extermination of the weak suggest that unconscious forces broke through all the rationality and rationalization. The executioners and their bands fought the specter of a liberation which they desired but which they were compelled to reject. The crime against the Son must be forgotten in the killing of those whose practice recalls the crime. It took centuries of progress and domestication before the return of the repressed was mastered by the power and progress of industrial civilization. But at its late stage its rationality seems to explode in another return of the repressed. The image of liberation, which has become increasingly realistic, is persecuted the world over... trials and tribulations of non-conformists release a hatred and fury which indicate the total mobilization against the return of the repressed. (70–71)

The governing reality principle is tied here to a particular understanding of rationality, which in turn is linked to a particular understanding of temporality. The ideal that has been sketched is such that it has to lead to an attack on time:

They recall the experience of a world that is not to be mastered and controlled but to be liberated -- a freedom that will release the powers of Eros now bound in the repressed and petrified forms of man and nature. These powers are conceived not as destruction but as peace, not as terror but as beauty. It is sufficient to enumerate the assembled images in order to circumscribe the dimension to which they are committed: the redemption of pleasure, the halt of time, the absorption of death; silence, sleep, night, paradise — the Nirvana principle not as death but as life. Baudelaire gives the image of such a world in two lines:

Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté, Luxe, calme, et volupté.

"There all is order and beauty, luxury, calm, and sensuousness."

This is perhaps the only context in which the word *order* loses its repressive connotation: here, it is the order of gratification which the free Eros creates. Static triumphs over dynamic; but it is a static that moves in its own fullness — a productivity that is sensuousness, to elaborate the images thus conveyed must be self-defeating, because outside the language of art they change their meaning and merge with the connotations they received under the repressive reality principle. But one must try to trace the road back to the realities to which they refer. (164)

This attack on time is implicit in Marcuse's emphasis on a polymorphous ethos that transcends the order of procreative sexuality:

The classical tradition associates Orpheus with the introduction of homosexuality. Like Narcissus, he rejects the normal Eros, not for an ascetic ideal, but for a fuller Eros. Like Narcissus, he protests against the repressive order of procreative sexuality. The Orphic and Narcissistic Eros is to the end the negation of this order—the Great Refusal. In the world symbolized by the culture-hero Prometheus, it is the negation of *all* order; but in this negation Orpheus and Narcissus reveal a new reality, with an order of its own, governed by different principles. The Orphic Eros transforms being: he masters cruelty and death through liberation. His language is song, and his work is *play*. Narcissus' life is that of *beauty*, and his existence is *contemplation*. These images refer to the *aesthetic dimension* as the one in which their reality principle must be sought and validated. (171)

The turn against time is made explicit in a quite a number of passages:

The brute fact of death denies once and for all the reality of a non-repressive existence. For death is the final negativity of time, but "joy wants eternity." Timelessness is the ideal of pleasure. Time has no power over the id, the original domain of the pleasure principle. But the ego, through which alone pleasure becomes real, is in its entirety subject to time. The mere anticipation of the inevitable end, present in every instant, introduces a repressive element into all libidinal relations and renders pleasure itself painful. This primary frustration in the instinctual structure of man becomes the inexhaustible source of all other frustrations—and of their social effectiveness. Man learns that "it cannot last anyway," that every pleasure is short, that for all finite things the hour of their birth is the hour of their death—that it couldn't be otherwise. He is resigned before society forces him to practice resignation methodically. The flux of time is society's most natural ally in maintaining law and order, conformity, and the institutions that relegate freedom to a perpetual utopia; the flux of time helps men to forget what was and what can be: it makes them oblivious to the better past and the better future. (231)

The brute fact of death is said to deny once and for all the possibility of a non-repressive existence. Timelessness helps to define the ideal. But how can we realize this ideal if human being is essentially temporal? We have to deny this supposedly essential temporality of human being, and Marcuse attempts to do this by discovering timelessness



within time. Marcuse here invokes Freud on the id, over which time is supposed to have no power.

More plausible is the turn to aesthetic experience:

Without release of the repressed content of memory, without release of its liberating power, non-repressive sublimation is unimaginable. From the myth of Orpheus to the novel of Proust, happiness and freedom have been linked with the idea of the recapture of time: the *temps retrouvé*. Remembrance retrieves the *temps perdu*, which was the time of gratification and fulfillment. Eros, penetrating into consciousness, is moved by remembrance; with it he protests against the order of renunciation; he uses memory in his effort to defeat time in a world dominated by time. But in so far as time retains its power over Eros, happiness is essentially a thing of the *past*. The terrible sentence which states that only the lost paradises are the true ones judges and at the same time rescues the *temps perdu*. The lost paradises are the only true ones not because, in retrospect, the past joy seems more beautiful than it really was, but because remembrance alone provides the joy without the anxiety over its passing and thus gives it an otherwise impossible duration. Time loses its power when remembrance redeems the past. (EC 233)

But the aesthetic solution is rejected as finally insubstantial and spurious. It has to be made concrete.

Still, this defeat of time is artistic and spurious; remembrance is no real weapon unless it is translated into historical action. Then, the struggle against time becomes a decisive moment in the struggle against domination:

The conscious wish to break the continuum of history belongs to the revolutionary classes in the moment of action. This consciousness asserted itself during the July Revolution. In the evening of the first day of the struggle, simultaneously but independently at several places, shots were fired at the time pieces on the towers of Paris.<sup>6</sup> (EC 233-2)

The attack on clocks deserves our special attention. Quite in the same spirit Jerry Rubin was to write in the 60's in *Do It*: All watches will be destroyed. Heidegger's statement in *Being and Time* comes to mind, that the authentic person always has time. Marcuse to be sure by this time could no longer find an ally in Heidegger:

Whether death is feared as constant threat, or glorified as supreme sacrifice, or accepted as fate, the education for consent to death introduces an element of surrender into life from the beginning—surrender and submission. It stifles

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<sup>6</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Über den Begriff der Geschichte," in *Die New Rundschau* (1950), p. 568.

"utopian" efforts. The powers that be have a deep affinity to death; death is a token of unfreedom, of defeat. Theology and philosophy today compete with each other in celebrating death as an existential category: perverting a biological fact into an ontological essence, they bestow transcendental blessing on the guilt of mankind which they help to perpetuate—they betray the promise of utopia. In contrast, a philosophy that does not work as the handmaiden of repression responds to the fact of death with the Great Refusal—the refusal of Orpheus the liberator. Death can become a token of freedom. The necessity of death does not refute the possibility of final liberation. Like the other necessities, it can be made rational—painless. Men can die without anxiety if they know that what they love is protected from misery and oblivion. After a fulfilled life, they may take it upon themselves to die—at a moment of their own choosing. But even the ultimate advent of freedom cannot redeem those who died in pain. It is the remembrance of them, and the accumulated guilt of mankind against its victims, that darken the prospect of a civilization without repression. (236–237)

Marcuse has to deny that human being is essentially being unto death.

Let me try to sum up some of the points I have been trying to make here:

1. Marcuse's idea of a non-repressive society is tied to the traditional idea of a re-establishment of the earthly paradise.
2. This earthly paradise is marked by a temporality that contrasts with the temporality of our present, fallen state.
3. While the temporality of our present and fallen state is such that happiness is precluded, the temporality of paradise cannot be separated from satisfaction and happiness.
4. Christianity is attacked for only granting that happiness in a dimension that is separate from our world.
5. Implicit in this attack is, however, substantial agreement: Marcuse agrees with Christianity in rejecting a temporality that is essentially tied to being unto the future, more especially, being unto death. The present is given primacy over the future.

Crucial to Marcuse's and to the Christian view is a faith that time is compatible with lasting gratification. Perhaps we can call this "true time." This true time may be thought of as belonging to a dimension that we can reach only by passing through death. We have to be reborn. For Marcuse, too, the good life, involves something like a

secularized rebirth. Death here presents itself as the threshold that separates our time from true time.

Marcuse, to be sure, wants to insist that both our time and true time belong to this world, this earth. This means that our time can give way to true time. It is the repression of true time.

I would like to begin this seminar with a discussion of our time. Heidegger and Schopenhauer will here be our guides. I would then like to turn to an examination of what we can call the ideal of satisfaction, which is inevitably shadowed by what we can call the terror of time. Here I shall focus on Plato's *Symposium*. Eliade's *Cosmos and History* will help us to understand the terror of history as a manifestation of the terror of time. In the second half of the course I shall turn more directly to the problem of time and value, where the fall story will provide a focus. There is a sense, as we shall see, in which both the terror of time and value have their origin in the fall, a sense in which the creation of value may be understood as a response to the terror of time. I shall conclude with a consideration of Nietzsche's understanding of the spirit of revenge and the difficulties encountered not just by his, but by any attempt to overcome it.

## 2. The Terror of Time

### 1

Last time I presented you with the thesis that I hope to defend in this course: the established culture and the kind of critique of it presented by Marcuse rest on a specific understanding of time that is inseparable from what Nietzsche called the spirit of revenge. The spirit of revenge offers us, in more ways than one, the key to an understanding of the problem of self-alienation.

Quoting some passages from *Eros and Civilization* I tried to develop the tension between the temporality of human existence and the demand for happiness. The latter invites a flight from everyday time, perhaps to a being beyond becoming, or a retreat to the present, an attempt to discover in the present an eternity within becoming. Beauty thus comes to be understood as a figure of paradise. If this flight to being or the present is not to be at the same time a flight from humanity it must be possible to rescue the essence of human being from temporality. But is this possible? For a first answer I would like to turn today to Schopenhauer's *World as Will and Representation*.

But why Schopenhauer? What I find significant about Schopenhauer is that he stood the traditional anthropology on its head by emphasizing the essential temporality of human being. Anticipating Heidegger in certain ways, he thereby became the founder of a new anthropology, where by "anthropology" I mean no more than a reasoned account of the essence of human being.

What do I mean here by "traditional anthropology"? I have in mind an understanding of human being that finds its first developed expression in Plato's works and that has continued and continues to shape philosophical discussion. Perhaps I should say that Schopenhauer stood Platonism on its head. We shall have occasion to consider Plato in more detail when we turn to the *Symposium*. But let me sketch here already some of the main characteristics of "Platonism" as I am here using it.

1. Human being is essentially temporal. To be sure, plants and animals, too are temporal beings. But to such beings their being is not a problem. The human being exists at a distance from himself, is troubled by his own being. The human being is the *animal metaphysicum*:

The wisdom of nature speaks out of the peaceful glance of the brutes; for in them will and the intellect are not yet so widely separated that they can be astonished at each other when they meet again. Thus here the whole phenomenon is still firmly attached to the stem of nature from which it has come and is partaker of the unconscious omniscience of the great mother. Only after the inner being of nature (the will to live in its objectification) has ascended, vigorous and cheerful, through the two series of unconscious existences, and then through the long and broad series of animals, does it attain at last to reflection for the first time on the entrance of reason, thus in man. Then it marvels at its own works, and asks itself what it itself is. Its wonder however is the more serious, as it here stands for the first time consciously in the presence of death, and besides the finiteness of all existence the vanity of all effort forces itself more or less upon it. With this reflection and this wonder there arises therefore for man alone the need for a metaphysic; he is accordingly the *animal metaphysicum*.<sup>7</sup>

2. As the *animal metaphysicum*, the human being exists beyond himself. Unlike plant or animal, the human being does not simply live in the present, but projects himself into the past in memory, into the future in hope, expectation, desire, and care. In this sense human being is essentially incomplete, completing itself only in death, but then of course we are no longer. Constitutive of human being is a sense of incompleteness, the lacking whole. Here lies the root of Schopenhauer's pessimism. Constitutive of human being so understood would seem to be a dissatisfaction with itself. At the root of this dissatisfaction is time.

3. Plato gives one account of this. The human being, he suggests, has fallen from being, his true home, into becoming. We are exiles. This fall may thus be understood as a fall from man's true nature, which belongs to being. But this loss of home is not so complete as to amount to a total forgetting. The human being is haunted by this ideal and thus by the desire for being. This desire Plato calls love, *eros*. Again I defer discussion of *eros* until we turn to the *Symposium*.

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<sup>7</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne, 2 vols. (New York: Dover, 1968), vol. II, p. 160. Page references in the text are to this edition.

4. More generally, **being is given precedence over becoming**. The goal of human being is to be. This is part of the ideal of **satisfaction**. To be satisfied is to be complete. Nothing is outstanding.

5. Implicit in this view is a downgrading of the body. If in its essence, human being belongs to being, as embodied being it belongs obviously to time. But if the former is right, the body cannot belong to the human being essentially. The human being is said **to have a body, not to be his or her body**.

In epistemology this transcendence of human being over the body has long been taken for granted. It was given a new twist by Descartes' determination of human being as first of all *res cogitans*. To a considerable degree it would seem to remain part of our common sense. Take our attitude to sex. Are we not first of all persons, happening to have a body, happening to be gendered? Or are we essentially gendered?

Consider in this connection the metaphor of the coat for the body offered in Plato's *Phaedo*. Or the recurring understanding of the body as a source of shame. We shall return to this theme, when we turn to Augustine and Sartre.

6. Yet is this view not challenged by the very nature of experience? Are we not, as Heidegger insists, essentially **being-in-the-world**? Spirit, Schopenhauer insists, must be subordinated to will. Such subordination, as we shall see, prepares the way for both Darwin and Freud. Schopenhauer presents us with what I call an iceberg image of human being. What the tradition saw was first of all the tip of the iceberg. To get a fuller understanding of the human being we have to attend to the whole iceberg; that is to say we have to account for pre- and subconscious regions. It is in this inversion that I see Schopenhauer's most significant contribution to our modern self-understanding. With this he anticipates Nietzsche and Freud and in a different way Darwin.

## 2

In the first of his three prefaces Schopenhauer calls attention to the thinkers to whom he feels most indebted. He mentions Plato and the Upanishads, but first of all he points to Kant. Indeed it is in their departure from Kant that Schopenhauer sees the most serious fault of the German idealists.

The influence of Kant is obvious when we read the very first sentences of *The World as Will and Representation*:

“The world is my representation”: this is a truth valid with reference to every living and knowing being, although man alone can bring it into reflective, abstract consciousness. If he really does so, philosophical discernment has dawned on him. It then becomes clear and certain to him that he does not know a sun and an earth, but only an eye that sees a sun, a hand that feels an earth, that the world around him is there only as representation, in other words, only in reference to another thing, namely that which represents, and this is himself. (I, 3)

The statement must be read carefully: how Kantian is it? Consider especially:

It then becomes clear and certain to him that he does not know a sun and an earth, but only an eye that sees a sun, a hand that feels an earth.

There is a rather un-Kantian emphasis on **the mediation of the body**: I do not know the sun except through the mediating eye, I do not know the earth except through the mediating hand. Several points are important here:

1. Things are **never given in isolation**, but **only in relation to other representations**.
2. My body occupies a special place among these things. There is a sense in which **the embodied self is the measure of all things**.
3. What I see is always only the appearance of objects, where the object is the cause of the appearance. I see the sun because the sun acts on my eyes. Note that Schopenhauer here holds a position rather different from that of Kant. The most obvious difference is the claim that **perception is intellectual**. An **understanding of causality** is *immediately* bound up with it. This has to challenge the Kantian understanding of the difference between sensibility and understanding. I find it difficult not to agree with Schopenhauer’s **causal theory of perception**.

**Together with the object the subject is necessarily given.**

The division into object and subject...is that form under which alone any representation of whatever kind it be, abstract or intuitive, pure or empirical, is generally possible and conceivable. Therefore no truth is more certain, more independent of all others, and less in need of proof, than this, namely that everything that exists for knowledge, and hence the whole of this world, is only object in relation to the subject, perception of perceiver, in a word, representation. (WWR vol. 1, 3)

Consider in this connection Wittgenstein's Tractatus:

5.631 The thinking, presenting subject; there is no such thing.

If I wrote a book 'The world as I found it' I should have therein to report on my body and say which members obey my will and which do not, etc. This then would be a method of isolating the subject or rather of showing that in an important sense there is no subject: that is to say, of it alone in this book mention could not be made

5.632 The subject does not belong to the world but is a limit of the world.<sup>8</sup>

### 3

And yet there is something about this view of things that disturbs us, as Schopenhauer makes clear at the end of the first part:

However the one-sidedness of this consideration will be made in the following book through a truth that is not so immediately certain as that from which we start here. Only deeper investigation, more difficult abstraction, the separation of what is different, and the combination of what is identical can lead us to this truth. This truth, which must be very serious and grave if not terrible to everyone, is that a man can also say: "The world I my will." (I, 4)

Consider this passage from the second volume:

We want to know the significance of those representations; we ask whether this world is nothing more than representation. In that case, it would inevitably pass by us like an empty dream, or a ghostly vision not worth our consideration. Or we ask whether it is something else, something in addition, and if so what that something is. (II, 98-99)

### 4

If the first essential form of the world as representation is the division into subject and object, the a priori form under which objects stand is provided by **the principle of sufficient reason**, where that principle has its foundation in something rather like the Kantian transcendental unity of the apperception, i.e. in the fact that my experience must form a coherent whole: all our representations stand in a nexus, the form of which can be determined a priori.

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<sup>8</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922).



What is that principle? Schopenhauer addressed that question in his dissertation, where he set himself at least a twofold task:

1. to show that the tradition had been careless in its use of that principle, confusing its four quite distinct manifestations.

2. to replace the Kantian account of the a priori with a simpler one.

Schopenhauer took the principle of sufficient reason to mean that all our representations depend on other representations, i.e. stand in a nexus. But the matter is complicated by the fact that our representations are not all of one type. Schopenhauer distinguished four classes:

1. **empirical representations**, phenomena, not just thought, but sensed: this rose. The principle of sufficient reason applied to the first class gives us the category of **causality**. Every change must have a cause.

As I have already noted, that holds also for empirical intuitions, also for the given. The given demands a giver. But this may not be construed as the thing in itself. It must be thought as an object in space and time.

Schopenhauer also insists that there can be no first cause, no *causa sui*. These are contradictions in terms.

2. **abstract representations**, representations of representations: e.g. the concept "rose." To this second class corresponds the **principle of sufficient reason in knowledge**. Everything we can be said to know must have its sufficient reason, although this reason may not be confused with a cause. Thus to be true a proposition must have its sufficient reason in something other if it is to be true, where Schopenhauer distinguishes once more between different kinds of truth:

- a. **logical truth**, where the ground is provided by other propositions: Logic explores this realm.

- b. **empirical truth**, where the ground is provided by experience

- c. **transcendental truth**, where the ground is provided by the forms of the possibility of experience, space and time: the truth of geometry would be an example.

- d. **metalogical truth**, where the ground is provided by the formal conditions of all thinking: "you cannot simultaneously attribute and deny a predicate to a subject."

3. The third class corresponds to the content of Kant's pure intuition of **time and space**. Schopenhauer speaks of the **ground of being**. To the third class corresponds **the dependence of every moment in time on a predecessor and a successor**, of every point in space on others. In both cases there are series *in infinitum*. The thought of a beginning of time or a boundary of space is as unthinkable as that of a *causa sui*.

4. The fourth class includes our actions understood as deliberate doings. To the fourth class corresponds the law of motivation. **Everything we do is done for a motive.**

## 5

Time is discussed as the simplest form of the principle of sufficient reason. Schopenhauer follows Kant in tying time to counting. Every moment is seen as having its ground in the one that precedes it:

Anyone who has clearly seen from the introductory essay the complete identity of the content of the principle of sufficient reason, in spite of all the variety of its forms, will also be convinced of the importance of the knowledge of the simplest of its forms as such for an insight into his own inmost nature. We have recognized this simplest form to be time. In time each moment is, only in so far as it has been effaced by its father the preceding moment, to be effaced just as quickly itself. Past and future (apart from the consequences of their content) are as empty and unreal as any dream; but present is only the boundary between the two, having neither extension nor duration. In just the same way, we shall recognize the same emptiness in all the other form of the principle of sufficient reason, and shall see that, like time, space also, and like this, everything that proceeds from causes or motives, has only a relative existence, is only through and for another like itself, i.e only just as enduring. In essence this view is old; in it Heraclitus lamented the eternal flux of things; Plato spoke with contempt of its object as that which forever becomes, but never is; Spinoza called it mere accidents of the sole substance that alone is and endures; Kant opposed to the thing-in-itself that which is known as mere phenomenon; finally the ancient wisdom of the Indians declares that "it is Maya, the veil of deception, ..." (I, 7–8)

From this follows the dream-like quality of the world of representations.

## 6

In par. 3 Schopenhauer introduces the crucial distinction between **abstract** and **intuitive representations**:

The main difference among our representations is that between the intuitive and the abstract. The latter constitutes only one class of representations, namely concepts; and on earth these are the property of man alone. The capacity for these, which distinguishes him from all animals has at all times been called reason [*Vernunft*]. (I, 6)

Schopenhauer thus appropriates but also transforms the Kantian distinction between **understanding** and **reason**. Reason is understood as the faculty of transcending the immediacy of intuition. Schopenhauer gives here an account of the ecstatic nature of human being that in some ways invites comparison with that of Heidegger. This power of transcendence is said to be the foundation of doubt, and thus also of truth and falsity, as it is the foundation of care and remorse.

In his account Schopenhauer makes more of the alienating power of reason than its triumphs.

If in the representation of perception, illusion does at moments distort reality, then in the representation of the of abstract, error can reign for thousands of years, impose its iron yoke on whole nations, stifle the noblest impulses of mankind; through its slaves and dupes it can enchain even the man it cannot deceive. It is the enemy against which the wisest minds of all times have kept up an unequal struggle, and only what these have won from it has become the property of mankind. (I, 35)

Reason brings us an increase in power, but also in suffering:

It is only this new consciousness at a higher potential, this abstract reflex of everything intuitive in the non-perceptive conception of reason, that endows man with that thoughtfulness which so completely distinguishes his consciousness from that of the animal, and through which his whole behavior on earth turns out so differently from that of his irrational brothers. He far surpasses them in power and in suffering. They live in the present alone; he lives at the same time in the future and the past. They satisfy the need of the moment; he provides by the most ingenious preparations for the future, nay, even for times that he cannot live to see. They are given up entirely to the impression of the moment, to the effect of the motive of perception; he is determined by abstract concepts independent of the present moment. He therefore carries out

considered plans, or acts in accordance with maxims, without regard to his surroundings, and to the accidental impressions of the moment. Thus, for example, he can with composure take cunning measures for his own death, dissemble to the point of inscrutableness, and take his secret with him to the grave. Finally he has an actual choice between several motives, for only *in abstracto* can such motives, simultaneously present in consciousness, afford knowledge with regard to themselves that the one excludes the other, **and can thus measure against one another their power over the will** (1, 36)

Reason thus gives expression to what Heidegger calls the “**ecstatic**” character of Dasein. The human being is capable of so raising himself beyond himself that he need not give in to his first level desires. Only the human being faces a genuine choice. In that sense it is a sense of freedom that distinguishes human beings from animals, where that sense does not preclude determinism.

The first gift of reason, according to Schopenhauer, is **speech**:

Speech is the first product and the necessary instrument of his faculty of reason. Therefore in Greek and Italian speech and reason are expressed by the same word; *ò logos, il discorso*. *Vernunft* (reason) is derived from *vernehmen*, which is not synonymous with hearing, but signifies the awareness of the meaning of thoughts communicated by words. Only by the aid of language does reason bring about its most important achievements, namely the harmonious and consistent action of several individuals, the planned cooperation of many thousands, civilization, the State; and then, science, the storing up of previous experience, the summarizing into one concept of what is common, the communication of truth, the spreading of error, thoughts and poems, dogmas and superstitions. The animal knows death only when he dies, but man consciously draws every hour nearer to death; and at times this makes life a precarious business, even to the man who has not already recognized this character of constant annihilation in the whole of life itself. Mainly on this account man has philosophies and religions, though it is doubtful whether that which we rightly esteem above all else in his conduct, namely voluntary rectitude and nobility of feeling, have ever been the fruit of them. (1, 37)

A good part of the second part of the first book is directed against the claims that are made for reason. We meet thus in Schopenhauer an emphasis on the rights of perception as opposed to those of reason. In Schopenhauer already we find a view of philosophy as a discipline that creates artificial problems as reason loses its foundation in the

understanding, a foundation reason requires since it is nothing more than a representation of representations. Consider, for example, par. 16:

At the beginning of our consideration of reason we remarked in general terms how much the action and behavior of man differs from those of the animal, and that this difference is to be regarded as solely the result of the presence of abstract concepts in consciousness. The influence of these on our whole existence is so decisive and significant that it places us to a certain extent in the same relation to the animals as that between animals that see and those without eyes (certain larvae, worms, and zoophytes). (1, 84)

We should note the asserted **analogy between rational understanding and seeing**:

We, on the other hand, by virtue of knowledge in the abstract, comprehend not only the narrow and actual present, but also the whole past and future together with the wide realm of possibility. We survey life freely in all directions, far beyond what is present and actual. Thus what the eye is in space and for sensuous knowledge, reason is, to a certain extent, in time and for inner knowledge. But just as the visibility of objects has value and meaning only by informing us of their tangibility, so the whole value of abstract knowledge is always to be found in its reference to knowledge of perception. Therefore, the ordinary natural man always attaches far more value to what is known directly and through perception than to abstract concepts, to that which is merely thought; he prefers empirical to logical knowledge. (1, 84)

Schopenhauer already insists on the primacy of perception.

By virtue of being both, a being of perception and a being of reason, the human being lives a double life: in the world and at the same time at a distance from himself as a being in the world:

The universal survey of life as a whole, an advantage which man has over the animal through his faculty of reason, is also comparable to a geometrical, colorless, abstract, reduced plan of his way of life. He is therefore related to the animal as the navigator, who by means of chart, compass, and quadrant knows accurately at any moment his course and position on the sea, is related to the uneducated crew who see only the waves and skies. It is therefore worth noticing, and indeed wonderful to see, how man, besides his life in the concrete always lives a second life in the abstract. (1, 85)

It is precisely this distance from life that can give us a sense that we are only dreaming, or that we are only actors in a play that we do not fully understand and of which we are not the author:

Here in the sphere of calm deliberation, what previously possessed him completely and moved him intensely appears to him cold, colorless, and for the moment foreign and strange; he is a mere spectator and observer. In respect of this withdrawal into reflection, he is like an actor who has played his part in one scene, and takes his place in the audience until he must appear again. In the audience he quietly looks at whatever may happen, even though it be the preparation of his own death (in the play); but then he again goes on the stage, and acts and suffers as he must. (I, 85)

This feeling, which can be oppressive in that it seems to rob reality of its weight, can also be used to lighten the burden of life. To the extent that I succeed in looking at life as a play that does not really concern me, the pain that this life brings ceases to really move me. I once found myself in a hospital, in rather great pain. I found myself assuming such a spectator's point of view, clinging almost desperately to very abstract thoughts. My tastes, both in philosophy and in poetry shifted radically (to Husserl in philosophy and Stefan George in poetry).

Schopenhauer recognizes the possibility of seeking refuge from the burden of life in a life of reflection and thus escaping the problems of the temporality of existence. But with approval he quotes Augustine's *The City of God*:

It is incumbent on us to explain the arguments by which men have attempted to obtain for themselves a supreme happiness in the unhappiness of this life, so that the great difference between what we hope for and their vain effort may become all the clearer. Philosophers have disputed much among themselves over the highest good and the greatest evil, and in treating this question with the greatest zeal, have tried to find out what makes man happy. For this is what is called the highest good. (II, 151n)

Augustine here points to the misery of this life. Schopenhauer would have agreed: is the pursuit of happiness in this life not bound to fail? But given this sorry state, can we not make this miserable life most tolerable by expecting as little as possible from it? This strategy is at the heart of the ethics of **cynicism**:

Accordingly, the fundamental idea of cynicism is that life in its simplest and most naked form, with the hardships that naturally belong to it, is the most

tolerable, and is therefore to be chosen. For every aid, comfort, enjoyment, and pleasure by which people would make life more agreeable, would produce (II, 153)

Cynicism too, is an example of an ethics of satisfaction. It attempts to reduce the expectations and demands and thus the possibilities for disappointment.

They begged occasionally, so far as was necessary to obtain these things [the barest necessities], but they did not work. But they accepted absolutely nothing in excess of the necessities above mentioned. Independence in the widest sense was their object. They spent their lives in resting, walking about, talking with everyone, and in scoffing, laughing and joking. Their characteristics were heedlessness and great cheerfulness. (II, 154)

Striking is how Schopenhauer in his discussion follows a long tradition that thinks pain outweighs pleasure in life.

The **Stoics** as Schopenhauer describes them are in many ways rather like the Cynics, only they suggest that they truly know that they do not really need the pleasures of this world and can therefore accept them. In his ability to enjoy the things of the world the Stoic thinks himself superior to the Cynic, who practices a more complete resignation. In the second volume Schopenhauer gives us a biting description of the Stoics, who are said to stand in the same relationship to the Cynics “as the well-fed Benedictines and Augustinians are to the Franciscans and Capuchins” (WWR vol. II, 156).

One senses here something of a shift in Schopenhauer with respect to the Stoics. In the first volume, the description of them had been much more positive:

As I have understood the spirit of Stoic ethics, its source lies in the thought whether reason, man’s great prerogative, which, through planned action and its result, indirectly lightens the burdens of life so much for him, might not also be capable of withdrawing him at once and directly, i.e., through mere knowledge, either completely or nearly so, from the sorrows and miseries of every kind that fill his life. (I, 87)

The key idea is simple enough. Limit your desires. If you ask little of life, you are less likely to be disappointed.

Note the premise on which this strategy rests: it recognizes the tension between the human desire for happiness and the miseries that are such a striking part of this life. Indeed, if Schopenhauer is right, the very idea of a truly happy life is a contradiction in terms. Happiness demands a being at one with oneself that temporality precludes. This

is why Stoicism tries, not to take the individual out of life, but to establish a distance between the life of reason and concrete life, so that, while continuing to live, the individual becomes in a sense his own spectator and is no longer really the one who is living. Socrates could serve as an example.

And yet the tension remains. Reason proves insufficient to effectively distance the individual from life. Again and again the world will drag even the Stoic sage back into it. Imagine such a sage with a bad toothache. Schopenhauer thus denies perfection to the Stoic life:

But, however much this end is to a certain extent attainable through the application of reason and through a merely rational ethic, and although experience shows that the happiest are indeed those purely rational characters commonly called practical philosophers—and rightly so, because just as the real, i.e. theoretical philosopher translates life into the concept, so they translate the concept into life—nevertheless we are still very far from being able to arrive at something perfect in this way, from being the correct use of our reason. On the contrary we find a complete contradiction in our wishing to live without suffering, a contradiction that is therefore implied by the frequently used phrase, "blessed life." (I, 90)

Cf. Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* and in the *Notebooks*:

6. 7. 16: Can one live in such a way that life ceases to be problematic? That one *lives* in eternity and not in time?

8. 7. 16: I am either happy or unhappy. That is all. One can say: good or evil do not exist.

He who is happy cannot have any fear. Also not of death.

Only he who does not live in time, but in the present is happy.

For life in the present there is no death.

7. 10. 16: The work of art is the object *seen sub specie aeternitatis*; and the good life is the world *seen sub specie aeternitatis*. This is the connection between art and ethics.<sup>9</sup>

But the body will not be denied. This is why the Stoic holds out suicide as a last resort. As Socrates hinted, death is understood here as offering the cure for the disease that is life.

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<sup>9</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tagebücher 1914-1916, Schriften* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 1960), pp. 84-278.



## 7

The second book begins with a reflection that calls our attention to the nature of the reduction on which the first book rests. In our experience things have a meaning; they are not simply there. How are we to understand this? How is it possible that things should have a claim on us, present themselves as objects of concern or desire? The attempt to restore weight to the world by understanding it as a representation of the thing in itself responds to this sense of the difficult to bear lightness of phenomena. — The connection between the problem of the thing in itself and the problem of value and willing deserves further consideration.

Schopenhauer thus insists that we give up the primacy of representations. And is this turn away from representation not already implicit in the very beginning of the first book? How is the perspectival character of experience possible? Does this not already presuppose that the subject is incarnated in a body? That it is the body? If I were to begin with a pure thinking subject, how could I explain that my body is more mine than your body? But body and will belong together and to the will the world offers itself in a quite a different way, as object of my desire.

The will, however, will never be satisfied. In par. 29 the foundation of Schopenhauer's pessimism is made explicit. Everywhere in nature Schopenhauer sees endless striving. All of the different expressions of the will share thus a family resemblance. This allows us to speak of them as phenomena of the same will.

In fact, absence of all aim, of all limits, belongs to the essential nature of the will in itself, which is an endless striving. This was touched on above when centrifugal force was mentioned. It also reveals itself in the simplest form of the lowest grade of the will's objectivity, namely gravitation, the constant striving of which we see, although a final goal for it is obviously impossible. For if, according to its will, all existing matter were united into a lump, then within this lump gravity, ever striving towards the centre, would still always struggle with impenetrability as rigidity or elasticity. Therefore the striving of matter can always be impeded only, never fulfilled or satisfied. (I, 164)

The lowest as well as the highest phenomena are taken to demonstrate this:

Finally, the same thing is also seen in human endeavors and desires that buoy us up with the vain hope that their fulfillment is always the final goal of willing. But, as soon as they are attained, they no longer look the same, and so are soon

forgotten, become antiquated, and are really, although not admittedly, always laid aside as vanished illusions. It is fortunate enough when something to desire and to strive for still remains, so that the game may be kept up of the constant transition from desire to satisfaction, and from that to a fresh desire, the rapid course of which is called happiness, the slow course sorrow, and so that this game may not come to a standstill, showing itself as a fearful, life-destroying boredom, a lifeless longing without a definite object, a deadening languor. According to all this, the will always knows, when knowledge enlightens it, what it wills here and now, but never what it wills in general. Every individual act has a purpose or end; willing as a whole has no end in view. (I, 164–165)

The will is will to live. In nature this manifests itself as a striving to ensure the survival, not just of the individual, but of the species (cf. Plato's *Symposium*). Why should we, like other animals, be possessed of such a desire? For Schopenhauer there is no answer. All of the activity of nature seems to have a point in the short run, e.g. the survival of the species, while in the long run, according to Schopenhauer, nature has no final goal. That is why teleology does not lead to theology.

The conflict between human existence and the ideal of satisfaction is taken to be constitutive of the human condition:

No attained object of willing can give a satisfaction that lasts and no longer declines; but it is always like the alms thrown to the beggar, which relieves him today so that his misery may be prolonged till tomorrow. Therefore, so long as our consciousness is filled by our will, so long as we are given up to the throng of desires with its constant hopes and fears, so long as we are the subject of willing, we can never obtain lasting happiness or peace. Essentially, it is all the same whether we pursue or flee, fear harm or aspire to enjoyment; care for the constantly demanding will, no matter in what form, continually fills and moves consciousness; but without peace and calm true well-being is absolutely impossible. Thus the subject of willing is constantly lying on the revolving wheel of Ixion, is always drawing water in the sieve of the Danaids, and is the eternally thirsting Tantalus. (I, 196)

Schopenhauer aside, to what extent can we avoid giving some such analysis? What alternatives offer themselves?

From Schopenhauer's analysis it follows that the human being can overcome suffering only when (s)he escapes from him- or herself as a willing individual. Kant here provides Schopenhauer with a significant pointer: in time the disinterested nature of

**aesthetic experience** promises to lift the terror of time. Consider the discussion of the first moment of the *Critique of Judgment* and look at it from the point of view of the problem of time. Here is how Schopenhauer understands aesthetic experience:

Raised up by the power of the mind, we relinquish the ordinary way of considering things and cease to follow under the guidance of the forms of the principle of sufficient reason merely their relations to one other, whose final goal is always the relation to our own will. Thus we no longer consider the where, the when, the why, and the whither in things, but simply and solely the *what*. Further, we do not let abstract thought, the concepts of reason, take possession of our consciousness, but, instead of all this, devote the whole power of our mind to perception, sink ourselves completely therein, and let our whole consciousness be filled by the calm contemplation of the natural object actually present, whether it be a landscape, a tree, a rock, a crag, a building, or anything else. We lose ourselves entirely in this object, to use a pregnant expression; in other words we forget even our individuality, our will, and continue only to exist only as pure subject, as clear mirror of the object, so that it is as though the object alone existed without anyone to perceive it, and thus we are no longer able to separate entire consciousness is filled and occupied by a single image of perception. (I, 178–179)

In aesthetic experience the human being exploits that distance from himself as desiring, a distance that is part of his intellectual nature and makes himself a being that no longer desires, but is content to just know. For a time the will within him is negated. The human being is no longer interested, is no longer directed towards the future but allowed to exist in the present. Schopenhauer's debt to Kant here requires no comment. The ordinary everyday mode of existence has been bracketed.

## 8

But the aesthetic solution cannot finally defeat the terror of time — it offers only a temporary escape. Paragraph 54 is important to us, not so much in that it offers an introduction to the last part of the book in which the theme of resignation is developed, but rather because it points to the possibility of drawing a very different Nietzschean conclusion from the preceding discussion. I shall return to it in my discussion of Nietzsche.

According to Schopenhauer birth and death belong to the phenomenon of the will. Life requires both. But neither the will nor the subject is subject to birth and death.

Death is described by Schopenhauer as a sleep in which individuality is forgotten. Can the will ever die? Can it ever slip into the past? The will will always manifest itself in the present. In this sense past and future have no reality.

Above all, we must clearly recognize that the form of the phenomenon of the will, and hence the form of life or of reality, is really only the *present*, not the future or the past. Future and past are only in the concept, exist only in the connexion and continuity of knowledge insofar as this follows the principle of sufficient reason. No man has lived in the past, and none will live in the future; the present alone is the form of all life, but it is also life's sure possession which can never be torn from it. The present always exists together with its content; both stand firm without wavering, like the rainbow on the waterfall. For life is sure and certain to the will, and the present is sure and certain to life. (I, 278)

And yet, when we consider the order of phenomena things seem quite different:

Of course, if we think back to the thousands of years that have passed, to the millions of men and women who have lived in them, we ask, What were they? What has become of them? But, on the other hand, we need recall only the past of our own life and vividly renew its scenes in our imagination, and then ask again, What was all this? What has become of it? As it is with our life, so is it with the life of those millions. Or should we suppose that the past took on a new existence by its being sealed through death? Our own past, even the most recent, even the previous day, is only an empty dream of the imagination, and the past of all those millions is the same. What was? What is? The will, whose mirror is life and will-free knowledge beholding the will clearly in that mirror. He who has not yet recognized this, or will not recognize it, must add to the above questions as to the fate of past generations this question as well: Why precisely is he, the questioner, so lucky as to possess this precious, perishable, and only real present, while those hundreds of generations of men, even the heroes and sages of former times, have sunk into the night of the past, and have thus become nothing, while he, his insignificant ego, actually exists? Or more briefly, although strangely: Why is this now, his now, precisely now and was not long ago? Since he asks such strange questions, he regards his existence and his time as independent of each other, and the former as projected into the latter. He really assumes two nows, one belonging to the object and the other to the subject, and marvels at the happy accident of their coincidence. (I, 278)

The reflection is interesting: to think in this manner we must have opposed ourselves to time.

The will cannot lose the present. Schopenhauer points out, given this certainty, most of us are surprisingly undisturbed by our inevitable death. Our living is not a being unto death:

yet this can frighten him only very rarely and at particular moments, when some occasion calls it up to the imagination. Against the mighty voice of nature reflection can do little. In man, as in the animal that does not think, there prevails as a lasting state of mind the certainty, springing from innermost consciousness, that he is nature, the world itself. By virtue of this, no one is noticeably disturbed by the thought of certain and never-distant death, but everyone lives on as though he is bound to live forever. (WWR vol. I, 281)

Most of the time we do not spend very much time thinking about it. Is this because, as Heidegger suggests, that most of the time we hide from ourselves our own essential being, because we find death too dreadful to bear? This would make such existence in Heidegger's sense inauthentic. But does something else announce itself here? An unarticulated knowledge that death does not deserve to be taken all that seriously?

Consider briefly the end of the book:

But we now turn our glance from our own needy and perplexed nature to those who have overcome the world, in whom the will, having reached complete self-knowledge, found itself again in everything, and then freely denied itself, and who then merely wait to see the last trace of the will vanish with the body that is animated by that race. Then, instead of the restless pressure and effort; instead of the constant transition from desire to apprehension, and from joy to sorrow; instead of the never-satisfied and never-dying hope that constitutes the life of the man who wills, we see that peace that is higher all reason, that ocean-like calmness of the spirit, that deep tranquility, that unshakable confidence and serenity, whose mere reflection in the countenance, as depicted by Raphael and Correggio is an complete and certain gospel. Only knowledge remains, the will has vanished. We then look with deep and painful yearning on that state, beside which the miserable and desperate nature of our own appears in the clearest light by the contrast. Yet this consideration is the only one that can permanently console us, when, on the one hand, we have recognized incurable suffering and endless misery as essential to the phenomenon of will, to the world, and, on the

other, see the world melt away with the abolished will, and retain before us only empty nothingness. (I, 411–412)

This leads to a further consideration: to what extent does Schopenhauer's metaphysics reflect the project that he is pursuing? In the end Schopenhauer, too, despite the way he brings the human subject into the world, into the body, and thus into time, despite the way his understanding of being as will would seem to join being to time, instead of thinking being against time, would seem to return to the tradition that thinks being against time.

### 3. The Temporality of Human Being

#### 1

Last time I spoke of the tension between the temporality of human existence and the demand for happiness. Such an assertion raises questions about time and about happiness. What is the temporality of happiness? We say that when we are fulfilled we are happy. But can we ever be truly fulfilled? Faust's wager with Mephistopheles would seem to turn on this. Is Faust ever fulfilled? What about the ending? Has the devil been cheated by the poet? The demand for satisfaction invites a flight from time, perhaps to a being beyond becoming, or a retreat to the present, an attempt to discover in the present an eternity within becoming. But if this flight to being or the present is not to be at the same time a flight from humanity it must be possible to rescue the essence of human being from temporality. Is this possible? For a first answer I turned last time to Schopenhauer's *World as Will and Representation*.

According to Schopenhauer, as we saw, eternal becoming, flux, belongs to the revelation of the essential nature of the will. Once more I return to some key passages:

In fact, absence of all aim, of all limits, belongs to the essential nature of the will in itself, which is an endless striving. This was touched on above when centrifugal force was mentioned. It also reveals itself in the simplest form of the lowest grade of the will's objectivity, namely gravitation, the constant striving of which we see, although a final goal for it is obviously impossible. For if, according to its will, all existing matter were united into a lump, then within this lump gravity, ever striving towards the centre, would still always struggle with impenetrability as rigidity or elasticity. Therefore the striving of matter can always be impeded only, never fulfilled or satisfied. (I, 164)

And human beings are part of nature, condemned to dream of a happiness that will always elude them, that if achieved would indeed mean death. **Eros** and **thanatos**, the love and the death instincts, are indeed closely linked. What lets us dream of such happiness is our reason, which allows us to raise ourselves above our temporal being in reflection and to oppose being to becoming. That distinction is indeed inscribed into our experience. To see this particular rose as a rose is to experience a particular as member of a set that is not similarly located in time and space.

Human existence and realization of what the ideal of satisfaction demands, happiness so understood, are incompatible:

No attained object of willing can give a satisfaction that lasts and no longer declines; but it is always like the alms thrown to the beggar, which reprieves him today so that his misery may be prolonged till tomorrow. Therefore, so long as our consciousness is filled by our will, so long as we are given up to the throng of desires with its constant hopes and fears, so long as we are the subject of willing, we can never obtain lasting happiness or peace. Essentially, it is all the same whether we pursue or flee, fear harm or aspire to enjoyment; care for the constantly demanding will, no matter in what form, continually fills and moves consciousness; but without peace and calm true well-being is absolutely impossible. Thus the subject of willing is constantly lying on the revolving wheel of Ixion, is always drawing water in the sieve of the Danaids, and is the eternally thirsting Tantalus. (I, 196)

Given Schopenhauer's, or for that matter Marcuse's, understanding of happiness, happiness will be denied to human beings by their very essence. This raises the question: to what extent can we avoid giving some such analysis? What alternatives offer themselves?

## 2

Let me develop and strengthen the thesis that human being is essentially temporal and as such lacking by taking a look at Heidegger's *Being and Time* which would have us understand human being as fundamentally **guilty**, that is to say, lacking. I would like to spend three sessions on *Being and Time*.<sup>10</sup> But before turning to the paragraphs I have asked you to read I would like to raise three questions that should help those not yet familiar with *Being and Time*.

1. In what sense is fundamental ontology more fundamental than traditional ontology?
2. Why does fundamental ontology take the form of an investigation into human being, i.e., of an analytic of Dasein?
3. How is fundamental ontology related to psychology?

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<sup>10</sup> References in this chapter are to Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).



About the first question:

Let us get some terms straight: First the distinction between **ontological** and **ontic**: **ontology** is the inquiry into the structures constitutive of entities. Its object is the exhibition of **categories**. Kant is thus an ontologist in Heidegger's sense when he tries to exhibit the categories. Ontic investigation on the other hand inquires into **what is the case**.

Kant, however, does not question the presupposed understanding of experience. And yet, as the other two Critiques demonstrate, the presupposed notion of experience rests on a reduction. A more fundamental questioning of experience is therefore needed: what are the structures constitutive of human being-in-the-world? The inquiry into these structures Heidegger terms **fundamental ontology**. The structures are called **existentialia**. **Existential : existentiell = ontological : ontic**. Fundamental analogy thus takes the form of an analytic of *Dasein*. This answers my second question.

We should note here a certain parallel between Heidegger and Descartes. Descartes recognized that his metaphysics of nature, his interpretation of the being of the objects of science, needed for its foundation a metaphysics of the soul, an analysis of the being of humans as *res cogitans*. That "fundamental ontology" was to secure that access to beings provided by clear and distinct thinking. That "fundamental ontology" in turn was recognized to be in need of a further foundation. Descartes' philosophical theology addresses that need. Heidegger of course would have us question Descartes' attempt as insufficiently fundamental. But he will also recognize that his fundamental ontology is in need of a further foundation. In that sense his inquiry into the question of Being can be said to take the place of Descartes' theology.

About my third question: the answer should be obvious. Psychology is an ontic discipline. It does not inquire into the structures constitutive of human being in the world as such, but inquires into how human beings as a matter of fact are and behave. There is to be sure a relation. The structures said to be constitutive of human being in the world cannot be incompatible with observed facts.

## 3

In the second chapter Heidegger examines being-in-the-world as the fundamental constitution of Dasein. Heidegger distinguishes three moments:

1. What do we mean by “**world**”?
2. Who is that **being**, that is in the world?
3. What is the meaning of this **being-in**?

I begin with the last: How is the “in” to be understood? I am “in” this room. There are chairs “in” this room. Heidegger distinguishes a categorial from an existential interpretation of the “in” (54), a categorial from an existential spatiality (56). Existential space is **heterogeneous** (56). The modes of being-in-the-world have for their mode of being *Besorgen* or “concern” (57). Heidegger calls our attention to **deficient modes** of concern. In this connection Heidegger introduces and offers a first characterization of the being of Dasein as *Sorge*, “care”:

The expression ‘concern’ will be used in this investigation as an ontological term for an existentiale, and will designate the Being of a possible way of Being-in-the-world. This term has been chosen not because Dasein happens to be proximally and to a large extent ‘practical’ and economic, but because the Being of Dasein is to be made visible as care. (83-84)

Why is this existential character of being-in-the-world usually overlooked and the world interpreted most of the time in terms of *Vorhandenheit* (“presence-at-hand”) as the totality of facts that are what they happen to be? Why this primacy of assertion? Why has the metaphor of sight come to be so important?

Both in Dasein and for it, this state of Being is always in some way familiar [*bekannt*]. Now if it is also to become known [*erkannt*], the knowing which such a task explicitly implies takes itself (as a knowing of the world [*Welterkennen*]) as the chief exemplification of the soul’s relationship to the world. Knowing the world (noein)—thus functions as the primary mode of Being-in-the-world, even though Being-in-the-world does not as such get conceived. But because this structure of Being remains ontologically inaccessible, yet is experienced ontically as a ‘relationship’ between one entity (the world) and another (the soul), and because one proximally understands Being by taking entities as entities within-the-world for one’s ontological foothold, one tries to conceive the relationship between world and soul as

grounded in these two entities themselves and in the meaning of their Being—  
namely to conceive it as present-at-hand. (85-86)

Being-in-the-world comes to be understood as a relation of the soul to the world.

Practical engagement in the world comes to be understood as a-theoretical, i.e. as privative. In this way our understanding is misled. But pure theory, as we shall see, can know nothing of value. But how then is the being of value to be understood?

The following paragraph, 13, develops this analysis of being-in-the-world. Heidegger begins with a discussion of the subject–object polarity, of the priority granted to the *erkennende In-der-Welt-sein*, to that mode of being-in-the-world that understands (60). *Natur* comes to be understood as *das was erkannt wird*, what is understood (60). The being of the knower, to be sure, must be different. The body cannot account for this difference, it is too much part of the world. The being of the knower must be sought *innen*, within. The question then arises how the subject gets outside the sphere of consciousness. The problem of solipsism arises, of being trapped within the immanence of consciousness. Heidegger insists that knowing is inevitably founded in an always already being involved in the world. The supposed problem of how to get outside the sphere of subjectivity to the world is interpreted as the result of a reduction of a richer experience.

The fundamental consideration is not too different from the way Schopenhauer makes the transition from Book 1 to Book 2 of the *World as Will and Representation*. In the cognitive attitude Dasein gains a new stance towards a world that inevitably has already been discovered. An adequate account of what it means to know has to ground itself in a clarification of being-in-the-world.

In the third chapter, Heidegger interprets the *Weltlichkeit der Welt* (worldhood of the world). What is the meaning of world? Heidegger distinguishes four different uses:

1. World as the totality of what is, the totality of *vorhanden*, present-at-hand facts (**ontic**)
2. World used to describe the being of the beings in 1 (**ontological**)
3. World as that in which Dasein lives (**existentiell**)
4. World used to describe the being of 3 (**existential**)

Heidegger suggests that he will use the term in the third sense (65)

"Nature" we tend to understand first of all as Kant or natural science understands it. This "nature", Heidegger suggests, becomes ontologically transparent only given a developed analytic of Dasein. The same, he suggests, goes for the romantic poetic understanding of nature.

The problem of *Weltlichkeit* is to be raised, in keeping with Heidegger's decision to start with ordinary, everyday Dasein, by considering the *Umwelt* ("environment").<sup>11</sup>

What then is it that we meet with first of all in our *Umwelt*? **Things**. Some of these things, we can say, have a **value**. So understood, these valued things then would seem to be a bit like decorated sheds, value like decoration, added to otherwise mute things. Is this an adequate account?

Heidegger takes his cue from the Greeks:

The Greeks had an appropriate term for "Things": *prágmata*—that is to say, that which one has to do with in one's concernful dealings (*práxis*). But ontologically, the specifically 'pragmatic' character of the *prágmata* is just what the Greeks left in obscurity; they thought these 'proximally' as 'mere Things'. We shall call those entities which we encounter in concern "equipment." In our dealings we come across equipment for writing, sewing, working, transportation, measurement. The kind of Being which equipment possesses must be exhibited. The clue for doing this lies in our first defining what makes an item of equipment—namely, its equipmentality. (96-97)

Later, he suggests, we can lose this relationship to the world:

"Being-familiar-with..." This character of Being-in was then brought to view more concretely through the everyday publicness of the "they," which brings tranquillized self-assurance—"Being-at-home," with all its obviousness—into the average everydayness of Dasein. On the other hand, as Dasein falls, anxiety brings it back from its absorption in the 'world.' Everyday familiarity collapses. Dasein has been individualized, but individualized as Being-in-the-world. Being enters into the existential 'mode' of the "not-at-home." Nothing else is meant by our talk about uncanniness. (233)

Here we have the key to what could be considered Heidegger's "pragmatism."<sup>12</sup>

How then are we to understand the equipment's equipmentality?

<sup>11</sup> For his understanding of the *Umwelt* Heidegger is indebted to Jakob von Üxküll, See Üxküll, *Theoretical Biology*, trans. D. L. Mackinnon (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1926)

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Mark Okrent, Richard Rorty, Hubert Dreyfus.

Taken strictly, there “is” no such thing as an equipment. To the being of any equipment there always belongs a totality of equipment, in which it can be this equipment that it is. Equipment is essentially “something- in-order-to...” [“*etwas um-zu...*”]. A totality of equipment is constituted by various ways of the ‘in-order-to,’ such as serviceability, conduciveness, usability, manipulability. (97)

Heidegger speaks of *Zeug*, of *Werkzeug*, a tool such as a hammer, for example, which is essentially “something to do something with,” *wesenhaft um zu*:

The hammering itself uncovers the specific manipulability [“*Handlichkeit*”—“handiness” might be a better translation] of the hammer. The kind of Being which equipment possesses—in which it manifests itself in its own right—we call “readiness-to-hand” [*Zuhandenheit*]. (98)

*Zuhandenheit* names the being of equipment. Phenomenology, as we have seen, must overcome those tendencies that tend to cover up what offers itself first of all and most of the time. These tendencies are natural, especially in the case of *Zuhandenheit*: When a piece of equipment is really to-hand, say a hammer, it withdraws itself. What we focus on is what is to be done:

That with which our everyday dealings proximally dwell is not the tools themselves [*die Werkzeuge selbst*]. On the contrary, that which we concern ourselves primarily with is the work—that which is produced at the time; and this is accordingly ready-to-hand too. The work bears with it that referential totality with which the equipment is encountered. (99)

Consider — facts : logical space = *Zeug* (equipment): *Verweisungsganzheit* (referential totality).

Consider also the dissimilarity: the work provides for organization, assigns to things their proper places. The work itself has the status of *Zeug*, think of a pair of shoes, *Schuhzeug*. Material is used in making the work. This is one way in which nature gets discovered. But Heidegger here moves rather too quickly to what would seem to be a quite different sense of “nature”:

Here, however, “Nature” is not to be understood as that which is just present-at-hand, or as the power of Nature. The wood is a forest of timber, the mountain a quarry of rock, the river is water power, the wind ‘wind in the sail.’ As the ‘environment’ is discovered, the “Nature” thus discovered is encountered too. If its kind of Being as ready-to-hand is disregarded, this ‘Nature’ itself can be discovered and defined simply in its pure presence-at-hand. But when this

happens, the Nature which ‘stirs and strives’ (*Natur als was webt und strebt*) which assails us and enthralls us as landscape, remains hidden. The botanist’s plants are not the flowers of the hedgerow (*Blumen am Rain*), the ‘source’ which the geographer establishes for a river is not the ‘springhead in the dale (*Quelle im Grund*).’

*Natur als was webt und strebt*, *Blumen am Rain*, *Quelle im Grund*: what is their being? Heidegger leaves it unclear. As categories *Vorhandenheit* and *Zuhandenheit* alone prove both inadequate. Here Heidegger at most hints, but fails to address such inadequacy. What are its implications? — If you are curious, I encourage you to read his essay, “The Origin of the Work of Art.”<sup>13</sup> — **And what is the being of values?**

The tool is to hand in a **public world**. At the same time the *Umweltnatur* is discovered.

Heidegger warns against an understanding of the ready to-hand as the subjectively colored present-at-hand:.

But this characteristic is not to be understood as merely a way of taking them, as if we were talking such ‘aspects’ into the ‘entities’ which we proximally encounter, or as if some world-stuff which is proximally present-at-hand in itself were ‘given subjective colouring’ in this way. (101)

Yet what follows invites questioning:

Readiness-to-hand is the way in which entities as they are ‘in themselves’ are defined ontologico-categorially. Yet only by reason of something present-at-hand, ‘is there’ anything ready-to-hand. Does it follow, however, granting this thesis for the nonce, that readiness-to-hand is ontologically founded upon presence-at-hand? (101)

How are we to understand the claim that as *Zeug* the hammer shows itself as the thing it really is? Just how is the priority of *Zuhandenheit* over *Vorhandenheit* to be understood? Heidegger concludes this paragraph with a question that prepares for the following discussion:

But even if, as our ontological Interpretation proceeds further, readiness-to-hand should prove itself the kind of Being characteristic of these entities which are

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<sup>13</sup> See also Karsten Harries, *Art Matters: A Critical Commentary on Heidegger’s The Origin of the Work of Art* (New York: Springer, 2009)

proximally discovered within-the-world, and even if its primordially as compared with pure presence-at-hand can be demonstrated, have all these explications been of the slightest help towards understanding the phenomenon of world ontologically? In interpreting these entities within-the-world, however, we have always 'presupposed' the world. Even if we join them together, we still do not get anything like the 'world' as their sum. If then, we start with the Being of these entities, is there any avenue that will lead us to exhibiting the phenomenon of the world? (101-102)

## 4

To lead us to the world phenomenon, Heidegger focuses on a particular type of *Zeug* or equipment: a tool that is broken, material that cannot be used. These are disturbances in the context of *Zuhandenheit*: *Verweisungsstörungen*. Heidegger names three such disturbances:

1. Conspicuousness (*Auffälligkeit*): I am trying to make something, but an essential piece is missing. I now no longer know what to do with the materials and equipment that are now just lying around, conspicuous in their current uselessness. In a sense they lose their *Zuhandenheit*: they are *zuhanden* in a deficient mode. And the more desperately I look for the missing piece, the more aware I am of what now lies uselessly and obtrusively on the table. *Die pure Vorhandenheit meldet sich am Zeug*, pure presence-at-hand announces itself in the equipment.

2. Obtrusiveness (*Aufdringlichkeit*): Some piece of equipment fails to function. There is nothing to be done. I can't fix it now. I stand before it, not knowing what to do. The discussion of these deficient modes is of great significance in that it suggests the **origin of the theoretical attitude**. It arises in a *ratloses Davorstehen*, in a confronting things that does not know what to do (73), in losing one's way. Consider in this connection Wittgenstein's characterization of philosophical problems as having the form: "I don't know my way about,"<sup>14</sup> which appropriates the Greek understanding of philosophy as having its origin in *aporia*. What I thus confront, not knowing what to do, becomes obtrusive in its presence. Heidegger speaks of the *Nur-noch-Vorhandensein eines Zuhandenen*, the now mere being present-at-hand of what was ready-to-hand.

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<sup>14</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §123.

3. Obstinacy (*Aufsässigkeit*): Say that you are in a hurry and have to pass through a toll-booth. The driver in the car in front of you is fumbling for coins as you impatiently wait. You have no time for this sort of thing — as the minutes pass. This is the sort of thing Heidegger has in mind when he speaks of the obstinacy of things.

In all these cases *Vorhandenheit* makes an appearance, but it remains tied to the *Zuhandenheit* of *Zeug*. *Zuhandenes* loses in a certain way its *Zuhandenheit*. This *Störung der Verweisung* makes the *Verweisung* explicit. Dislocation has a revelatory function! It reveals what one was up to. The *Zeugzusammenhang*, the equipmental context, discloses itself as a whole (74). With this the world announces itself, but how the world is to be understood remains obscure.

The world may be understood as something like the totality of these contexts, the context of all the contexts of equipment. To clarify this further Heidegger turns to a particular kind of *Zeug*:

We shall again take as our point of departure the Being of the ready-to-hand, but this time with the purpose of grasping the phenomenon of reference or assignment more precisely. We shall accordingly attempt an ontological analysis of a kind of equipment in which one may come across such ‘reference’ in more senses than one. We come across ‘equipment’ in signs. The word “sign” designates many kinds of things: not only may it stand for different kinds of signs, but Being-a-sign-for can itself be formalized as a universal kind of relation, so that the sign-structure itself provides an ontological clue for ‘characterizing’ any entity whatever. (107-108)

Take a traffic sign (Heidegger speaks of the turning signal of a car). Such signs offer orientation in a context. To this context belong the street, the cars, pedestrians, etc.:

A sign is not a Thing that stands to another Thing in the relationship of indicating; it is rather *an item of equipment which explicitly raises a totality of equipment into our circumspection so that together with it the worldly character of the ready-to-hand announces itself*. In a symptom or a warning-signal ‘what is coming’ ‘indicates itself,’ but not in the sense of something merely occurring, which comes as an addition to what is already present-at-hand; ‘what is coming’ is the sort of thing which we are ready for, or which we ‘weren’t ready for’ if we have been attending to something else. In signs of something that has happened already, what has come to pass and run its course becomes circumspectively accessible. A sign to mark something indicates what one is ‘at’ at any time.



Signs always indicate primarily 'wherein' one lives, where one's concern dwells, what sort of involvement there is with something... (110-111)

Signs may have been established by us. There are thus conventional signs. But there are also natural signs. Thus the south-wind may be a sign of rain: First of all it is thus not just present-at-hand, Once again Heidegger resists an interpretation that would give priority to *Vorhandenheit*:

But, one will protest, that which gets taken as a sign must first have become accessible in itself and apprehended before the sign gets established. Certainly it must in any case be such that in some way we can come across it. The question simply remains as to how entities are discovered in this previous encountering, whether as mere Things which occur, or rather as equipment which has not been understood — as something ready-to-hand with which we have hitherto not known 'how to begin,' and which has accordingly kept itself veiled from the purview of circumspection. And here again, when the equipmental characters of the ready-to-hand are still circumspectively undiscovered, they are not to be interpreted as bare Thinghood presented for an apprehension of what is just present-at-hand and no more. (112)

Interesting is the note on the function of signs in primitive cultures — it raises the question: **in just what sense is Heidegger's fundamental ontology "fundamental"?**

One might be tempted to cite the abundant use of 'signs' in primitive Dasein, as in fetishism and magic, to illustrate the remarkable role which they play in everyday concern when it comes to our understanding of the world. (112)

But on closer inspection it becomes plain that to interpret fetishism and magic by taking our clue from the idea of signs in general is not enough to enable us to grasp the kind of 'Being-ready to-hand' which belongs to entities encountered in the primitive world. With regard to the sign-phenomenon, the following Interpretation may be given: for primitive man, the sign coincides with that which is indicated. Not only can the sign represent this in the sense of serving as a substitute for what it indicates, but it can do so in such a way that the sign itself always is what it indicates. (113)

The belief in the presence of Christ in the bread and wine of the sacrament might be an example of such a primitive understanding. But take something closer to our everyday: eating a piece of bread. Can we understand the bread as equipment, as ready-to-hand *Zeug*?

Important is the suggestion that the entire analysis of being *as Zuhandenheit* may be inadequate to an interpretation of primitive Dasein. (113) What does this tell us about Heidegger's own enterprise? In what sense does *Zuhandenheit* provide us with anything like an ontological ground? Too many Heidegger interpreters have taken the priority of *Zuhandenheit* rather uncritically for granted. But what kind of priority belongs to it? And what does this have to do with the problem of truth?

*Zuhandenes* Heidegger suggests is constituted by *Zuhandenheit*, which has the *Struktur der Verweisung*. What is it good for? What is its point? The ready-to-hand thus cannot be separated from world:

In a workshop, for example, the totality of involvements which is constitutive for the ready-to-hand in its readiness-to-hand is earlier than any single item of equipment; so too for the farmstead with all its utensils and outlying lands. But the totality of involvements itself goes back ultimately to a "towards-which" in which there is no further involvement: this "towards-which" is not an entity with the kind of Being that belongs to what is ready-to-hand within a world; it is rather an entity whose Being is defined as Being-in-the-world, and to whose state of being, worldhood itself belongs. (116)

Take a hammer: to understand it is to know what it is good for, how it is to be used. But we can ask the question once more with respect to the practice that demanded use of the hammer: what is it good for? We are finally led to an understanding of Dasein's way of being-in-the-world. To be in the world is thus to be caught up in a context of meanings. It is precisely when we have dislocated ourselves, that such dislocation can reveal to us the world as a collection of mere facts. The question then arises, where do meanings come from? **Values are posited to make up for that deficiency.**

Most important for our purposes is the paradigm shift. Implicit is also a shift in our understanding of the temporality of human being. What is the temporality of hammering? There is work to be done. Dasein is essentially looking ahead. The present receives its meaning from the future. Already here the priority of the future announces itself.

## 5

So far Heidegger has analyzed the being of Dasein in a number of ways; he has, so to speak, obtained various elements. The question now is how to tie these elements together, how to join them into a **whole**. But in just what sense is Dasein a whole? How are we to understand the *Ganzheit*, the wholeness of Dasein?

But we may look at it more freely and our unified view of it may be held in readiness more securely if we now raise the question towards which we have been working in our preparatory fundamental analysis of Dasein in general: “how is the totality of that structured whole which we have pointed out to be defined in an existential-ontological manner.” (225)

The question resembles an earlier question: how are we to understand the worldhood of the world? (pars. 15–18). First of all and most of the time we have already scattered ourselves into different roles, different activities. These different projects in which we find ourselves engaged hide the unity of who we are. How then are we to understand the wholeness of Dasein? Heidegger rejects the **architectural metaphor**:

To put it negatively, it is beyond question that the totality of the structural whole is not to be reached by building it up out of elements. For this we would need an architect’s plan. The Being of Dasein, upon which the structural whole as such is ontologically supported, becomes accessible to us when we look all the way *through* this whole *to a single* primordially unitary phenomenon which is already in this whole in such a way that it provides the ontological foundation for each structural item in its structural possibility. Thus we cannot interpret this ‘comprehensively’ by a process of gathering up what we have hitherto gained and taking it all together. (226)

Consider in this connection the architectural metaphor as a metaphor for the whole of a poem. How adequate is it?

Needed, Heidegger suggests, is a different kind of perspective. To return to the earlier discussion: how did Heidegger bring the worldhood of the world into view? First of all and most of the time the world is hidden from us by our concern for the things of the world. Heidegger appealed to something like a hemorrhaging of the everyday world, he spoke of a *Verweisungsstörung*. Such a disturbance brought with it a changed perspective, allowed us to glimpse the world. Something similar is now needed: where in

our everyday experience do we meet with such a seeing-through? Where, when, or how do we look through ourselves to what constitutes the core of our being?

Heidegger turns to the mood of **anxiety**. Its function is absolutely crucial. If there were not something like anxiety manifesting itself in the everyday world, Heidegger could never move to his authentic understanding and the idea of phenomenology as he understands it would make no sense. **Anxiety reveals the being of Dasein to be Care.** To repeat: the wholeness of Dasein as care is disclosed by a mood. Once again the analogy to interpreting the wholeness of a poem should be noted..

Who then am I? What am I? First of all and most of the time Dasein has fled into the world, to *das Man* (“the they”). Why does Heidegger here speak of a ***Flucht*, a flight?** How does this show itself?

Dasein’s absorption in the ‘they’ and its absorption in the ‘world’ of its concern, makes manifest something like a fleeing of Dasein in the face of itself — of itself as an authentic potentiality-for-Being-its-Self. (229)

What are we fleeing from? From ourselves?

Heidegger turns to **anxiety**. How is it related to **fear**? Fear is directed towards something particular. Can fear be considered a defense against anxiety? What is anxiety anxious about? Nothing? Consider:

To understand this talk about Dasein’s fleeing in the face of itself in falling, we must recall that Being-in-the-world is a basic state of Dasein. That in the face of which one has anxiety [*das Wovor der Angst*] is Being-in-the-world as such. (230)

**Die Aufsässigkeit des innerweltlichen Nichts und Nirgends**, the obstinacy of the innerworldly nothing and nowhere, What does *Aufsässigkeit* (translated by Macquarrie and Robinson as “obstinacy”) mean? We have already encountered the word. Consider once more pp. 103–104. As already indicated, that earlier discussion invites comparison with the present one: A *Verweisungsstörung* was said to make the *Verweisung* explicit: a disturbance makes visible the context that gives things their significance. *Verweisungsstörungen* are hemorrhages in our concerned dealings with things. Anxiety is an analogous phenomenon. Again: dislocation makes visible.

How are **anxiety** and **boredom** related? Boredom, I would like to propose, is the inauthentic aesthetic analogue to anxiety: still oriented toward signs, Dasein wants to lose itself to things.

Anxiety reveals the world not to be my home:

“Being-familiar-with...” This character of Being-in was then brought to view more concretely through the everyday publicness of the “they,” which brings tranquillized self-assurance—“Being-at-home,” with all its obviousness—into the average everydayness of Dasein. On the other hand, as Dasein falls, anxiety brings it back from its absorption in the “world.” Everyday familiarity collapses. Dasein has been individualized, but individualized as Being-in-the-world. Being enters into the existential “mode” of the “not-at-home.” Nothing else is meant by our talk about uncanniness. (233)

Heidegger speaks of **Unheimlichkeit**, of the fundamental homelessness of Dasein. Such talk is quite characteristic of the period. This should give us pause and make us think. Could one insist that Dasein's being is essentially a being-at-home? Bachelard claims this and criticizes Heidegger. And does the later Heidegger not emphasize *Wohnen*, dwelling? The possibility of a Marxist interpretation of Heideggerian authenticity as a function of capitalism presents itself. Or consider Hans Jonas' later introduction to his book on Gnosticism, which would have us understand Heidegger's supposedly fundamental ontology as all too obviously time-bound.<sup>15</sup>

It is worth noting that anxiety is missing in Wittgenstein's *Investigations*, although in a conversation with Waismann Wittgenstein professes to know very well what Heidegger means by Being and anxiety.<sup>16</sup> But here we run up against the limits of language, Wittgenstein insisted. What discloses itself when this happens has to be consigned to silence.

Note also the parallel between the function of anxiety in *Being and Time* and Cartesian doubt.

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<sup>15</sup> Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion; The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*, 2nd rev. ed (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972).

<sup>16</sup> Friedrich Waismann, *Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle, Conversations 1929-32*, recorded by Friedrich Waismann, ed. Brian McGuinness (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979). P. 68.

## 6

Heidegger has shown the being of Dasein to be **care**. He supports this with an interpretation of the **cura fable** attributed to Hyginus. The key elements of the fable would indeed seem to support Heidegger: the human being belongs to care as long as he is. Dasein has its foundation in care. And that he belongs to care has its foundation in the judgment of Saturn, time. The temporality of our being delivers us over to care: the human being is in such a way that his own being confronts him as a problem.

Is there anything problematic about Heidegger's reading of the fable? I am struck by a certain de-emphasis of the role played in the fable by Jupiter, or spirit, that is to say, by a de-emphasis of that in Dasein that traditionally has been said to transcend death. I would thus claim the fable as a pre-ontological witness not only for, but also against Heidegger.

Blumenberg, in *Die Sorge geht über den Fluss* raises the interesting question: why is care crossing the river, when she sees a lump of clay? Blumenberg interprets it as a gnostic myth. What explains her desire to create human being is the image she sees reflected in the river: her own image. Did *Sorge* cross the river to mirror herself?

#### 4. Being-at-one as a Value

##### 1

Last time we considered briefly a question that Heidegger himself raises towards the end of Part One of *Being and Time*: How are we to understand the wholeness, the *Ganzheit* of Dasein? In Heidegger's words:

how is the totality of that structured whole which we have pointed out to be defined in an existential-ontological manner? (225)

What do I refer to when I say "I"? To myself of course! But who or what am I? A soul, a substance, a *res cogitans*? How are we to understand the wholeness of Dasein?

In the introduction to Part Two of *Being and Time*, Heidegger points out that the preceding discussion was restricted in that it moves within the brackets of the first of all and most of the time, the *zunächst und zumeist*. Does this not mean that our analysis has focused on everyday inauthentic Dasein?

But have we not at the very outset of our Interpretation renounced the possibility of bringing Dasein into view as whole? Everydayness is precisely that Being which is 'between' birth and death. And if existence is definitive for Dasein's Being and if its essence is constituted in part by potentiality-for-Being, then, as long as Dasein exists, it must in each case, as such a potentiality, *not yet be* something. Any entity whose Essence is made up of existence, is essentially opposed to the possibility of our getting it in our grasp as an entity which is a whole. Not only has the hermeneutical Situation given us no assurance of 'having' the whole entity; one may even question whether "having" the whole entity is attainable at all, and whether a primordial ontological Interpretation of Dasein will not founder on the kind of Being which belongs to the very entity we have taken as our theme. (276)

Characteristic of everyday Dasein is precisely that it does not possess itself in its entirety. Something is always still outstanding. We complete our lives only with death. But then we are no longer. Note how the concept "**entirety**" here functions. One could ask whether Heidegger, with his valorization of the **whole**, is not himself indebted, too indebted, to the Platonic-Christian tradition to which we shall turn next time. Such emphasis stands in a tension with the ecstatic temporal character of Dasein, which seems to resist closure. As long as Dasein is, it is between birth and death, where death is given

priority. Grasping itself in its entirety, Dasein grasps itself as limited by and as having its end in death. We should note the asymmetry of birth and death? Is Heidegger's neglect of birth legitimate?

Everyday Dasein would seem to be essentially incomplete. In what sense and how then can Dasein grasp itself as a whole? Does incompleteness not belong to the very being of Dasein? When death comes I am no longer. We cannot experience our own death. Can we make up for this lack by experiencing the death of others?

Death, Heidegger insists, is the one possibility where another cannot take my place. We can take another's place in a line, we can even give up our life for the sake of another. But this does not mean that that person no longer has to die. In this sense no one can die for another (284). But is death really unique in this way? No one can listen to this music for me, taste this bread. There seems to be a sense in which nothing, and another sense in which everything I do or experience can be done or experienced by another. Is death in any way unique in this respect? Sartre thus rejects Heidegger's analysis of the death phenomenon, as do Marcuse and Bachelard. But is death not unique in the fact that, should that possibility become reality, there would be no other possibilities for me. Thus the anticipation of death circumscribes all my possibilities and gathers them into a whole.

## 2

The meaning of "**end**" and "**whole**" and "**entirety**" remain less than clear. We said that Dasein is essentially incomplete. Is it then, say, like a jigsaw puzzle missing some pieces? Like a not yet ripe fruit? Can the end of Dasein be understood like the end of a symphony? All of these are said by Heidegger to fail to do justice to the existential understanding of death: Dasein is said to be its end as soon as it is: "As soon as man comes to life, he is at once old enough to die." (289) Heidegger quotes here Johannes von Tepl's *Der Ackermann aus Böhmen*. Death should then not be thought of as something that comes to Dasein and limits it from without, like some unfortunate accident, a pair of scissors, say, that cuts the thread of life. Being unto death means something like caring for oneself as a being that has to die. We need to keep the ecstatic being of Dasein in view.



Having established the need for an existential analysis of death Heidegger distinguishes such an analysis from others, be they oriented towards the natural sciences, or towards theology:

The ending of that which lives we have called 'perishing'. Dasein too 'has' its death, of the kind appropriate to anything that lives; and it has it, not in ontical isolation, but as codetermined by its primordial kind of Being. In so far as this is the case, Dasein too can end without authentically dying, though, on the other hand, qua Dasein, it does not simply perish. We designate this intermediate phenomenon as its "demise." (291)

Much later, in the Bremen lectures, Heidegger recognizes that circumstances can be such that they deny us the possibility of a genuine dying. In this connection he speaks of the holocaust.<sup>17</sup>

Of interest here is Heidegger's claim that his analysis leaves the matter of an after-life open. Does it? Related is the question: is authenticity possible for one who is convinced that death is not his end?

### 3

How do we deal with death? Mostly by trying to push it into the background, both for those dying and for ourselves. Are funerals defenses against death? What about monuments to the dead?. Faced with death we often flee to others. But if we can really seize ourselves only by resolutely anticipating our death, what do others matters? Does authentic self-sacrifice make sense on Heidegger's terms? In "The Origin of the Work of Art" Heidegger certainly considers it a possibility. But just how are we to think it? What kind of self-understanding is presupposed?

Death must be understood as what is always possible. It is Dasein's ownmost possibility. Seizing that possibility is said by Heidegger to free Dasein from its usual dispersal in the world:

When, by anticipation, one becomes free *for* one's own death, one is liberated from one's lostness in those possibilities which may accidentally thrust themselves upon one; and one is liberated in such a way that for the first time

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<sup>17</sup> See Karsten Harries, "Philosophy, Politics, Technology," Harries and Jammne eds. *Martin Heidegger: Politics, Art, and Technology* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1994), p. 225–245.

one can authentically understand and choose among the factual possibilities lying ahead of that possibility which is not to be outstripped. Anticipation discloses to existence that its uttermost possibility lies in giving itself up, and thus shatters all one's tenaciousness to whatever existence one has achieved. (308)

Note in this connection the possibility of choosing to be no longer. **Can there be authentic suicide?**

Note Heidegger's summary of authentic being-towards-death:

Anticipation reveals to Dasein its lostness in the they-self, and brings it face to face with the possibility of being itself, primarily unsupported by concerned solicitude, but being itself, rather in an impassioned **freedom towards death**—a freedom which has been released from the illusions of the "they," and which is factual, certain of itself, and anxious. (311)

This gives us some idea of what it would mean to exist authentically. But is this more than a fantastic construction? Heidegger himself raises this question (311).

Heidegger has sought to establish the possibility of an authentic being unto death, at least as a possibility. The question is whether Dasein ever seizes this possibility, or perhaps even demands this of itself.

#### 4

In the second chapter of Part Two we begin to see a transformation of Heidegger's understanding of authenticity, which comes to be endowed with something like a normative significance. Authenticity comes to be understood as a mode of existence that Dasein demands of itself.

What then is it that in the everyday situation calls us to authenticity? Heidegger identifies what calls with the **call of conscience**. In the call of conscience Dasein calls itself to return to itself, to assume itself in its finitude, its being-unto-death. What is it that the call of conscience gives us to understand? Dasein here is both caller and called. But conscience does not call us to a particular place. It has nothing to say. Its speech is **silence**. This silent discourse would seem to be the only example of authentic discourse that we are given in *Being and Time*. Dasein calls itself in its uncanniness, *seiner Unheimlichkeit*.

The caller is unfamiliar to the everyday they-self; it is something like an *alien* voice.  
(321)

Conscience gives us something to understand. It is a mode of **discourse** (*Rede*). Discourse had been said in par. 34 to be an existential constitutive of Dasein, together with state of mind (*Befindlichkeit*) and understanding. *Rede* was said to disclose. But what then does conscience disclose? Does it disclose our true selves?

Heidegger grants that first of all "they" have already determined how we understand ourselves.

To any state-of-mind or mood, understanding belongs equiprimordially. In this way Dasein "knows" what it is itself capable of [*woran es mit ihm selbst ist*], inasmuch as it has either projected itself upon possibilities of its own or has been so absorbed in the "they" that it has let such possibilities be presented to it by the way in which the "they" has publicly interpreted things. The presenting of these possibilities, however, is made possible existentially through the fact that Dasein, as a Being-with which understands, can *listen* to Others. Losing itself in the publicness and the idle talk of the "they," it fails to hear [*überhört*] its own Self in listening to the they-self. (315)

Today, we may want to speak of this in terms of the social construction of the self. The call of conscience calls every such constructed self into question.

Dasein fails to hear itself, and listens away to the "they"; and this listening-away gets broken by the call if that call, in accordance with its character as such, arouses another kind of hearing, which in relation to the hearing that is lost, has a character in every way opposite. If in this lost hearing, one has been fascinated by the 'hubbub' of the manifold ambiguity which idle talk possesses in its everyday 'newness', then the call must do its calling without any hubbub and unambiguously, leaving no foothold for curiosity. *That, which, by calling in this manner, gives us to understand, is the conscience.* (316)

Heidegger reiterates that the call of conscience is to be understood as a mode of discourse, as a form of *Rede*; indeed it would seem to be the only example of authentic discourse discussed in *Being and Time*.

If the everyday interpretation knows a 'voice' of conscience, then one is not so much thinking of an utterance (for this is something which factually one never comes across); the voice is taken rather as giving-to-understand. In the tendency to disclosure which belongs to the call, lies the momentum of a push—of an

abrupt arousal. The call is from afar unto afar. It reaches him who wants to be brought back. (316)

If conscience is a call, what is the subject of this call, *das Angerufene*? Dasein itself. And it is called to its own self. But what does it mean to say that the call brings Dasein back to itself?

The call reaches Dasein in this understanding of itself which it always has, and which is concerned in an average, everyday manner. The call reaches the they-self [*Man-selbst*] of concerned Being with Others.

And to what is one called when one is thus appealed to? To one's own Self. Not to what Dasein counts for, can do, or concerns itself with in its being with one another publicly, nor to what it has taken hold of, set about, or let itself be carried along with. The sort of Dasein which is understood after the manner of the world both for Other and for itself, gets passed over in this appeal; this is something of which the call to the Self takes not the slightest cognizance. And because only the Self of the they-self gets appealed to and brought to hear, the "they" collapses. (317)

The call speaks to us in the mode of silence and yet, Heidegger insists, what it discloses has one clear sense, is *eindeutig*.

Who here is calling? The call comes from within, even as it overcomes me. But what thus overcomes me is not God or the moral law, but is indeed nothing other than my ownmost self. And how are we to understand this ownmost self? Heidegger answers in the form of a rhetorical question:

Uncanniness reveals itself authentically in the basic state-of-mind of anxiety; and, as the ownmost elemental way in which thrown Dasein is disclosed, it puts Dasein's being-in-the-world face to face with the "nothing" of the world; in the face of this "nothing," Dasein is anxious with anxiety about its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. *What if this Dasein which finds itself [sich befindet] in the very depths of its uncanniness, should be the caller of the call of conscience?* (321)

Dasein is both caller and called. In the call of conscience Dasein calls itself, anxious about its own being. Breaking into the world of the they from without, it does not belong to that world:

But any attempt to interpret the caller as a power beyond Dasein, say God or some *daimon*, is interpreted as a flight from conscience.

Heidegger himself raises the obvious question: what does the phenomenon here described have to do with what we usually call conscience?

So then, only by analyzing the way the appeal is understood can one be left to discuss explicitly what the call gives one to understand. But only with our foregoing general ontological characterization of the conscience does it become possible to conceive existentially the conscience's call of "Guilty!" All experiences and interpretations of the conscience are at one in that they make the 'voice' of conscience speak somehow of 'guilt'.  
(324–325)

Conscience speaks of **guilt**. Bad conscience tells me that I am guilty. What makes me guilty? The ordinary understanding of guilt presupposes **authorship** and **negativity**. Heidegger transforms the ordinary understanding: in what sense is Dasein its own author? Is it ever completely in charge of itself? Heidegger answers this question in the negative: Dasein is essentially guilty.

If the 'Guilty!' is something that can definitely apply to existence, then this raises the ontological problem of clarifying existentially the character of this "not" as a "not". Moreover, to the idea of 'Guilty!' belongs what is expressed without further differentiation in the conception of guilt as 'having responsibility for' — that is, as Being-the basis for... Hence we define the formally existential idea of the "Guilty!" as "Being-the-basis for a Being which has been defined by a 'not'" — that is to say, as "*Being-the 'basis of a nullity'*". (329)

Ontological guilt cannot be understood as resulting from something we did or failed to do.

It does not present some unfortunate fall from some more primordial state:

This implies, however, that *Being-guilty does not first result from an indebtedness [Verschuldung], but that, on the contrary, indebtedness becomes possible only 'on the basis' of a primordial Being-guilty*. Can something like this be exhibited in Dasein's Being, and how is it at all possible existentially?  
(329)

We are essentially subject to **facticity** and **death**, also essentially subject to **others**. We did not choose to get born, born then and there rather than in some other place, of this rather than that gender, race, nationality. Objectively considered our being is contingent through and through.

That Heidegger has to reject any ontological interpretation of the problem of guilt that appealed to the idea of evil is evident.

The concepts of privation and lack—which moreover, are not very transparent—are already insufficient for the ontological Interpretation of the phenomenon of guilt, though if we take them formally enough, we can put them to considerable use. Least of all can we come any closer to the existential phenomenon of guilt by taking our orientation from the idea of evil, the *malum as privatio boni*. Just as the *bonum* and its *privatio* have the same ontological origin in the ontology of the present-at-hand, this ontology also applies to the idea of ‘value’, which has been abstracted from these. (332)

Why would the idea of *evil* have its origin in the ontology of presence-at-hand? The same goes for the presupposed idea of *good*. And the same, Heidegger insists, holds for **values**. In this connection we may want to consider the currently fashionable talk about “moral facts” or “objective values”. All such talk, Heidegger suggests, rests on a refusal to question the derivative ontological status of what here is being talked about, to investigate **the being of value**. Talk of *malum as a privatio boni* presupposes a determination of the place human beings ought to occupy. But as Sartre recognized, Heideggerian Dasein does not allow for such a determination.

Heidegger claims that the will to have a conscience is the most primordial presupposition of any genuine factual becoming guilty. To become thus guilty Dasein must have chosen itself:

In so choosing, Dasein makes possible its ownmost Being-guilty, which remains closed off from the they-self. The common sense of the “they” knows only the satisfying of manipulable rules and public norms and the failure to satisfy them. It reckons up infractions of them and tries to balance them off. It has slunk away from its ownmost Being-guilty to be able to talk loudly of making “mistakes”. But in the appeal the they-self gets called to [*angerufen*] the ownmost Being-guilty of the Self. Understanding the call is choosing; but it is not a choosing of conscience, which as such cannot be chosen. What is chosen is *having-a-conscience* as Being-free for one’s ownmost Being-guilty.

“*Understanding the appeal*” means “*wanting to have a conscience*”. (334)

And yet: in what sense can authentic Dasein become factually guilty. Heidegger's ontological understanding of guilt threatens to render any such factual guilt ambiguous. In a sense Heidegger's point seems obvious: to become guilty I have to act. But if it is

not so much I, but *das Man*, the “they”, who acts through me, in what sense can I be said to be guilty? On the other hand, does not factual guilt presuppose an understanding of right and a wrong? And does such an understanding not inevitably mean subjection to *das Man* in some form?

## 5

While our everyday understanding of conscience cannot do justice to the existential analysis offered, it nevertheless must be compatible with it:

Two things follow from this: on the one hand, the everyday way of interpreting conscience cannot be accepted as the final criterion for the ‘Objectivity’ of an ontological analysis. On the other hand, such an analysis has no right to disregard the everyday understanding of conscience and to pass over the anthropological, psychological, and theological theories which have been based upon it. (336)

What does the everyday understanding hold? (336)

1. Conscience has a critical function.
2. It Speaks of something specific that has been done or omitted.
3. Its voice is not rooted in Dasein itself.
4. Conscience appears as good or bad conscience where the second has priority.

Heidegger insists on the character of the call of conscience as a kind of care.

Here, too, Dasein is ahead of itself. The ordinary understanding would seem to apply to Dasein the category of something present-at-hand:

Only by first positing that Dasein is an interconnected sequence of successive Experiences, is it possible to take the voice as something which comes afterwards, something later, which refers back. The voice **does** call back, but it calls beyond the deed which has happened, and back to the Being-guilty into which one has been thrown, which is earlier than any indebtedness. (337)

Even less than bad conscience is *good conscience* able to do justice to the primordial phenomenon of guilt.

How would one settle an argument between Heidegger and someone who argues that conscience calls him who has strayed from the right path? Heidegger would insist that **conscience calls always**. Phenomenologically there ought to be a difference. Consider the case of an Eichmann who felt pangs of guilt for having helped some Jewish

relatives. Guilt feelings here are relative to having lost oneself to a particular conception — can we say perversion? — of what is right and wrong. But is all understanding of the call of conscience as a call back to the right path to be understood in this way? And if not, how are we to draw the distinction?

## 6

The authentic response to the call of conscience is said to be **resolve**, *Entschlossenheit*. It constitutes the most fundamental, authentic truth of Dasein.

Resoluteness is a distinctive mode of Dasein's disclosedness. In an earlier passage, however, we have interpreted disclosedness existentially as the *primordial truth*. Such truth is primarily not a quality of 'judgment' nor of any definite way of behaving, but something essentially constitutive for Being-in-the-world as such. Truth must be conceived as a fundamental *existentiale*. In our ontological clarification of the proposition that 'Dasein is in the truth' we have called attention to the primordial disclosedness of this entity as the *truth of existence*; and for the delimitation of its character we have referred to the analysis of Dasein's authenticity. (343)

Heidegger insists that authenticity does not isolate Dasein from the world: And how could it, given that Dasein's being is a being-in-the-world and a being-with-others? As authentic disclosedness, resoluteness is:

*authentically* nothing else than *Being-in-the-world*? Resoluteness brings the Self right into its current concerned Being-alongside what is ready-to-hand, and pushes it into solicitous Being with Others. (344)

Resoluteness lets Dasein seize itself as it is, with others. Affirming itself in its essential being with others, resolve lets Dasein find its place in the world. And yet Heidegger does not analyze in detail how we are to think that. How is the return to others to be thought? Think of the Abraham of *Fear and Trembling* after his return from Mount Moriah. Heideggerian authenticity would seem to demand something like a **teleological suspension of the ethical**. Being with others, the authentic person is yet alone. A remark by Nietzsche comes to mind: *100 tiefe Einsamkeiten bilden zusammen die Stadt Venedig—dies ist ihr Zauber. Ein Bild für die Menschen der Zukunft.* "Together 100 deep solitudes form the city of Venice — this is its magic. An image for the human beings of



the future."<sup>18</sup> Heidegger cites this remark in a letter to Jaspers, who, pleading for dialogue, had charged Heidegger with losing his way in monologues.<sup>19</sup>

I would like to confront Heidegger's understanding of authenticity here with a remark made by Jacques Maritain in *Art and Scholasticism*:

The moment one touches a transcendental, one touches being itself, a likeness of God, an absolute, that which ennobles and delights our life; one enters into the domain of the spirit. It is remarkable that men really communicate with one another only by passing through being or one of its properties. Only in this way do they escape from the individuality in which matter encloses them. If they remain in the world of their sense needs and of their sentimental egos, in vain do they tell their stories to one another, they do not understand each other. They observe each other, without seeing each other, each of them infinitely alone, even though work and sense pleasures bind them together. But let one touch the good and Love, like the saints, the true, like an Aristotle, the beautiful, like a Dante, or a Bach, or a Giotto, then contact is made, souls communicate. Men are really united only by the spirit.<sup>20</sup>

How are we to think an authentic return to the other, such a homecoming, once home has been left behind for the wilderness of the authentic? How is the **call of conscience** related to **community**?

## 7

Heidegger founds his interpretation of time, as well as his interpretation of both Dasein and Being on his interpretation of the death phenomenon. Someone like Maritain would have to come to a different conclusion with respect to both. I would claim that Heidegger's analysis is too one-sided. How would such a claim be substantiated? There are a great many rhetorical questions in *Being and Time*. More often perhaps than Heidegger would seem to have intended, they should be taken by us as more than just rhetorical questions.

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<sup>18</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente*, Frühjahr 1880, *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), vol. 9, p. 38.

<sup>19</sup> Martin Heidegger/Karl Jasper, *Briefwechsel 1920-1963*, ed. Walter Biemel and Hans Sande (Munich: Piper, 1990) letter of August 12, 1949.

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism and the Frontiers of Poetry*, tr. Joseph W. Evans (New York: Scribner's, 1962), pp. 32–33.

The existential phenomenon of resoluteness is said to be testified to in an *existentiell* manner by *resolve*. With this turn to the *existentiell* the previous discussion is said to lose its character as an arbitrary construction. **Resolved Dasein is unto its death.** But is it, Heidegger asks, really legitimate to tie these two ideas, resolve and being-unto-death together as he has done?

Has not our ontological projection of the authentic potentiality-for-Being-a-whole led us into a dimension of Dasein which lies far from the phenomenon of resoluteness? What can death and the ‘concrete Situation’ of taking action have in common? In attempting to bring resoluteness and anticipation forcibly together, are we not seduced into an intolerable and quite unphenomenological construction, for which we can no longer claim that it has the character of an ontological projection, based upon the phenomena? (349)

To be resolved means to permit oneself to be called to one's own being guilty.

Dasein is essentially guilty—not just guilty *on some occasions*, and *on other occasions not*. Wanting-to-have-a-conscience resolves upon this Being-guilty. To project oneself upon this Being-guilty, which Dasein *is as long as it is*, belongs to the very meaning of resoluteness. (353)

Crucial here is that to project oneself upon one's Being-guilty is to project oneself unto **something constant**:

The *existentiell* way of taking over this ‘guilt’ in resoluteness is therefore authentically accomplished only when that resoluteness, in its disclosure of Dasein, has become so transparent that Being-guilty is understood *as something constant*. (353)

With this, the possibility of opposing to the many different activities that engage us, something resembling a **constant self**, presents itself. Again, I would grant that Heidegger has sketched a human possibility. The question remains: should we give this possibility a normative weight? Note that, if there is some reason to speak in this connection of a “constant self,” this is inevitably also an **abstract self**.

On Heidegger's interpretation death and guilt are **co-fundamental**. Could one argue guilt is more fundamental — that we are indeed author of a lack, but what we lack is precisely the whole? Heidegger of course could object that there is a sense in which this is precisely what we *need*, not lack:

When Dasein is resolute, it takes over authentically in its existence the fact that it *is* the null basis of its own nullity. We have conceived death existentially as

what we have characterized as the possibility of the *impossibility* of existence — that is to say, as the utter nullity of Dasein. Death is not “added on” to Dasein as its ‘end’; but Dasein, as care, is the thrown (that is, null) basis for its death. The nullity by which Dasein’s Being is dominated primordially through and through, is revealed to Dasein itself in authentic Being-towards-death. Only on the basis of Dasein’s *whole* Being does anticipation make Being-guilty manifest. Care harbours in itself both death and guilt equiprimordially. Only in anticipatory resoluteness is the potentiality-for-Being-guilty understood *authentically and wholly* — that is to say, *primordially*. (354)

Note that ***ursprünglich*, primordially**, here is taken to mean ***eigentlich*, authentically** and ***ganz*, wholly**. Note also the footnote Heidegger adds, trying to distinguish his account of guilt from the theological:

The Being-guilty which belongs primordially to Dasein’s state of Being, must be distinguished from the *status corruptionis* as understood in theology. Theology can find in Being-guilty, as existentially defined, an ontological condition for the practical possibility of such a *status*. The guilt which is included in the idea of this *status* is a factual indebtedness of an utterly peculiar kind. It has its own attestation, which remains closed off in principle from any philosophical experience. The existential analysis of Being-guilty proves nothing either *for* or *against* the possibility of sin. Taken strictly, it cannot even be said that the ontology of Dasein *of itself* leaves this possibility open; for this ontology, as a philosophical inquiry, ‘knows’ in principle nothing about sin. (496)

This parallels an earlier remark on the possibility of an afterlife (292). As before, Heidegger insists on the distance between fundamental ontology and theology. But what is the relationship between the two accounts of guilt?

1. It would seem that if we insist that death need not mean the end of Dasein in Heidegger’s sense (as, I take it, the traditional understanding of an afterlife would have to insist), then guilt could also not be considered in quite the way Heidegger would have it. The relationship of guilt and death would have to be rethought.

2. Is Heidegger’s attempt to separate theology and ontology in such a way that the latter in no way pre-empts the claims of the former not one that we have to reject? If original sin is indeed admitted, if only as a possibility, as Heidegger suggests, does this not mean that the present (fallen) state of human beings would not be the state that defines humanity? Heidegger’s fundamental ontology, too, even with its analysis of

death, may thus appear bound to the *zunächst und zumeist*, to the “first all and most of the time”, i.e. to an ontology that has its foundation in a particular human project, the project of fallen humanity, a fall so deep that human beings do not recognize this fall as a fall, but make it constitutive of human being in a way that leaves no possibility for salvation.

## 8

Resolve is said to lead us to Dasein's most primordial truth. (355) Resolved Dasein is said to be *certain*. (355) What does *certain* mean here? It would seem to be quite possible to be certain in this sense and yet quite mistaken about what is the case. Certainty does not mean here acquisition of a firm foundation on which to base one's decisions:

Such certainty must maintain itself in what is disclosed by the resolution. But this means that it simply cannot *become rigid* as regards the Situation, but must understand that the resolution in accordance with its own meaning as a disclosure, must be *held open* and free for the current factual possibility. The certainty of the resolution signifies that one *holds oneself free* for the possibility of *taking it back*—a possibility which is factually necessary. (355)

Resolved, Dasein remains free and open. It cannot insist on the finality of its resolutions, but must be prepared to take them back. Uncertainty would seem to be part of having to make some particular decision. This, Heidegger insists, does not mean that Dasein therefore falls into irresoluteness. (356)

Resolve then is tied to the making of particular decisions. But how are we to think this? To make a particular resolution, do I not require criteria, some measure? Is it not precisely the specific resolve that lets me gain my place? Heidegger insists that authentic resolve can never secure itself by appealing to something outside itself, say some given values or the categorical imperative. But to say with Heidegger that only the resolved person knows his place, is this not to make resolve utterly groundless?

Important is the concluding paragraph of this section:

Is there not, however, a definite ontical way of taking authentic existence, a factual ideal of Dasein, underlying our ontological Interpretation of Dasein's existence? That is so indeed. But not only is this Fact one which must not be denied and which we are forced to grant; it must also be conceived in its *positive necessity*, in terms of the object which we have taken as the theme of our

investigation. Philosophy will never seek to deny its 'presuppositions', but neither may it simply admit them. It conceives them, and it unfolds with more and more penetration both the presuppositions themselves and that for which they are presuppositions. The methodological considerations now demanded of us will have this very function. (358)

Heidegger's fundamental ontology thus would seem to presuppose a particular ideal, a particular project of recovering authentic existence. That ideal emphasizes self-integration. To cite the title of one of Kierkegaard's edifying discourses: "Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing."

That brings us back to Heidegger's claim that his fundamental ontology presupposes a particular ideal. (363) *Existentielle Wahrheit* is here said to be the ground of *ontologische Wahrheit*. This is to say, our understanding of being cannot be divorced from a concrete, and that means also *historical*, way of being. The particular way of being that is characteristic of the everyday understanding is also marked by a particular understanding of, more precisely by a *passing over of* the phenomenon of Being. This gives it a sense of security authentic Dasein cannot know. **Heidegger would tie the being of values to such an inauthentic self-understanding that refuses to accept Dasein's fundamental guilt and does so especially when it judges itself or some other self guilty.**

## 5. The Ideal of Satisfaction

### 1

Let me begin by taking one more look at *Being and Time*, at the relationship between **resolve** and **being-unto-death**. To be resolved, according to Heidegger, means to permit oneself to be called to one's essential guilt:

Dasein is essentially guilty—not just guilty on some occasions, and on other occasions not. Wanting to have a conscience resolves upon this Being-guilty. To project oneself upon this Being-guilty, which Dasein is *as long as it is*, belongs to the very meaning of resoluteness. (353, my italics)

To project oneself upon one's Being-guilty is to project oneself unto **something constant**:

The existentiell way of taking over this 'guilt' in resoluteness is therefore authentically accomplished only when that resoluteness, in its disclosure of Dasein, has become so transparent *that Being-guilty is understood as something constant*. (353, my italics)

With this the possibility of opposing to the many different activities that engage us something resembling a **constant self** presents itself.

I granted last time that with his account of resolved being-unto-death Heidegger has sketched a human possibility. The question remains: **should we give this possibility a normative weight?** Note that if there is reason to speak in this connection of a "constant self," this is inevitably also an abstract self. The constant self is purchased at the price of concrete reality.

On Heidegger's interpretation, death and guilt are co-fundamental. Could one argue that guilt is in some sense more fundamental, or fundamental in a different way? That a lack of the whole is constitutive of our being? And that what we lack is precisely that whole the thought of which haunts us?

### 2

With this mind I would like to return now to some passages in Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* that I considered in our very first session:

The powers that be have a deep affinity to death; death is a token of unfreedom, of defeat. Theology and philosophy today compete with each other in

celebrating death as an existential category: perverting a biological fact into an ontological essence, they bestow transcendental blessing on the guilt of mankind which they help to perpetuate—they betray the promise of utopia. (Marcuse, 236)

Here one might ask, whether that divorce of biological fact and ontological essence is not based on an understanding of human being that is incompatible with Dasein's guilt, i.e. the fact that Dasein by its very being as being-in-the world and with-others is essentially embodied and mortal. But let me continue:

In contrast, a philosophy that does not work as the handmaiden of repression responds to the fact of death with the Great Refusal—the refusal of Orpheus the liberator. Death can become a token of freedom.

In what sense can death become a token of freedom? In my being able to refuse it such power over me that I allow it to rule my being?

The necessity of death does not refute the possibility of final liberation. Like the other necessities, it can be made rational — painless. Man can die without anxiety if they know that what they love is protected from misery and oblivion. After a fulfilled life they may take it upon themselves to die — at a moment of their own choosing. (Marcuse, 236–237)

Marcuse's words deserve careful analysis. But before I turn to it in more detail, let me quote Isaiah, to show how old is the hope that is here expressed:

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days or an old man who does not fill out his days... They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity. (Isaiah 65:17–23)

### 3

Has Heidegger perverted a biological fact into an ontological essence? I have raised some considerations that argue against it. Has he betrayed the **promise of utopia**?

But just what is that promise? A first answer is suggested by the quote: utopia is **a state where freedom and necessity coincide**. How should we understand this? To develop that answer let me return to another quote from Marcuse:

Freud questions culture not from a romanticist or utopian point of view, but on the ground of the suffering and misery which its implementation involves. Cultural freedom thus appears in the light of unfreedom, and cultural progress in the light of constraint. Culture is not thereby refuted: unfreedom and constraint are the price that must be paid.

But as Freud exposes their scope and their depth, he upholds the tabooed aspirations of humanity: *the claim for a state where freedom and necessity coincide. Whatever liberty exists in the realm of the developed consciousness, and in the world it has created, is only derivative*, compromised freedom, gained at the expense of the full satisfaction of needs. (Marcuse, 17-18, emphasis added)

A freedom that coincides with necessity is here distinguished from a liberty that only a developed consciousness grants. The former freedom is thus associated with an undeveloped consciousness, a state where desires are not outstripped by a consciousness what is necessary. One might think of a happy child in this way; or of Adam and Eve in paradise.

And in so far as of the full satisfaction of needs is happiness, freedom in civilization is essentially antagonistic to happiness: it involves the repressive modification (sublimation) of happiness.

But is civilization to be identified with a developed consciousness? Does happiness require an undeveloped consciousness? Is the real home of happiness the unconscious? Marcuse seems to suggest something of the sort.

Conversely, the unconscious, the deepest and oldest layer of the mental personality, is the drive for integral gratification, which is absence of want and repression. As such it is the immediate identity of necessity and freedom. According to Freud's conception the equation of freedom and happiness tabooed by the conscious is upheld by the unconscious. Its truth, although repelled by consciousness, continues to haunt the mind; it preserves the memory of past stages of individual development at which integral gratification is obtained. And the past continues to claim the future: it generates the wish that paradise be re-created on the basis of the achievements of civilization. (Marcuse, 17-18)

Marcuse invokes the idea of paradise. The loss of paradise is tied to a developed consciousness or civilization. He goes on to suggest that we can make sense of a return to paradise on the basis of civilization, a kind of synthesis of what at first seems inescapably opposed. We should ask ourselves: what meaning can here still be given to



freedom? We shall have to return to that question. This much, however, is clear:

**Happiness** is understood by Marcuse as the **coincidence of freedom and necessity**.

Marcuse speaks of such happiness as “integral gratification, which is absence of want and repression.”

‘The goal is **to give what is a foundation in freedom**. But given the understanding of freedom that is associated with a developed consciousness, is this not the impossible goal of making the human being into God — the subject of one of Grimm’s fairy tales, “Vom Fischer und seiner Frau.” The dream of a re-creation of paradise on the basis of our reason, which allows us to master nature, has presided over the progress of our culture. We meet with it already in Francis Bacon and Descartes. And have we not come ever closer to fulfilling the Cartesian promise of rendering ourselves the masters and possessor of nature? One could give this project also a Hegelian reading. According to the Bible God created the human being in his image. Small wonder then that that divine image should haunt us, as it haunted already Adam and Eve in paradise, otherwise they would not have been tempted by the snake’s promise, *eritis sicut Deus* (“and you shall be as God”). Is it not precisely this that let Adam aspire to a freedom beyond the freedom he already enjoyed, an impossible freedom that made him aware of what Heidegger calls the human being’s essential guilt?

#### 4

Marcuse himself here places himself in a Christian context: although, as I pointed out, it is heretical millennialism rather than orthodox Christianity that his position evokes. What makes it heretical is that paradise can be regained by us, here on this earth, in this life. Paradise need not be deferred to an indefinite beyond. This passage, too, I cited in our first session:

The message of the Son was the message of liberation: the overthrow of the law (which is domination) by Agape (which is Eros). This would fit in with the heretical image of Jesus as the Redeemer in the flesh, the Messiah who came to save men here on earth. The subsequent transubstantiation of the Messiah, the deification of the Son beside the Father, would be a betrayal of his message by his own disciples — the denial of the liberation in the flesh, the revenge on the redeemer. (Marcuse, 69/-70)

The Christian message is to be brought down to earth. This is what those heretics tried to do who, in Marcuse's words "tried or allegedly tried to rescue the unsublimated content and the unsublimated objective" (Marcuse, 70-71). Marcuse suggests here the possibility of a Dionysian reading of Christ, where Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* provides significant pointers. Our rationality and the related understanding of reality is seen as essentially repressive.

## 5

The ideal of integral satisfaction has to lead to an attack on time. Let me return to Marcuse. We met with Marcuse's invocation of Orpheus and Narcissus already in the first session.

The images of Orpheus and Narcissus reconcile Eros and Thanatos. They recall the experience of a world that is not to be mastered and controlled but to be liberated—a freedom that will release the powers of Eros now bound in the petrified forms of man and nature. These powers are conceived not as destruction, but as peace, not as terror, but as beauty. It is sufficient to enumerate the assembled images in order to circumscribe the dimension to which they are committed: the redemption of pleasure, the halt of time, the absorption of death: silence, sleep, night, paradise—the Nirvana principle not as death, but as life. (Marcuse, 164)

Significant is the invocation of **Orpheus** and **Narcissus**. Both are ambiguous images. In Plato's *Symposium* Phaedrus compares Orpheus unfavorably to Alcestis. Orpheus contrived to enter Hades alive and ended up losing not only Eurydice, his love, but in the end his own life. Death and life intertwine in the Orpheus story, but they do so in Plato's account in a way diametrically opposed to Marcuse's. And love and death also intertwine in the Narcissus story, but love is here an introverted love. Both are of course associated with art, Orpheus with music, Narcissus with painting, and it is aesthetic experience that provide Marcuse with the most obvious example of the kind of happiness that he associates with paradise.

I would underscore the way "the redemption of pleasure" is tied here to "the halt of time." The attack on time is implicit in Marcuse's emphasis on a polymorphous eros that transcends the order of procreative sexuality:

Orpheus and Narcissus reveal a new reality, with an order of its own, governed by different principles. The Orphic Eros transforms being: he masters cruelty and death through liberation. His language is song, and his work is play. Narcissus' life is beauty, and his existence is contemplation. These images refer to the aesthetic dimension as the one in which their reality principle must be sought and validated. (171)

The question is: **can the aesthetic dimension validate a reality principle?** This last demand collides with the irreality of the beautiful on which the aesthetic approach insists. Think of the rhetoric of *schöner Schein* ("beautiful illusion"). Should we then follow Marcuse in his celebration of Narcissus and Orpheus, in his attempt to wed thanatos and eros? Everything depends on whether we can make sense of his promise of a reality beyond our reality principle.

But here I want to focus on the turn against time. We have learned already that according to Marcuse the "promise of utopia" answers to "the tabooed aspirations of humanity" (Marcuse, 18). Man is said to carry within himself memories of "integral gratification, which is the absence of want and repression. As such it is the immediate identity of necessity and freedom." (Marcuse, 18) But as long as human beings experience themselves as cast into the world and as subjected to time — and such subjection reveals itself most forcefully in the certainty that we must die — we cannot really be at peace with ourselves. Freedom so understood must confront and wars with necessity. First of all and most of the time, certainly, human beings exist as they have not chosen to exist. This of course Marcuse would grant. But he would add: this is because first of all and most of the time they are subject to a repressive reality principle. But is there really an alternative? Can conditions on earth change in a way that would eliminate such repression?

## 6

To pursue the promise of integral satisfaction a bit further I would like now to turn to Plato's *Symposium*. Plato there understands the human being as ruled by *eros*, and like Heidegger's *care*, *eros* looks ahead. Here I want to focus just on the speeches made by Aristophanes and Socrates.

In humorous terms, as befits a comic poet, Aristophanes begins by describing an original state of mankind:

First of all, you must learn the constitution of man and the modifications which it has undergone, for originally it was different from what it is now. In the first place there were three sexes, not, as with us, two, male and female; the third partook of the nature of both and has vanished, though its name survives. The hermaphrodite was a distinct sex both in form as well as in name, with the characteristics of both male and female, but now the name alone remains, and that solely as a term of abuse. Secondly, each human being was a rounded whole, with double back and flanks forming a complete circle; it had four hands and an equal number of legs, and two identically similar faces upon a circular neck, with one head common to the faces, which were turned in opposite direction. (190c-d)<sup>21</sup>

The spherical shape here suggests the self-contained plenitude of these original human beings. And yet they must not have been altogether complete, for if they had not felt something to be lacking they would not have turned against the gods and dared to scale heaven:

Their strength and vigor made them very formidable, and their pride was overweening; they attacked the gods, and Homer's story of Ephialtes and Otus attempting to climb up to heaven and set upon the gods is also related of these beings. (190b)

Like Adam and Eve, these original human beings were haunted by something that did not belong to them. To punish this act of **hubris** Zeus decides to **split** these original human beings — Aristophanes calls them terrible in their might and strength — in two. Here is how Zeus explains his decision:

In this way they will be weaker, and at the same time more profitable to us by being more numerous. They shall walk upright on two legs. If there is any sign of wantonness in them after that, and they will not keep quiet, I will bisect them again, and they shall hop on one leg. (190c-d)

Note once more the resemblance to the Biblical account of the fall. Before the fall Adam and Eve are supposed to have been at one with themselves, well provided for in paradise. But this original state of perfection must have been flawed in some way; otherwise they could not have fallen. The devil had found his way into paradise. And the devil is

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<sup>21</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Walter Hamilton, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1951).

nothing other than an aspect of that freedom that, as Descartes observes in the *Meditations*, is as infinite as the freedom of God. To be sure, as his reason opens up an infinite space of possibilities, as an animal the human being is cast into the world, finite and mortal. As a being of reason the human being is dissatisfied with his mortal condition, experiences it as a lack. And in Adam too this lack leads to a prideful self-assertion. Both Aristophanes and Genesis make **pride the source of the fall**.

## 7

The similarities between the two accounts makes it hardly surprising that they should have been joined. One thinker who did so is the 9th century Irish philosopher John Scotus Eriugena. Eriugena understnads the division of human nature into two sexes as the con sequences of Adam's fall : "For, if man has not sinned, he would ... not have suffered the ignominious generation from the two sexes in the likeness of irrational animals, as the wisest of the Greek theologians affirm with most certain reasons."<sup>22</sup> In the Fourth Book of the *Division of Nature* Eriugena keeps returning to this theme: If the first man had not sinned, there would have been no sexual difference, but man would have remained simply human, earth and paradise would not have been separated, but the earth would have remained paradise, sensible and intellectual nature would not have been separated, ut remained united in thought. The present division, however, which has its origin in Adam's fall, which has rendered us mortals transitory, isolated, and divided into sexes, will be healed by the second Adam, Jesus Christ: in whom we shall truly live.

Note the pervasive dialectic: the old, androgynous Adam fell and was split into two sexes. Thus he was made incomplete, lacking, although once more there must have been some imperfection present from the very beginning, otherwise there would have been no possibility of sin. This postlapsarian lack is tied by Eriugena first of all to our **transitoriness**. To consciously live in time is to experience oneself as incomplete, as a fragment. Our understanding of time brings with it **a desire for completeness, for eternity**.

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<sup>22</sup> John Scotus Eriugena, *On the Division of Nature*, Book 4, chapter 9, *Selections From Medieval Philosophers*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Scribmner'sSons, 1958), vol. 1, p. 133

The **isolation** of the individual, too, can be linked to the theme of time. As Heidegger recognizes, precisely when the individual faces death, he is forced to recognize his individuality. Mortality and individuality seem inseparably related. The person who tries to hold on to himself as an individual cannot help but fear death.

And finally Eriugena emphasizes the division of the sexes. Like all desire, sexual desire shows us human beings to be lacking, incomplete, split off from the whole, while at the same time it forces us to recognize the way our bodies tie us into time.

We should note that Eriugena privileges thought or spirit in a way that has no counterpart in the Aristophanic account. In this respect he is closer to the Platonic Socrates than to Plato's Aristophanes. In Platonic fashion Eriugena understands the fall as fundamentally a **fall into mortality**.

8

Our temporality denies us human beings the longed for completeness and satisfaction. Love is the desire of such self-completion. It thus has its origin in a splitting. Let us listen once more to Aristophanes:

... love is simply the name for the desire and pursuit of the whole. Originally, as I say, we were whole beings, before our wickedness caused us to be split by Zeus, as the Arcadians have been split apart by the Spartans [the reference is to the punishment inflicted by the Spartans on Mantinea, an event that took place only in 385 BC and thus an anachronism]. We have reason to fear that if we do not behave ourselves in the sight of heaven, we may be split in two again, like dice which are bisected for tallies, and go about like the people presented in profile on tombstones, sawn in two vertically down the line of our noses.

(*Symposium*, 64)

Aristophanes concludes by suggesting that given our present condition, the way to happiness lies in finding the mate that properly belongs to one, where he refuses to privilege the male, but insists that he is speaking of "men and women in general." *Eros* is understood here as the desire for the whole,

## 9

The substance of Socrates' speech is supposedly the retelling of a dialogue in which a young Socrates appears very much in need of the instruction of the wise Diotima. Diotima convinces Socrates that love is neither beautiful nor even a god.

"What can Love be then?" I said. "A mortal?" "Far from it" "Well what?" "He is a great spirit, Socrates; everything that is of the nature of a spirit is half-god and half-man." "And what is the function of such a being?" "To interpret and convey messages to the gods from men and to men from gods, prayers and sacrifices from the one, and commands and rewards from the other. Being of an intermediate nature, a spirit bridges the gap between them, and prevents the universe from falling into two separate halves." (*Symposium*, 81)

Love is described here as a bridge between the human and the divine, between the temporal and the eternal, that prevents the universe from splitting into a purely earthly and a purely spiritual realm, but binds the former to the latter. This explanation places love into a relationship to time. Love belongs to time. But love also belongs to eternity. **Love mediates between time and eternity, between the human and the divine.** Love thus helps to define our human being, which, caught up in time, reaches up to and measures itself by eternity. This twofold character of love is brought out more clearly by Diotima's account of the birth of love.

The parents of love are said to be Poverty and Contrivance. Love shares characteristics with his mother:

He is always poor, and far from being sensitive and beautiful, as most people imagine, he is hard and weather-beaten, shoeless and homeless, always sleeping out for want of a bed, on the ground, on doorsteps, and in the street. So far he takes after his mother and lives in want. But, being also his father's son, he schemes to get for himself whatever is beautiful and good (*Symposium*, 82)

By poverty Plato here means the lack that pervades human existence in so far as it is temporal. But incomplete as we are, we carry within ourselves a desire for completeness. Like Aristophanes, Socrates thus ties **love to a desire for completeness**. **Beauty** is then defined as **the object of love**.

Love thus is not itself beautiful, as young Socrates had thought. On Diotima's view, to see something beautiful in time is to have an experience that seems to deliver us

from time, if only for a time, and thus seems like a foretaste of that escape from time that alone could allow for genuine completeness.

Much in Diotima's speech reminds us of Aristophanes. There is, however, a decisive difference. The Aristophanic account understands the goal of love as a **unification in time**. **Beauty** is understood as the **object of sexual desire**. Such desire does not leave the beautiful alone. It wants to unite with it. Uniting with our other half is the closest we mortals can get to attaining the plenitude figured by the circlemen. Diotima takes issues with that, specifically addressing the Aristophanic account:

“There is indeed a theory,” she continued, “that lovers are people who are in search of the other half of themselves, but according to my view of the matter, my friend, love is not desire either of the half or the whole, unless that half or whole happens to be good.” (*Symposium*, 85)

Love is a desire for the good. In its most general sense it is said to “embrace every desire for good and for happiness; that is precisely what almighty and all-ensnaring love is.” (85) Love in its narrower and more usual sense is said to have usurped the name of the whole.

But love is said to be not just a desire for the possession of the good, but for the *perpetual* possession of the good. This is to say that love would escape the rule of time. It is tied to being rather than to becoming. *Eros* longs to **transcend time**. As Nietzsche will put it in *Zarathustra*: “all joy wants eternity”: *alle Lust will Ewigkeit*.

But if love is the desire for the perpetual possession of the good, how does it express itself, given the time-bound character of human existence? Diotima points to procreation, which, she says, can be either physical or spiritual. And in this connection Diotima revises what Socrates had said earlier about the beauty being the object of love:

“The object of love, Socrates, is not as you think, beauty.” “What is it then?”  
 “Its object is to procreate and bring forth beauty... Now why is procreation the object of love? Because procreation is the nearest thing to perpetuity and immortality that a mortal being can attain.” (*Symposium*, 87)

Diotima sees in sexual desire the lowest form of *eros*, which she finds even in the animal world. Here love desires immortality within time. Diotima goes on to establish a hierarchy of attempts to achieve immortality in time. At the most basic, but also lowest level, is the desire to make love so that a child may be born. In our children we seek to



live beyond our own death. Artists and poets, too, seek to give birth to something that will transcend their ephemeral being. Who, Diotima asks, would not rather have the children of Homer and Hesiod, of Lycurgus and Solon, than his own?

But all these attempts to defeat our mortality in time are said by Diotima to constitute only the **lower mysteries** of love, into which even young Socrates could be initiated. With the turn to the **higher mysteries**, we from a **procreative** to a **contemplative eros**:

The man who would pursue the right way to this goal must begin, when he is young, by applying himself to the contemplation of physical beauty, and, if he is properly directed by his guide, he will first fall in love with one beautiful person and beget noble sentiments in partnership with him. Later he will observe that physical beauty in any person is closely akin to physical beauty in any other, and that, if he is to make beauty of outward form the object of his quest, it is great folly not to acknowledge that the beauty exhibited in all bodies is one and the same; when he has reached this conclusion he will become a lover of all physical beauty...The next stage is for him to reckon beauty of soul more valuable than beauty of body; the result will be that when he encounters a virtuous soul in a body which has little of the bloom of beauty, he will be content to love and cherish it and to bring forth such notions as may serve to make young people better. (*Symposium*, 93)

From there he will go on to contemplate the beauty of human institutions, beauty in morals and in the sciences. Having been led this far, the student “catches sight of one unique science whose object is the beauty of which I am about to speak” (*Symposium*, 93).

There is tension between this higher beauty and sensible beauty. The latter is only the temporal shadow or figure of the former. It is precisely this inadequacy that prevents us from being finally content with sensible beauty. Sensible beauty does not so much satisfy desire, as it awakens a deeper desire or love, a love that demands eternity. The experience of the beautiful makes us want to do something. It is for this reason that Plato ties love to a desire to give birth, be it to a child, a work of art, or to the state. In all these cases the individual wants to overcome his own ephemeral being, create something that will resist time, and establish being within becoming. But all such creation must leave us finally dissatisfied. All sensible beauty therefore calls us to an ecstatic flight beyond this world and its time, calls us to the higher mysteries of the *Symposium*.

the man who has been guided thus far in the mysteries of love, and who has directed his thoughts towards examples of beauty in due and orderly succession, will suddenly have revealed to him as he approaches the end of his initiation a beauty whose nature is marvellous indeed, the final goal, Socrates, of all his previous efforts. This beauty is first of all eternal; it neither comes into being nor passes away, neither waxes or wanes...he will see it as absolute, existing alone with itself, unique, eternal and all other beautiful things partaking of it, yet in such a manner that, while, they come into being and pass away, it neither undergoes any increase or diminution nor suffers any change. (*Symposium*, 93–94)

The experience of beauty is given here a description that would seem to apply equally well to mystical experience.

If love is finally of this absolute beauty it would seem to demand that we leave the love of individual persons and also art behind. Love, so understood, is served better by the philosopher than by the poet:

“This above all others, my dear Socrates,” the woman from Mantinea continued, “is the region where a man’s life should be spent, in the contemplation of absolute beauty. Once you have seen that, you will not value it in terms of gold or rich clothing or of the beauty of boys and young men, the sight of whom at present throws you and many people like you into an ecstasy that, provided you could always enjoy the company of your darlings, you would be content to go without food and drink, if that were possible, and to pass your whole life with them in the contemplation of their beauty. What may we suppose to be the felicity of the man who sees absolute beauty in its essence, pure and unalloyed, who, instead of a beauty tainted by human flesh and color and a mass of perishable rubbish, is able to apprehend divine beauty where it exists apart and alone?” (*Symposium*, 94–95)

At this point it looks as if the contemplative has triumphed over the procreative *eros* — and not just that, as if asceticism had triumphed over aestheticism. Diotima would seem to have had severed the contemplative from the procreative *eros*. But is this really the case? The very ending of her speech lets us wonder:

Do you not see that in that region alone where he sees beauty with the faculty capable of seeing it, will he be able to bring forth not mere reflected images of goodness but true goodness, because he will be in contact not with a reflection, but with the truth? And having brought forth and nurtured true goodness he will have the privilege of being beloved by God, and becoming, if ever man can, immortal himself. (*Symposium*, 95)

Diotima does not seem to be praising here the life of someone lost in contemplation of true beauty, but someone, who puts this vision to work by giving birth to something beautiful, in keeping with her earlier remark. The gods may find satisfaction in pure contemplation. And we may want to call theirs a higher *eros* that lost in the contemplation of the beautiful is content to let it be. But our lot would appear to be a different one. We humans have to place the **procreative *eros***, albeit perhaps in a highly sublimated form, above the **contemplative *eros***.

In this connection we should ask ourselves why Plato did not end the dialogue on this high philosophical note, and why Alcibiades should be the last speaker.

# 10

In conclusion, let me return briefly to Marcuse. Plato's subjection of *eros* to logos had to be understood by him as involving the sort of sublimation of *eros* that he had found also in orthodox Christianity. Love is increasingly spiritualized as we ascend on Diotima's ladder. Just this Marcuse would have us question. In what sense, then, can I say that there is a fundamental similarity between Marcuse's views and those of Plato? Consider what Marcuse says:

Freud's interpretation of being in terms of Eros recaptures the early stage of Plato's philosophy, which conceived of culture not as the repressive sublimation, but as the free self-development of Eros. As early as Plato, this conception appears as an archaic-mythical residue. Eros is being absorbed into Logos, and Logos is reason which subdues the instincts. The history of ontology reflects the reality principle which governs the world ever more exclusively: the instincts contained in the metaphysical notion of Eros were driven underground. They survived, in eschatological distortion, in many heretic movements, in the hedonistic philosophy (Marcuse, 125–126).

In the *Symposium*, much is made of two Aphrodites, reflected in the distinction between two different kinds of love, and later in the distinction between Eros and Agape. Plato's *Symposium* here has its analogue in Xenophon's. But the *Symposium* also invites us to question that distinction and Marcuse picks up on this:

The notion that Eros and Agape may after all be one and the same — not that Eros is Agape, but that Agape is Eros—may sound strange after almost two thousand years of theology. Nor does it seem justifiable to refer to Plato as a

defender of this identification—Plato who himself introduced the repressive definition of Eros into the household of Western culture. Still, the *Symposium* contains the clearest celebration of the sexual origin and substance of the spiritual relations. (Marcuse, 210–211)

Marcuse stops, for rather obvious reasons, with Plato's lower mysteries. The alliance of eros and logos according to him had to mean repression. Marcuse also rejects an ontology that would allow him to accept Plato's account.

But can Marcuse make any sense of the possibility of escaping destructive time? To do so, he has to show how “eternity can become present in the here and now” Something in us has to escape the tyranny of becoming if the ideal of pleasure is not to prove just another empty dream. In this connection Marcuse appeals to Freud, to that famous if difficult to understand passage in the *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* where Freud suggests that “Time has no power over the id, the original domain of the pleasure principle.” (Marcuse, 23) The Freudian id thus promises an answer to the question I asked earlier: What sense can Marcuse make of the possibility of escaping destructive time? Note how Marcuse here inverts the Platonic anthropology. The id takes the place of the soul. Eternity is sought not above, in the realm of the forms, but below in the depths of the unconscious. Paradise is figured by sexual pleasure. Any such inversion inevitably retains much of the original picture. Most importantly, **both Plato and Marcuse subscribe to the ideal of integral satisfaction**, to what I have called **an ethics of satisfaction**, which makes being at one or self-integration the goal of human striving. If this hope for satisfaction is to be more than illusory, then reality, more specifically *human* reality, has to transcend the power of time. **The ethics of satisfaction demands an ontology that opposes being to time and asserts the primacy of being over becoming.** And with its celebration of authenticity, of self-integration, Heidegger, too, would still seem to be moving within the orbit of an ethics of satisfaction.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Karsten Harries, “Death and Utopia: Towards a Critique of the Ethics of Satisfaction,” *Research in Phenomenology*, vol. 7, 1977, 138–152. Reprinted in *Radical Phenomenology*, ed. John Sallis (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1978), 138–152.

## 6. The Terror of History and the Realm of Values

### 1

Let me begin by returning briefly to the *Symposium*. I would like to underscore that this dialogue on love or **eros** is set in the middle of the Peloponnesian War that ended with the defeat of Athens, i.e. in a time of strife or **eris**

By framing his story as he does, and Plato does something similar in the *Phaedo*, he suggests that by the time of the telling of the story, it had already acquired something of a mythic quality, as if the events did not take place in real time, did not have a place in real history, but had been lifted into an ideal realm that historical time cannot touch. Recall Aristotle's comment that poetry is more philosophical than history. In this dialogue we seem to encounter two kinds of time and the question is, which one is more real? Think of way fairy tales often begin with a "Once upon a time there lived..." What time are we speaking about? I take it that it is a time that no longer is part of history. And the same sort of thing happens when a medieval painter places the events he depicts in his painting against a gold background. That gold background transports them out of time, lets us see these events *sub specie aeternitatis*. And bound as we are into time, into history, it would seem that we draw comfort from such narratives, take comfort from opposing to historical time this ideal time. I invite you to relate this doubling of time to the doubling of Aphrodite in the dialogue.

In the *Symposium*, I am tempted to say, ideal time is given precedence over historical time, just as Socrates is given a higher place than Alcibiades, although this placement leaves a number of questions. Regardless of such questions, something like an ill will against time would seem to preside over the *Symposium*. On all levels, eros presents itself to us as in search of a state transcending time, a state of fullness, of satisfaction. On its lower levels, as we saw, eros tries to achieve this by making sure that something of us will survive us in time: children, fame, works, etc. On the higher level, the higher mysteries of Diotima, this tie to time is cut. Eros now seeks its end beyond time altogether, in the realm of the spirit. A Platonist might insist that **such a spiritualization of eros is demanded by eros itself**, understood as a desire for

satisfaction, for plenitude. As long as eros remains tied to the body and is understood first of all as sexual desire, such satisfaction will be denied to it, as Schopenhauer insisted. Is it possible to gain that kind of satisfaction for which eros longs without rising above the body, above destructive time, above history? Let me state this as a thesis: the ideal of satisfaction and history are incompatible. The ideal of satisfaction, and love, understood as tied to it, asks an end to history. Asking an end to history, it also asks an end to community. So understood love is finally incompatible with love of the world.

## 2

With this let me turn to Eliade, who speaks, not of the terror of time, but of **the terror of history**:

Let me begin with a look at the last pages of *Cosmos and History*<sup>24</sup>:

We may say, furthermore, that Christianity is the "religion" of modern man and historical man. Of the man who simultaneously discovered personal freedom and continuous time (in place of cyclical time). It is even interesting to note that the existence of God forced itself far more urgently upon modern man, for whom history exists as such, as history and not as repetition, than upon the man of the archaic and traditional cultures, who, to defend themselves from the terror of history, had at his disposition all the myths, rites, and customs mentioned in the course of this book. (Eliade, 161)

Note what here is linked together: a sense of **personal freedom, the fall into history, and the thought of God**.

In fact, it is only by presupposing the existence of God that he conquers, on the one hand freedom (which grants him autonomy in a universe governed by laws or, in other words, the "inauguration" of a mode of being that is new and unique in the universe) and, on the other hand, the certainty that historical tragedies have a transhistorical meaning, even if that meaning is not always visible for humanity in its present condition. Any other situation of modern man leads, in the end to despair. It is a despair provoked not by his own human existentiality, but by his presence in a historical universe in which almost the whole of mankind lives prey to a continual terror (even if not always conscious of it).

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<sup>24</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History, The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York and Evanston: Harper Torchbooks, 1959).

In this respect, Christianity incontestably proves to be the religion of “fallen man”: and this to the extent to which modern man is irredeemably identified with history and progress, and to which history and progress are a fall, both implying the final abandonment of the paradise of archetypes and repetition. (Eliade, 162)

Let me reiterate: Christianity is here understood as the religion for modern man. Modern man is marked by a particular experience of time. Key here is the irreversibility of time.

What is meant here by the phrase: the terror of history? Consider the beginning of the chapter called “Normality of Suffering”;

Archaic man, as has been shown, tends to set himself in opposition, by every means in his power, to history, regarded as a succession of events that are irreversible, unforeseeable, possessed of autonomous value. He refuses to accept it and to grant it value as such, as *history* — without, however, always being able to exorcize it; for example, he is powerless against cosmic catastrophes, military disasters, social injustices bound up with the very structure of society, personal misfortunes, and so forth. Thus it would be interesting to learn how this “history” was tolerated by archaic man; that is, how he endured the calamities, the mishaps, and the “sufferings” that entered into the lot of each individual and each collectivity. (Eliade, 95)

History must be tolerated. We have no choice. But how are we to cope with it? There would seem to be three options:

1. **The cosmic.** History is interpreted as a reenactment of timeless paradigms or archetypes. The notion of repetition gains special importance here.
2. **The a-cosmic.** Versions of this are the turn to the aesthetic and the ascetic discussed by Schopenhauer. One could speak here also of a turn to **gnosticism**.
3. **The eschatological.** History can have a meaning because it will end, where this end may be thought to be imminent, or indefinitely distant. This end will issue in something like a golden age, **paradise** regained.

According to Eliade the first option is the one taken by all primitive cultures. You may want to ask yourself whether the *Symposium*, too, does not remain in important ways within the orbit of this option. But what then is the primitive ontology? According to Eliade it relies on the contrast between our fallen time and *illud tempus*, that time when there was no time. Once again consider what I said about the framing of the *Symposium*.

What is the meaning of *illud tempus*? I have touched on it already: think once more of the time of fairy tales, of the significance of the "once upon a time" with which they so often begin. But let me turn to Eliade:

Now let us turn to human acts — those, of course, which do not arise from pure automatism. Their meaning, their value, are not connected with their crude physical datum but with their property of reproducing a primordial act, of repeating a mythical example. Nutrition is not a simple physiological operation; it renews a communion. Marriage and the collective orgy echo mythical prototypes; they are repeated because they were consecrated in the beginning ("in those days," in *illo tempore, ab origine*) by gods, ancestors, or heroes.

In the particulars of his conscious behavior, the "primitive," the archaic man, acknowledges no act which has not previously been posited and lived by someone else, some other being who was not a man. What he does has been done before. His life is ceaseless repetition of gestures initiated by others.

The conscious repetition of given paradigmatic gestures reveals an original ontology. The crude product of nature, the object fashioned by the industry of man, acquire their reality, their identity, only to the extent of their participation in a transcendent reality. The gesture acquires meaning, reality, solely to the extent to which it repeats a primordial act. (Eliade, 4-5)

Note the many ways in which this resembles Plato's ontology. The place of Plato's forms is here taken by what is felt to be the zone of the sacred, of absolute reality, tied to paradigmatic acts by gods or ancestors. To open oneself to this zone is to open oneself to the origin, the center of our lives, which endows them with meaning or value.

The road is arduous, fraught with perils, because it is in fact a rite of passage from the profane to the sacred, from the ephemeral and illusory to reality and eternity, from death to life, from man to the divinity. Attaining the center is equivalent to a consecration, an initiation; yesterday's profane and illusory existence gives place to a new, to a life that is real, enduring, and effective. (Eliade, 18)

Rites transform some ordinary place into the center of the world, transform ordinary time into the time of the beginning. Ordinary time is projected into mythical time, *in illo tempore*, when the foundation of the world occurred (Eliade, 20). Profane time and space are transformed into mythical time and space.



It should be evident that all such thinking is anti-historical, anti-eschatological. Is it also clear that the “primitive,” as here understood, lies behind us? Eliade himself gestures in the direction of Plato. Consider this passage:

What is personal and historical in the emotion we feel when we listen to the music of Bach, in the attention necessary for the solution of a mathematical problem, in the concentrated lucidity presupposed by the examination of any philosophical question? Insofar as he allows himself to be influenced by history, modern man feels himself diminished by the possibility of this impersonal survival. But the interest in the “irreversible” and the “new” in history is a recent discovery in the life of humanity. (Eliade, 47–48)

In such experiences of what transcends us, the burden character of time is lifted.

Returning to the *arche*, the origin, allows for a regeneration of time:

But in the primitive conception, a new era begins not only with every new reign but also with the consummation of every marriage, the birth of every child, and so on. For the cosmos and man are regenerated ceaselessly and by all kinds of means, the past is destroyed, evils and sins are eliminated, etc. Differing in their formulas, all these instruments of regeneration tend toward the same end: to annul time, to abolish history by a continuous return *in illo tempore*, by the repetition of the cosmogonic act. (Eliade, 81)

Time is devalued; it has lost its burden character. In time, time's irreversibility is disregarded.

Like the mystic, like the religious man in general, the primitive lives in a continual present. (Eliade, 86)

Death, the death of the individual and of groups are accepted as part of life. Life must return to darkness, to chaos, to be reborn again. No victory, no catastrophe is ever final (Eliade, 88). This insight into the normality of suffering, of death, was itself made part of a mythical narrative:

The very ancient myth of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Tammuz has replicas and imitations almost throughout the Palaeo-Oriental world. (Eliade, 100)

## 3

I trust that the nature of the cosmic answer to the terror of time has become clearer. This answer is challenged by the rise of an historical awareness that Eliade ties to Israel. Now historical events gain a value because they have been willed by God:

This God of the Jewish people is no longer an Oriental divinity, creator of archetypal gestures, but a personality who ceaselessly intervenes in history, who reveals his will through events (invasions, sieges, battles, and so on). Historical facts thus become “situations” of man in respect to God, and as such they acquire a religious value that nothing had previously been able to confer on them. It may, then, be said with truth that the Hebrews were the first to discover the meaning of history as an epiphany of God, and this conception, as we should expect, was taken up and amplified by Christianity. (Eliade, 104)

On the mythical view the source of meaning was linked to an *arche*, an origin placed beyond our time, into that time which cannot be located in history.

The situation is altogether different in the case of monotheistic revelation. This takes place in time, in historical duration: Moses receives the Law at a certain place and at a certain date. Of course, here, too, archetypes are involved, in the sense that these events are raised to the rank of examples, will be repeated; but they will not be repeated until the times are accomplished, that is in a new *illud tempus*. For example, as Isaiah (11:15-16) prophesies, the miraculous passages of the Red Sea and the Jordan will be repeated “in the day.” (Eliade, 105)

And here lies the crucial difference:

this victory over the forces of darkness and chaos no longer occurs regularly every year, but is projected into a future and Messianic *illud tempus*. (Eliade, 106)

The end of history is the overcoming of its terror. And it is the hope for this end that lets the individual put up with history and its catastrophes:

Messianic beliefs in a final regeneration of the world themselves also indicate an anti-historic attitude. Since he can no longer ignore or periodically abolish history, the Hebrew tolerates it in the hope that it will finally end, at some more or less distant future moment. (Eliade, 111)

History here is tolerated, but only on certain conditions:

it can be tolerated only because it is known that, one day or another, it will cease. History is thus abolished, not through consciousness of living an eternal

present (coincidence with the atemporal instant of the revelation of archetypes), nor by means of a periodically repeated ritual (for example, the rites of the beginning of the year) — it is abolished in the future. (Eliade, 111–112)

History is stretched here between that time when there was as yet no history and that time when there no longer will be history, that is to say, in the Biblical context, between the paradise that was and the paradise to come. Eliade points out how much such a view owes to Iranian thought:

What we wish to emphasize is that, in the Iranian conception, history (whether followed or not by infinite time) is not eternal; it does not repeat itself, but will come to an end one day by an eschatological *ekpyrosis* and cosmic cataclysm. For the final catastrophe that will put an end to history will at the same time be the judgment of history. It is then—in *illo tempore*—that, as we are told, all will render an account of what they have done “in history” and only those who are not guilty will know beatitude and eternity. (Eliade, 125–126)

These ideas became part of Christian thought. Think of the Book of Revelation. Here is how the early Church Father Lactantius understood history:

God created the world in six days, and on the seventh day he rested; hence the world will endure for six aeons, during which “evil will conquer and triumph” on earth. During the seventh millennium, the prince of demons will be chained and humanity will know a thousand years of rest and perfect justice. After this the demon will escape from his chains and resume war upon the just; but at last he will be vanquished and at the end of the eighth millennium the world will be recreated for eternity. (Eliade, 126)

Lactantius was writing as the Roman Empire was falling apart. Barbarians made ever more destructive incursions. The civilized world seemed to be falling apart. And not only Christians understood these events as signs that history was indeed coming to an end.

This to be sure is only one side of Christianity. The older cosmic view also survives in it:

Let us simply note that even within the frame of the three religions — Iranian, Judaic, and Christian — that have limited the duration of the cosmos to some specific number of millennia and affirm that history will finally cease in *illo tempore*, there still survive certain traces of the ancient doctrine of the periodic regeneration of history. In other words, history can be abolished, and consequently renewed a number of times, before the final *eschaton* is realized.

Indeed, the Christian liturgical year is based upon a periodic and real repetition of the Nativity, Passion, death, and Resurrection of Jesus, with all that this mystical drama implies for a Christian; that is personal and cosmic regeneration through reactualization *in concreto* of the birth, death, and resurrection of the Saviour. (Eliade, 130)

But despite such archaic elements, the Christian understanding of history cannot finally be cyclical, as is that of the Greeks. Eliade quotes Henri-Charles Puech:

“A straight line traces the course of humanity from initial Fall to final Redemption. And the meaning of this history is unique, because the Incarnation is a unique fact. Indeed, as Chapter 9 of the Epistle to the Hebrews and I Peter 3:18 emphasize, Christ died for our sins once only, once for all (*hapax, ephapax, semel*); it is not an event subject to repetition, which can be re produced several times (*pollakis*). The development of history is governed and oriented by a unique fact, a fact that stands entirely alone. Consequently the destiny of all mankind, together with the individual destiny of each one of us, are both likewise played out once, once for all, in a concrete and irreplaceable time which is that of history and life.”<sup>25</sup> It is this linear conception of time and history, which, already outlined in the second century by St. Irenaeus of Lyon, will be taken up again by St. Basil and St. Gregory and be finally elaborated by St. Augustine. (Eliade, 143)

This eschatological conception of history dominates the Christian Middle Ages. On this understanding history has a beginning and an end, it begins with the creation of the world and ends with the last judgment. This alone can give it meaning. To be sure, this understanding of history is

complemented by the theory of cyclic undulation that explains the periodic return of events. This twofold dogma dominates speculation down to the seventeenth century, although, at the same time, a theory of the linear progress of history begins to assert itself. In the Middle Ages, the terms of this theory can be recognized in the writings of Albertus Magnus and St. Thomas, but it is with the *Eternal Gospel* of Joachim of Floris that it appears in all its coherence, as an integral element of a magnificent eschatology of history, the most significant contribution to Christianity in this field since St. Augustine's. Joachim of Floris divides the history of the world into three great epochs, successively inspired and dominated by a different person of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. In the Calabrian abbot's vision, each of these epochs reveals, in history, a new dimension

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<sup>25</sup> Henri-Charles Puech, *La gnose et le temps*,” *Eranos-Jahrbuch*, X SX (Zurich, 1951), pp. 70ff.

of the divinity and, by this fact, allows humanity to perfect itself progressively until finally, in the last phase—inspired by the Holy Ghost—it arrives at absolute spiritual freedom. (Eliade, 145)

It was essentially this view that Hegel inherited and secularized. Hegel still divides world history into the three great epochs. The World Spirit presides over the progress of history. And there is a sense in which in Hegel's philosophy, too, we can speak of an end of history.

Let me cite this passage from Eliade:

Now, it is possible to discern a parallel between Hegel's philosophy of history and the theology of history of the Hebrew prophets: for the latter, as for Hegel, an event is irreversible and valid in itself as much as it is a new manifestation of the will of God—a proposition really revolutionary, we should remind ourselves, from the viewpoint of traditional societies dominated by the eternal repetition of archetypes. Thus, in Hegel's view, the destiny of a people still preserved a transhistorical significance, because all history revealed a new and more perfect manifestation of the Universal Spirit (Eliade, 148–9)

And even Marx continued to hold on to essentially the same picture. To be sure, he could not appeal to God or even to the World Spirit. His philosophy has no room for transcendence. But Marx, too, places a golden age at the end of history, an age when all the evil of history with its class struggles, when human self-alienation will have been overcome.

But it has become difficult for us to take seriously appeals to some end of history to answer the terror of history. Had not Heidegger “gone to the trouble of showing that the historicity of human existence forbids all hope of transcending time and history?” (Eliade, 150). How can there be then some hope in the return to the cosmic world view? Consider:

Some pages earlier, we noted various recent orientations that tend to confer value upon the myth of cyclical periodicity, even the myth of the eternal return. These orientations disregard not only historicism but even history as such. We believe we are justified in seeing in them, rather than a resistance to history, a revolt against historical *time*, an attempt to restore this historical time, freighted as it is with human experience, to a place in the time that is cosmic, cyclical, and infinite. In any case it is worth noting that the work of two of the most significant writers of our day—T. S. Eliot and James Joyce—is saturated with

nostalgia for the myth of eternal repetition and, in the last analysis, for the abolition of time. (Eliade, 153)

We shall have to return to this notion of repetition. The key to the primitive cosmology would seem to be its ability to affirm what Heidegger might call the inescapable guilt of humanity.

## 7. The Fall as the Origin of Value

### 1

Last time we discussed Eliade's *Cosmos and History*. We spoke of the terror of history and of ways of coping with this terror. Following Eliade I distinguished a number of strategies. Let me review them briefly here:

1. **The cosmic.** History is interpreted as a reenactment of timeless paradigms or archetypes. The notion of repetition gains special importance here. Most of the lecture was spent on this response.

2. **The a-cosmic**, which involves a denial of reality: Referring back to our discussion of Schopenhauer, I suggested that there are two variants:

- a. The aesthetic
- b. The ascetic

3. **The eschatological**, where again we can distinguish two variants:

- a. The eschaton is placed in some indefinite future and beyond
- b. The eschaton is imminent

Augustine represents the first of these eschatological strategies. To understand the Augustinian view of history and its telos we have to understand what makes that history necessary, i.e. the fall. **History has its foundation in the fall.** In *Life Against Death*,<sup>26</sup> Norman O. Brown has this to say about Augustine and history:

Christian theology, or at least Augustinian theology, recognizes human restlessness and discontent, the *cor irrequietum*, as the psychological source of the historical process. But Christian theology, to account for the origin of human discontent and to indicate a solution, has to take man out of this real world, out of the animal kingdom, and inculcate into him delusions of grandeur. And thus Christian theology commits its own worst sin, the sin of pride.  
(Brown, 16)

Augustine did recognize something crucial, Norman O. Brown would admit:

Why does man, alone of all animals, have a history? For man is distinguished from animals not simply by the possession and transmission from generation to generation of that suprabiological apparatus which is culture, but also, if history

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<sup>26</sup> Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death: the Psychoanalytic Meaning of History* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1959).

and changes in time are essential characteristics of human culture and therefore of man, by a desire to change his culture and so to change himself. In making history “man makes himself,” to use the suggestive title of Gordon Childe's book. (Brown, 15)

But if it can indeed be said that the desire to change himself, even make himself, is constitutive of the human being, it is yet true that it appears much less prevalent in societies that respond to the terror of history with a cosmic world view, than in those who place a value on the individual that makes the cosmic world view unacceptable. Given our historical awareness we may indeed be tempted to see such archaic societies in the image of paradise. But the historical individual has lost that paradise. And this fallen state is a presupposition of the Augustinian understanding of history.

## 2

The Augustinian account is dominated by the ideas of **blessedness** and **death**. The fall is understood as a fall from a state of relative blessedness into a state shadowed by mortality:

XI, 12: Accordingly, so far as present comfort goes, the first man in Paradise was more blessed than any just man in this insecure state; but as regards the hope of future good, every man who not merely supposes, but certainly knows that he shall eternally enjoy the most high God in the company of angels, and beyond the reach of ill — this man, no matter what bodily torments afflict him, is more blessed than was he, who, even in that great felicity of Paradise, was uncertain of his fate. (Augustine, 357)<sup>27</sup>

The certainty that ours shall be the everlasting enjoyment of God makes us now blessed. Again note the doubling of blessedness. And compare this doubling with the doubling of eros in the *Symposium*!

What then is blessedness? Augustine's answer is not very different from the answer Plato gave in the *Symposium*: perpetual possession of the good:

XI, 13. From all this it will readily occur to any one that the blessedness which an intelligent being desires as its legitimate object results from a combination of

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<sup>27</sup> Refers to Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Modern Library, 1950).



these two things, namely, that it be delivered from all dubiety, and know  
certainly that it shall eternally abide in the same enjoyment. (Augustine, 357)

Once again blessedness is said to demand eternity. In that sense it demands the end of history, a state beyond history. The question is whether or not “eternal life” is an oxymoron.

And this question repeats itself when we consider what such neo-Freudians as Marcuse or Norman O’Brown would substitute for the paradise to come, secularizing the Augustinian message. Consider here once more a passage from Marcuse I cited before:

The images of Orpheus and Narcissus reconcile Eros and Thanatos. They recall the experience of a world that is not to be mastered and controlled but to be liberated—a freedom that will release the powers of Eros now bound in the petrified forms of man and nature. These powers are conceived not as destruction, but as peace, not as terror, but as beauty. It is sufficient to enumerate the assembled images in order to circumscribe the dimension to which they are committed: the redemption of pleasure, the halt of time, the absorption of death: silence, sleep, night, paradise—the Nirvana principle not as death, but as life. (Marcuse, 164)

I would underscore the way “the redemption of pleasure” is tied here to “the halt of time.” The question is to what extent any attack on time is not in the end inevitably an attack on reality, and thus on life.

And here another passage I read you before:

Orpheus and Narcissus reveal a new reality, with an order of its own, governed by different principles. The Orphic Eros transforms being: he masters cruelty and death through liberation. His language is song, and his work is play. Narcissus’ life is beauty, and his existence is contemplation. These images refer to the aesthetic dimension as the one in which their reality principle must be sought and validated. (Marcuse, 171)

I asked already whether the aesthetic dimension can validate a reality principle. Everything depends on whether we can make sense of his promise of a reality beyond our reality principle.

### 3

Norman O. Brown followed Marcuse in *Life Against Death*:

If therefore the nirvana-principle “belongs to the death-instincts” and the pleasure principle belongs to Eros, their reunification would be the

condition of equilibrium or rest of life that is a full life, unrepressed and therefore satisfied with itself and affirming itself rather than changing itself...And how Nirvana differs from eternal rest not only of the spirit but also of the body, which St. Augustine promises as man's ultimate felicity, is a distinction I leave to the theologians. (Brown, 90–91)

Norman O. Brown, too, appeals to what Freud had said about the id knowing nothing of time:

And if, as I think we can, we equate Freud's Unconscious with the "noumenal" reality of ourselves, we find Freud positively asserting the discovery that at least in that "noumenal" reality there is no time: "Unconscious processes are in themselves 'timeless'"; "In the id there is nothing corresponding to the idea of time." If therefore we go beyond Freud and speculate seriously on the possibility of a consciousness not based on repression but conscious of what is now unconscious, then it follows a priori that such a consciousness would be not in time but in eternity. And in fact eternity seems to be the time in which childhood lives. The poets have said so. (Brown, 94)

#### 4

Here I want to focus on the turn against time and more especially against history. The fall is a fall both into mortality and into history. According to Augustine death is the result of sin. This connection needs to be understood:

XIII, 1: For God had not made man like the angels, in such a condition, that even though they had sinned, they could none the more die. He had so made them, that if they discharged the obligations of obedience, an angelic immortality and a blessed eternity might ensue, without the intervention of death; but if they disobeyed, death should be visited on them with just sentence. (Augustine, 412)

Here we should keep in mind that Augustine distinguishes between the death of the body and the death of the soul. The body dies when the soul forsakes it, when it can no longer live and feel. The soul dies when God forsakes it. This is the second death. In this case Augustine speaks of dead souls. The dead soul still feels:

XIII, 2: But in the last damnation, though man does not cease to feel, yet because this feeling of his is neither sweet with pleasure or wholesome with repose, but painfully penal, is not without reason called death rather than life. (Augustine, 413)

Like Schopenhauer or Heidegger, Augustine too understands this life as essentially a being-unto-death:

XIII, 10: For no sooner do we begin to live in this dying body, than we begin to move ceaselessly towards death. For in the whole course of this life (if life we must call it) its mutability tends towards death. Certainly there is no one who is not nearer it this year than last year, and to-morrow than to-day, and to-day than yesterday, and a short while hence than now. And now than a short while ago. For whatever time we live is deducted from our whole term of life, and that which remains is daily becoming less and less; so that our whole life is nothing but a race towards death, in which no one is allowed to stand still for a little space, or to go somewhat more slowly, but all are driven forward with an impartial movement, and with equal rapidity. (Augustine, 419)

This being-unto-death is tied to an awareness of the burden character of the human body.

Bodies have weight and this weight, Augustine insists, weighs on us.

XIII, 18: But it is necessary, they say, that the natural weight of earthly bodies either keep them on earth or draw them to it; and therefore they cannot be in heaven. Our first parents were indeed on earth, in a well-wooded and fruitful spot, which has been named Paradise. (Augustine, 427)

Note the use of “they say.” Augustine here signals that he has a rather different view.

Does the body weigh equally on every human being? Does it not weigh more heavily on the sick than on the healthy?

XIII, 18: And though the hale and strong man feels heavier to other men carrying him than the lank and sickly, yet the man himself moves and carries his own body with less feeling of burden when he has the greater bulk of vigorous health, than when his frame is reduced to a minimum by hunger or disease. Of such consequence, in estimating the weight of earthly bodies, even while yet corruptible and mortal, is the consideration not of deadweight, but of the healthy equilibrium of the parts. And what words can tell the difference between what we now call health and future immortality? (Augustine, 428)

We should note that the state of blessedness that Augustine envisions for us mortals is not one that leaves the body behind. It most definitely includes the body. But body and spirit will be in complete harmony. That is to say, Augustine rejects both the cosmic and the acosmic strategies of dealing with the terror of history. That leaves the eschatological: we are able to bear the terror of history because we can look forward to a state when we and the earth on which we live shall be transformed in such a way that we

no longer shall have to experience our bodies as burdens, when the terror of history shall be no more.

Key here is Augustine's confidence that the state of blessedness promised to us will most definitely include our bodies, and here he distinguishes his own position from that of Plato:

XIII, 20 Thus the souls of departed saints are not affected by the death which dismisses them from their bodies, because their flesh rests in hope, no matter what indignities it receives after sensation is gone. For they do not desire that their bodies be forgotten, as Plato thinks fit, but rather because they remember what has been promised to Him who deceives no man, and who gave them security for the safekeeping even of the hairs of their head, they with a longing patience wait in hope of the resurrection of their bodies, in which they have suffered many hardships, and are now to suffer never again. (Augustine, 430)

The resurrected body, Augustine tells us, will not only surpass our bodies even when we are in the best of health, but will surpass also the bodies of Adam and Eve before the fall. For theirs were not yet the transfigured spiritual bodies.

## 5

The fall is of course tied to the eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That is the original sin. Augustine links this to the will to one's own free choice. The fall is a fall into **freedom**, into **autonomy**. Fallen humanity insists on being author of itself. **The desire for autonomy** wins out over **obedience**. And the desire for autonomy is closely linked to the devil:

XIV, 3: For the devil too, wished to live according to himself when he did not abide in the truth; to that when he lied, this was not of God, but of himself, who is not only a liar, but the father of lies, he being the first who lied, and the originator of lying as of sin. (Augustine, 445)

What is the connection? Why does **pride** lead to the **lie**?

XIV, 13: Our first parents fell into open disobedience because already they were secretly corrupted; for the evil act had never been done had not an evil will preceded it. And what is the origin of our evil will but pride? For "pride is the beginning of sin." (Eccles. X, 13) And what is pride but the craving for undue exaltation? And this is undue exaltation, when the soul abandons Him to whom it ought to cleave as its end, and becomes a kind of end to itself. This

happens when it becomes its own satisfaction. And it does so when it falls away from that unchangeable good which ought to satisfy it more than itself. This falling away is spontaneous for if the will had remained steadfast in the love of that higher and changeless good by which it was illumined to intelligence and kindled into love, it would not have turned away to find satisfaction in itself, and so become frigid and benighted. (Augustine, 460)

Narcissism is at the heart of sin. Augustine's account of the fall deserves our special attention:

XIV, 11: Man then lived with God for his rule in a paradise at once physical and spiritual. For neither was it a paradise only physical for the advantage of the body, and not also spiritual for the advantage of the mind; nor was it only spiritual to afford enjoyment to man by his internal sensations, and not also physical to afford him enjoyment through his external senses. But obviously it was for both ends. But after that proud and envious angel ..., preferring to rule with a kind of pomp of empire rather than to be another's subject, fell from the spiritual Paradise, and essaying to insinuate his persuasive guile into the mind of man, whose unfallen condition provoked him with envy, now that himself was fallen, he chose the serpent as his mouthpiece in that bodily Paradise in which it and all the other animals were living with those two human beings, the man and his wife, subject to them, and harmless. (Augustine, 458)

We can put it this way: the misfortune of the human being is to have eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil but not from the tree of life. **Death** is the punishment.

Before death our pride suffers shipwreck. This makes it a fit punishment.

The Biblical account suggests that freedom and being-unto-death are inseparably linked in fallen humanity. Closely linked are an understanding of good and evil and a sense of shame.

## 6

Let me turn to the first: how are we to understand eating from tree of the knowledge of **good and evil**? Before the fall Adam and Eve were secure in their place, in this respect not so very different from the animals. As a result of the fall they faced their own being as a problem. What were they to be? What was their place to be? Our place becomes a problem as soon as it is experienced as one of many possible places. What then is the right place? With freedom goes an opening up of a space of

possibilities. And with this the need for a measure, a standard appears: a need for the law. The fall then has its foundation in a loss of place. That is the meaning of the expulsion from paradise.

And I have lost my place as soon as I want to assume full responsibility for my place. This is the sin of pride: to want to place oneself, to give oneself the law. But this the human being is unable to do. That is why the fall leads to the placement of fallen humanity under God's law. To refuse this need for the law, the attempt to want to undo this consequence of the fall, must lead inevitably to a suspension of the law. Freedom is replaced by spontaneity. For fallen humanity freedom requires the measure of the law. Every attempt to refuse this fallen condition, to recover paradise here on earth threatens the abolition of freedom, its degeneration into spontaneity.

## 7

But let me return to the other consequence of the fall: to **shame**. The main part of Book XIV is devoted to it:

XIV, 15: For in spite of himself his mind is both frequently disturbed, and his flesh suffers, and grows old, and dies; and in spite of ourselves we suffer whatever else we suffer, and which we would not suffer if our nature absolutely and in all its parts obeyed our will. But is it not the infirmities of the flesh which hamper it in its service? Yet what does it matter *how* its service is hampered, so long as the fact remains, that by the just retribution of the sovereign God whom we refused to be subject to and serve, our flesh, which was subject to us, now torments us by insubordination, although our disobedience brought trouble on ourselves, not upon God? (Augustine, 463)

Why does Augustine speak of a **just** retribution?

XIV, 17: Justly is shame very specially connected with lust; justly, too, these members themselves, being moved and restrained not at our will, but by a certain independent autocracy, so to speak, are called "shameful." Their condition was different before sin. For as it is written, "They were naked and were not ashamed" — not that their nakedness was unknown to them, but because nakedness was not yet shameful, because not yet did lust move those members without the will's consent; not yet did the flesh by its disobedience testify against the disobedience of man... But when they were stripped of their grace, that their disobedience might be punished by fit retribution, there began in

the movement of their bodily members a shameless novelty that made nakedness indecent: it at once made them observant and made them ashamed. And therefore, after they violated God's command by open transgression, it is written: "And the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons."  
(Augustine, 465)

Note that once again, as in Aristophanes' tale, pride is punished by a split of a self that once was a whole. Now it is one part of the self that is at odds with the other. Shame testifies to this split.

XIV, 18: The greatest master of Roman eloquence says, that all right actions wish to be set in the light, *i.e.* desire to be known. This right action, however, has such a desire to be known, that yet it blushes to be seen. Who does not know what passes between husband and wife that children may be born? Is it not for this purpose that wives are married with such ceremony? And yet, when this well understood act is gone about for the procreation of children, not even the children themselves, who may already have been born to them, are suffered to be witnesses. This right action seeks the light, in so far as it seeks to be known, but yet dreads being seen. And why so, if not because that which is by nature fitting and decent is so done as to be accompanied with a shame-begetting penalty of sin. (Augustine, 466-467)

Given this analysis it is also not surprising that there would be those who would refuse to accept that subordination of sexual pleasure to procreation, that to many this understanding of the sexual act suggested that to return to paradise would have to mean also to be able to make love without any sense of shame. And might such a love-making than not be understood as a mark of true enlightenment? Certain heretical sects of the Middle Ages such as the Brothers of the Free Spirit drew just this conclusion. And Augustine himself makes a point of denying that, had there been no fall, there would not have been sexual activity. But it would not have been burdened by shame:

XIV, 23: And certainly, had not culpable disobedience been visited with penal disobedience, the marriage of Paradise could have been ignorant of this struggle and rebellion, this quarrel between will and lust, that the will may be satisfied and lust restrained, but those members, like all the rest, should have obeyed the will. The field of generation should have been sown by the organ created for this purpose, as the earth is sown by the hand. And whereas now, as we essay to investigate this subject more exactly, modesty hinders us, and compels us to ask

pardon of chaste ears, there would have been no cause to do so, but we could have discoursed freely, and without fear of being obscene, upon all those points which occur to those who meditate on the subject. (Augustine, 471)

## 8

I have focused on three aspects of Augustine's analysis: On his understanding of the fall as a **fall into being-unto-death**, as a **subjection under the law**, and as a **fall into shame**. Let me turn now to Augustine's understanding of what it would mean to recover **paradise**. Recall here what Augustine has to say about the two kinds of death: in the first the soul forsakes the body, in the second God forsakes the soul. This means that there is a sense in which death, understood as a passage into total nothingness, for Augustine is an illusion. The wicked man, too, need not fear total annihilation, but something far worse. Here is how Augustine understands the last judgment:

XX, 14: "And another book was opened," it says. We must therefore understand it of a certain divine power, by which it shall be brought about that every one shall recall to memory all his own works, whether good or evil, and shall mentally survey them with a marvellous rapidity, so that this knowledge will either accuse or excuse conscience, and thus all and each shall be simultaneously judged. (Augustine, 733)

Memory triumphs here over time. And here is Augustine's understanding of the pain of the damned:

XXI, 3: For death will not be abolished, but will be eternal, since the soul will neither be able to enjoy God and live, nor to die and escape the pains of the body. The first death drives the soul from the body against her will; the second death holds the soul in the body against her will. The two have this in common, that the soul suffers against her will what her own body inflicts. (Augustine, 765)

And again:

XXI, 12: And just as the punishment of the first death cuts men off from this present mortal city, so does the punishment of the second death cut men off from that future immortal city. (Augustine, 782)

Like Schopenhauer, Augustine takes this life to be not worth living:

XXI, 14: And who would not shrink from the alternative, and elect to die, if it were proposed to him either to suffer death or to begin again an infant? Our infancy, indeed introducing us to this life not with laughter but with tears, seems



unconsciously to predict all the ills we are to encounter. Zoroaster alone is said to have laughed when he was born and that unnatural omen portended no good to him. For he is said to have been the inventor of magical arts, though indeed they were unable to secure to him even the poor felicity of this present life against the assaults of his enemies. (Augustine, 785)

Zoroaster here appears as the only one who did not share Augustine's insight into the misery of this life, perhaps a reason why Nietzsche chose him for his hero.

In his elaboration of the last judgment Augustine relies on Isaiah 66:15–16

XX, 21: "For behold, the Lord shall come as a fire and as whirlwind His chariots, to execute vengeance with indignation, and wasting with a flame of fire. For with the fire of the Lord shall all the earth be judged, and all flesh with His sword; many shall be wounded by the Lord." (Augustine, 743)

Many, but not all. And in Isaiah 65:17–23 you can also read lines that foretell a transfigured earth:

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days or an old man who does not fill out his days... They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity

The last sentences Augustine does not cite, and it is easy to understand why: the new Jerusalem here envisioned includes death, a death that comes at the right time. And it includes labor and procreation.

What place does sexuality have for a resurrected humanity? Keep in mind that for Augustine, resurrection is in the flesh, i.e. we shall be resurrected as men and as women:

XXII, 17: From the words, "Till we all come to a perfect man, to the measure of the fullness of Christ," (Eph 4:13) and from the words, Conformed to the image of the Son of God (Rom 8:29) some conclude that women shall not rise as women, but that all shall be men, because God made man only of earth, and woman of the man. For my part, they seem to be wiser who make no doubt that both sexes shall rise. For there shall be no lust, which is now the cause of

confusion. But before they sinned, the man and the woman were naked, and were not ashamed. From those bodies, the vice shall be withdrawn, while nature shall be preserved. And the sex of woman is not a vice, but nature. It shall then be superior to carnal intercourse and child-bearing; nevertheless the female members shall remain adapted not to the old uses, but to a new beauty, which, so far from provoking lust, now extinct, shall excite praise to the wisdom and clemency of God, who both made what was not and delivered from corruption what he made. (Augustine, 839)

Woman is transfigured into something like a beautiful painting. **A sexual love gives way to a love that is very much like aesthetic rapture.**

## 8. Freedom and Value

### 1

Augustine, as we have seen, ties the fall to the will to one's own free choice. The fall is a fall into **freedom**. Fallen humanity insists on being author of itself, on making or remaking itself. **The desire for autonomy** wins out over **obedience**, over the willingness to subordinate one's existence to a transcendent logos that would bind freedom. Narcissism is at the heart of sin.

Death is the punishment of sin. Our mortality is a reef on which our pride inevitably must suffer shipwreck. This makes it a fit punishment. The Biblical account suggests that freedom and being-unto-death are inseparably linked in fallen humanity. Closely linked are an understanding of good and evil and a sense of shame. With freedom goes an opening up of a space of possibilities. And with this the need for a measure, a standard appears: a need for the law. The fall then has its foundation in a loss of place. That is the meaning of the expulsion from paradise. To refuse this need for the law, the attempt to want to undo this consequence of the fall, must lead inevitably to a suspension of the law. But in the end such suspension will let freedom degenerate into mere spontaneity.

But let me return to the other consequence of the fall: to shame. Augustine calls it, too, a just retribution. Shame testifies to the split within the self that is the result of the fall. Why does Augustine speak of a just retribution? Before the fall there is no shame:

XIV, 17: For as it is written, "They were naked and were not ashamed"—not that their nakedness was unknown to them, but because nakedness was not yet shameful, because not yet did lust move those members without the will's consent; not yet did the flesh by its disobedience testify against the disobedience of man.

The disobedience of the flesh testifies to the limits of our freedom. Thought-provoking is Augustine's account of just what it was that caused Adam to fall into sin:

XIV, 11: For as Aaron was not induced to agree with the people when they blindly wished him to make an idol, and yet yielded to constraint; and as it is not credible that Solomon was so blind as to suppose that idols should be worshipped, but was drawn over to such sacrilege by the blandishments of women; so we cannot believe that Adam was deceived, and supposed the devil's words to be truth, and therefore transgressed

God's law, but that he by the drawings of kindred yielded to the woman, the husband to the wife, the one human being to the only other human being. For not without significance did the apostle say, "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression;" (Tim. 11:14) but he speaks thus, because the woman accepted as true what the serpent told her, but the man could not bear to be severed from his only companion, even though this involved a partnership in sin. He was not on this account less culpable, but sinned with his eyes open. (Augustine, 459)

Here it is not so much pride that is said to be the source of Adam's fall, as it is human solidarity. Adam chose to exist in sin with Eve, as a mortal among mortals, instead of choosing to be free of sin, but without her. I have no doubt that he made the right choice.

And even Augustine forces us to wonder how Adam could have forsaken Eve without betraying his human essence. Consider how that essence is described:

XIV, 22: But we, from our part, have no manner of doubt that to increase and multiply and replenish the earth in virtue of the blessing of God, is a gift of marriage as God instituted it from the beginning before man sinned, when He created them male and female—in other words two sexes manifestly distinct...It is quite clear that they were created male and female, with bodies of different sexes, for the very purpose of begetting offspring, and so increasing, multiplying, and replenishing the earth; and it is great folly to oppose so plain a fact. (Augustine, 469)

## 2

But let me now turn to Sartre, whose discussion of shame, just because it claims to be unburdened by Christian presuppositions, lets us become clearer about the philosophical presuppositions of both accounts. Sartre's very language suggests that he is secularizing the Christian and more specifically the Augustinian account:

Shame is the feeling of an original fall, not because of the fact that I may have committed this or that particular fault, but simply that I have "Fallen" into the world in the midst of things and that I need the mediation of the other to be what I am. (Sartre, 312)<sup>28</sup>

Sartre here betrays his proximity to Gnosticism.

It would be easy to give a Heideggerian defense of this claim, appealing to the way that our being is essentially a being in the world and with others, and yet

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<sup>28</sup> Refers to Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology* trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library: 1956).

authenticity demands that I own myself. That demand conflicts with the fact that first of all I am already owned by them. That Sartre, like Heidegger, gives an ontological twist to terms that carry a theological burden requires no comment.

Modesty and the fear of being surprised in a state of nakedness are only a symbolic specification of original shame; the body symbolizes here our defenseless state as objects. To put on clothes is to hide one's object state; it is to claim the right of seeing without being seen; that is to be pure subject. This is why the Biblical symbol of the fall after the original sin is the fact that Adam and Eve "know that they are naked." The reaction to shame will consist exactly in apprehending as an object the one who apprehended my own object-state. (Sartre, 312)

In this connection Sartre offers us his own account of the demonic, which invites comparison with that of Kierkegaard:

If, however, I conceive of the "they" as a subject before whom I am ashamed, then it cannot become an object without being scattered into a plurality of Others; and if I posit it as the absolute unity of the subject which can in no way become an object, I thereby posit the eternity of my being-an-object and so perpetuate my shame. This is shame before God; that is, the recognition of my being-an-object before a subject which can never become an object. By the same stroke I realize my object-state in the absolute and hypostatize it. The position of God is accompanied by a reification of my object-ness. Or better yet, I posit my being-an-object-for-God as more real than my For-itself. I exist alienated and I cause myself to learn from the outside what I must be. This is the origin of fear before God. Black masses, desecrations of the host, demonic associations, etc., are so many attempts to confer the character of an object on the absolute Subject. In desiring Evil for Evil's sake I attempt to contemplate the divine transcendence—for which God is the peculiar possibility — as a purely given transcendence and one which I transcend towards Evil. Then "I make God suffer," I "irritate him," etc. These attempts, which imply the absolute recognition of God as a subject who cannot be an object, carry their own contradiction within them and are always failures. (Sartre, 313–314)

### 3

For Sartre, as for Aristophanes, what we most deeply desire is a plenitude that our being denies us, a desire to leave the human condition behind for a divine mode of existence that our being denies us:

Generally speaking there is no irreducible taste or inclination. They all represent a certain appropriative choice of being. It is up to existential psychoanalysis to compare and classify them. Ontology abandons us here; it has merely enabled us to determine the ultimate ends of human reality, its fundamental possibilities, and the value which haunts it. Each human reality is at the same time a direct project to metamorphose its own For-itself into an In-itself-For-Itself and a project of the appropriation of the world as a totality of being-in-itself, in the form of a fundamental quality. Every human being is a passion in that it projects losing itself so as to found being and by the same stroke to constitute the In-itself which escapes contingency by being its own foundation, the *Ens causa sui*, which religions call God. Thus the passion of man is the reverse of that of Christ, for man loses himself as man in order that God may be born. But the idea of God is contradictory and we lose ourselves in vain. Man is a useless passion. (Sartre, 615)

Note the aggressiveness of this conception of human being. The desire to become God is a desire to appropriate the world. I cannot let it or the things of the world, including other persons, be what they are. I have to make them serve my project of becoming God. Being-for-itself, i.e. freedom, is understood here in opposition to, indeed as the nihilation of the in-itself. Note the definition of value Sartre gives us: he begins his discussion of “The Ethical Implications” of his work by insisting that ontology as such cannot provide us with norms or imperatives; it can only describe the being of value:

Ontology has revealed to us, in fact, the origin and the nature of value; we have seen that value is the lack in relation to which the for-itself determines its being as a lack. By the very fact that the for-itself exist, as we have seen, value arises to haunt its being for-itself. It follows that the various tasks of the for-itself can be made the object of an existential psychoanalysis, for they all aim at producing the missing synthesis of consciousness and being in the form of value or self-cause. (Sartre, 626)

**Value mediates between for-itself and in-itself.** It provides something like a bridge. Consider in this connection the bridge function of eros in the *Symposium*. On this view love has its foundation most fundamentally in love of self. This is not so very different from Plato’s position in the *Symposium*.

Where does such an ontology of value leave ethics? As Sartre realizes, the extreme formalism of his analysis does not give it anything resembling a firm ground:

It indicates to us the necessity of abandoning the psychology of interest along with any utilitarian interpretation of human conduct — by revealing to us the ideal meaning of all human attitudes (Sartre, 626)

Satrean existential psychoanalysis draws from this a Nietzschean lesson, and we shall turn to Nietzsche next time: to repudiate what Nietzsche called the *Geist der Schwere* (“*spirit of gravity*”), Sartre speaks of “the spirit of seriousness”:

The spirit of seriousness has two characteristics: it considers values as transcendent givens independent of human subjectivity, and it transforms the quality of “desirable” from the ontological structure of things to their simple material constitution. For the spirit of seriousness, for example, bread is desirable because it is necessary to live (a value written in an intelligible heaven) and because bread is nourishing. The result of the serious attitude, which as we know rules the world, is to cause the symbolic values of things to be drunk in by their empirical idiosyncrasy as ink by a blotter; it puts forward the opacity of the desired object and posits it in itself as a desirable irreducible. Thus we are already on the moral plane but concurrently on that of bad faith, for it is an ethics which is ashamed of itself and does not dare speak its name. It has obscured all its goals in order to free itself from anguish. (HC 626)

As we have seen, Sartre singles out utilitarianism for criticism and it is, I think, rather easy to substantiate that criticism. To check this claim I invite you to read a very clear-headed review of two books by Peter Singer that Peter Berkowitz, a former student of mine who worked with me on a dissertation on Nietzsche, published in the January 2000 issue of the *New Republic*.<sup>29</sup> I find myself very much in agreement with what Berkowitz here is arguing. **The reef on which the spirit of seriousness, according to Sartre, must suffer shipwreck is the foundation of the being of value in freedom:**

But ontology and existential psychoanalysis must reveal to the moral agent that he is the being by whom values exist. It is then that his freedom will become conscious of itself and will reveal itself in anguish as the unique source of value and the nothingness by which the world exists. (Sartre, 627)

But is it possible to thus found value in freedom? Sartre himself raises the crucial question:

... is it possible for freedom to take itself for a value as the source of all value, or must it be defined necessarily in relation to a transcendent value which haunts it? And in case it could will itself as its own possible and its determining value, what would this

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<sup>29</sup> Peter Berkowitz, “Other People’s Mothers: The utilitarian horrors of Peter Singer.” *The New Republic* January 10, 2000, pp. 27–37, a review of Peter Singer, *A Darwinian Left: Politics, Evolution, and Cooperation and Practical Ethics, Second Edition* (New Haven: Yale University Press (2000)).

mean? A freedom which wills itself freedom is in fact a being-which-is-not-what-it-is and which-is-what-it-is-not, and which chooses as the ideal of being, being-what it is not and not being-what-it-is. (Sartre, 627)

But will such a being not always flee itself in a way that will flee bad faith only to end up in bad faith, just as the desire to be totally authentic ends up in inauthenticity?

Is Sartre right to understand the fundamental project of human being as the project to become God? If he is, then every one of us takes up this project in his or her own distinctive way:

But to be, for Flaubert [for example], as for every subject of “biography,” means to be unified in the world. The irreducible unification which we ought to find, which is Flaubert, and which we require biographers to reveal to us—this is the unification of an original project, a unification which should reveal itself to us as a non-substantial absolute. (Sartre, 561)

We should note that for Sartre, too, as for Plato, unity binds freedom. But this still does not help us to understand how a particular individual becomes this individual. I find Sartre’s attempt to address that difficulty quite unconvincing:

In each tendency the person expresses himself completely, although from a different angle, a little as Spinoza’s substance expresses itself completely in each of its attributes. But if this is so, we should discover in each tendency, in each attitude of the subject, a meaning which transcends it. A jealousy of a particular date in which a subject historicizes himself in relation to a certain woman, signifies for the one who knows how to interpret it, the total relation to the world by which the subject constitutes himself as a self. In other words this empirical attitude is by itself the expression of the “choice of an intelligible character.” (Sartre, 563)

It is this choice that furnishes, Sartre suggests, the transcendent meaning of our empirical choices (Sartre, 564) If our fundamental project is to be God, every individual seizes that project by his or her own original choice of this original project.

As we see, like Heidegger, Sartre too wrests something like a constant self from the flow of time, where his analysis invites comparison with the world-establishing discussed by Heidegger in “The Origin of the Work of Art.” I have to say that I find this account anything but convincing. Indeed I find Schopenhauer’s discussion of character, with which it invites comparison, more persuasive. Be this as it may, I find such an original choice not just unbelievable, but quite unintelligible. And the problem seems to me to lie in the way Sartre wants to found value in freedom, instead of



founding it in the in-between of for-itself and in-itself. That would invite a reconsideration of the meaning of desire and its relationship, not just to freedom, but to the body.

4

I would therefore like to conclude this session with a discussion of Sartre's understanding of the slimy and its relation to value. It invites a reconsideration of Sartre's understanding of value and of the presuppositions on which it is based.

According to Sartre:

What ontology can teach psychoanalysis is first of all the true origin of the meaning of things and their true relation to human reality (Sartre, 603)

What then is that meaning? Given Sartre's ontology it is evident that it should be linked to that vain passion that we are, the desire to be God:

In each apprehension of quality, there is in this sense a metaphysical effort to escape from our condition so as to pierce through the shell of nothingness about the "there is" and to penetrate to the pure in itself, but obviously we can apprehend quality only as a symbol of a being which totally escapes us, even though it is totally there before us; in short, we can only make revealed being function as a symbol of being-in itself. (Sartre, 603-604)

How then are we to understand the meaning of things? Key here is our basic constitution: Sartre interprets it in terms of the original project. It is a project of appropriation. The slimy is discussed by Sartre as matter that resists such appropriation (Sartre, 605):

Slime is the agony of water. It presents itself as a phenomenon in process of becoming; it does not have the permanence within change that water has but on the contrary presents an accomplished break in a change of state. This fixed instability in the slimy discourages possession. Water is more fleeting, but it can be possessed in its very flight as something fleeting. The slimy flees with a heavy flight which has the same relation to water as the unwieldy earthbound flight of the chicken has to that of the hawk. Even that flight cannot be possessed because it denies itself as flight. (HC 607)

But we human beings are more like the chicken than the hawk. Slime would seem to figure the human condition:

Throw a slimy substance; it draws itself out, it displays itself, it flattens itself out, it is soft; touch the slimy; it does not flee, it yields...The slimy is compressible. It gives us at first the impression that it is a being which can be possessed...Only at the very moment when I believe that I possess it, behold by a curious reversal, it possesses me. Here appears its essential character: its softness is leech-like. (Sartre, 608)

By now it should have become evident that the slimy for Sartre figures not just human being, but more especially woman:

At this instant I suddenly understand the snare of the slimy: it is a fluidity which holds me and which compromises me; I cannot slide on this slime, all its suction cups hold me back; it cannot slide over me, it clings to me like a leech. The sliding however is not simply denied as in the case of the solid; it is degraded. The slimy seems to me to lend itself to me, in invites me: for a body of slime at rest is not noticeably distinct from a body of very dense liquid. But it is a trap. The sliding is sucked in by the sliding substance, and it leaves its traces upon me. The slime is like a liquid seen in a nightmare, where all its properties are animated by a sort of life and turn back against me. Slime is the revenge of the In-itself. A sickly-sweet feminine revenge which will be symbolized on another level by the quality "sugary." This is why the sugar-like sweetness to the taste—an indelible sweetness, which remains indefinitely in the mouth even after swallowing—perfectly completes the essence of the slimy. A sugar sliminess is the ideal of the slimy; it symbolizes the sugary death of the For-itself (like that of the wasp which sinks into the jam and drowns in it.) (Sartre 609)

A slimy world is a kind of hell, in which, as Augustine would have it, we can neither live or die:

The horror of the slimy is the horrible fear that time might become slimy, that facticity might progress continually and insensibly and absorb the For-itself which exists it. It is the fear, not of death, not of the pure In-itself, not of nothingness, but of a particular kind of being, which does not exist any more than the In-itself-For-itself and which is only represented by the slimy. It is an ideal being which I reject with all my strength and which haunts me as value haunts my being, an ideal being in which the foundationless In-itself has priority over the For-itself. We shall call it an Antivalue. (Sartre, 611)

Presupposed by this understanding of the slimy as an antivalue is Sartre's transformation of the Platonic eros into a desire for the fusion of freedom and necessity, a fusion figured by the beautiful. Presupposed in other words is what I earlier called an ethics of satisfaction. That goal is said to be a contradiction, but that does not mean that we ceaselessly pursue its earthly figures.

Here as its origin we grasp one of the most fundamental tendencies of human reality – the tendency to fill. We shall meet with this tendency again in the adolescent and in the adult. A good part of our life is passed in plugging holes, in filling empty places, in realizing and symbolically establishing a plenitude. The child recognizes as the results of his first experiences that he himself has holes. When he puts his fingers in his mouth, he tries to wall up the holes in his face; he expects that his finger will merge with his lips and the roof of his mouth and block up the buccal orifice as one fills a crack in a wall with cement; he seeks again the density, the uniform and spherical plenitude of Parmenidean being... (Sartre, 613)

It is from this standpoint that Sartre approaches sexuality, where we should note that this whole discussion is colored and distorted by his understanding of the fundamental project as a project to become God, and that means a project of appropriating the other. That already dooms all our relationships with others to failure. Given that project I have to use the other, and yet in the sexual act my own body compromises my freedom, as Augustine recognized. My own pride suffers shipwreck. And that shipwreck leads to a demonization of woman. It is such pride that lets Sartre speak of the essential “obscenity of the feminine sex,” which is said to be that of “everything which ‘gapes open.’” (Sartre 613) or lets him say:

Beyond any doubt her sex is a mouth and a voracious mouth which devours the penis—a fact which can easily lead to the idea of castration. The amorous act is the castration of the man. (Sartre, 614)

But again, is the fundamental project of the human being really the project to be God? Are human beings so ruled by pride that they cannot escape it? I remind you of Augustine's suggestion that it was not so much pride — the desire for godlike self-sufficiency — that caused Adam to fall, as it was human solidarity. Adam chose to exist in sin with Eve, as a mortal among mortals, rather than be free of sin but without her. The presence of God provided no adequate compensation. Sartre's interpretation of holes as essentially to be plugged up, does not quite ring true, especially not when we think of the human mouth; or of our other orifices. Think of the Midas myth. These holes open us to life, allow us to live and give life. We are back with Plato's distinction between a contemplative and a procreative eros. Sartre's problem, too, is that he privileges the former, without having a real place for the latter.

## 9. The Aesthetic Justification of Life

### 1

Last time we discussed Sartre's secularization of the Augustinian interpretation of the fall. I focused on the Augustinian understanding of pride, which Sartre takes over when he takes the fundamental project of the human being to be the project to become God. But if the human situation is correctly interpreted as ruled by this project, then the spirit of revenge, as Nietzsche understands it, i.e. the ill-will against time, is constitutive of it. **Time is then the anti-value.** It becomes associated with the devil. In *The Birth of Tragedy* this would seem to find expression in the wisdom of Silenus, to which I shall turn presently.

The same is true of **contingency**. Consider once more Sartre's thesis that our project is to become God. God is here understood as **freedom capable of grounding itself**. By contrast the existence of fallen humanity seems contingent, arbitrary, unjustified, and unjustifiable. **How can this contingent and temporal world be justified? How can my own being be justified?** To address this question let me now turn to Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*.

Written at the time of the Franco-Prussian War, that book is of course far more than its title suggests: It is not only an analysis of the birth of tragedy, but equally an analysis of its death, and a celebration of Wagner as the artist of genius who had brought about its rebirth. The death of tragedy is blamed on Socrates, but the tendency Nietzsche associates with Socrates is one that he takes to be constitutive of a tradition that includes modernity. Thus Nietzsche's Socrates is also a figure of Descartes. The critique of Socrates must thus be understood first of all as a critique of modernity, where the problem of modernity is also the problem of science?

And science, our science—indeed what is the significance of all science, viewed as a symptom of life? For what—worse yet, *whence* all science? How now? Is the resolve to be scientific about everything perhaps a kind of fear of, an escape from pessimism? A subtle last resort against — truth? And, morally speaking a kind of cowardice and falseness? Amorally speaking, a ruse? O Socrates,

Socrates, was that perhaps *your* secret? O enigmatic ironist, was that perhaps your — irony? (“An Attempt at a Self-Criticism,” 18)<sup>30</sup>

**What is the significance of wanting to be scientific about everything?** Take the attempt of utilitarianism to be scientific. Could that be, as Nietzsche calls it, a bulwark against truth: *Furcht und Ausflucht vor dem Pessimismus, Notwehr gegen die Wahrheit?* Against what truth? I take it against the truth that reality in itself has no meaning; meaning is a human creation. Can I justify an action with an appeal to utility? What is here being presupposed?

But how is “truth” being used here? What Truth are we defending ourselves against? Nietzsche’s answer is indebted to Schopenhauer:

There is an ancient story that King Midas hunted in the forest a long time for the wise Silenus, the companion of Dionysus, without capturing him. When Silenus at last fell into his hands, the king asked what was the best and most desirable thing for man. Fixed and immovable, the demigod said not a word, till at last, urged by the king, he gave a shrill laugh and broke into these words: “Oh, wretched ephemeral race, children of chance and misery, why do you compel me to tell you what it would be most expedient for you not to hear? What is best of all is utterly beyond your reach: not to be born, not to be, to be nothing. But the second best for you is — to die soon.” (*Birth of Tragedy*, 42)

Schopenhauer quotes the same lines from Theognis and also refers to *Oedipus at Colonus*<sup>31</sup> where we find these lines in abbreviated form.

Nietzsche suggests that science and art are competing strategies for coping with the dismal truth that found its philosophical expression in Schopenhauer’s pessimism:

Now it is as if the Olympian magic mountain had opened before us and revealed its roots to us. The Greek knew and felt the terror and horror of existence. That he might endure this terror at all, he had to interpose between himself and life the radiant dream-birth of the Olympians. That overwhelming dismay in the face of the titanic powers of nature, the Moira enthroned inexorably over all knowledge, the vulture of the great lover of mankind, Prometheus, the terrible

<sup>30</sup> Page references to Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. and with commentary by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, Inc., 1967).

<sup>31</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne, 2 vols. (New York: Dover, 1968), vol. II, p. 587.

fate of the wise Oedipus, the family curse of Atridae which drove Orestes to matricide: in short, that entire philosophy of the sylvan god, with its mythical exemplars, which caused the downfall of the melancholy Etruscans—all this was again and again overcome by the Greeks with the aid of the Olympian *middle world* of art; or at any rate it as veiled and withdrawn from sight. (*Birth of Tragedy*, 42)

The later preface suggests that, despite all that had changed, the central problem posed by this book had remained very much with him:

Still, I do not want to suppress entirely how disagreeable it now seems to me, how strange it appears now, after sixteen years—before a much older, a hundred times more demanding, but by no means colder eye which has not become a stranger to the task which this audacious book dared to tackle for the first time: to look at science in the perspective of the artist, but at art in that of life. (“An Attempt at Self-Criticism,” 19)

Let us follow the invitation extended by the quote and look at science from the vantage of the artist and at art from the vantage of life.

What is Nietzsche’s view of life? What is his view of nature? In *The Birth of Tragedy*, he gives a rather Schopenhauerian answer:

Though it is certain that of the two halves of our existence, the waking and the dreaming states, the former appeals to us as infinitely preferable, more important, excellent, and worthy of being lived — yet in relation to that mysterious ground of our being of which we are the phenomena, I should, paradoxical as it may seem, maintain the very opposite estimate of the value of our dreams. For the more clearly I perceive in nature those omnipotent art impulses, and in them an ardent longing for illusion, for redemption through illusion, the more I feel myself impelled to the metaphysical assumption that the truly existent primal unity, eternally suffering and contradictory, also needs the rapturous vision, the pleasurable illusion, for its continuous redemption. And we, completely wrapped up in this illusion and composed of it, are compelled to consider this illusion as the truly nonexistent — i.e. as a perpetual becoming in time, space, and causality — in other words, as empirical reality. (*Birth of Tragedy*, 44–45)

The debt to Schopenhauer is evident, although Nietzsche transforms Schopenhauer’s will into an artist who seeks redemption from his own suffering in an illusion. **To the essence of reality belongs illusion. Being is an endless process of self-transcendence.**

Nietzsche was to return to this point in the later preface:

Already in the preface addressed to Richard Wagner, art, and *not* morality, is presented as the truly *metaphysical* activity of man. In the book itself the suggestive sentence is repeated several times, that the existence of the world is *justified* only as an aesthetic phenomenon. Indeed, the whole book knows only an artistic meaning and crypto-meaning behind all events—a “god,” if you please, but certainly an entirely reckless and amoral artist-god who wants to experience, whether he is building or destroying, in the good and in the bad, his own joy and glory—one who, creating worlds, frees himself from the *distress* of fullness and *overfullness* and from the afflictions of the contradictions compressed in his soul. (“An Attempt at Self-Criticism,” 22)

Nietzsche’s metaphysics is an *Artisten-Metaphysik*. Being is understood in *The Birth of Tragedy* in the image of artistic activity, and what Schopenhauer called will is understood as such activity, as process tending towards form, *energeia* coming to rest in an *ergon*. This kind of metaphysics is not all that far removed from Plato’s or Aristotle’s. But what matters more to Nietzsche is the rejection of a higher meaning. And yet we human beings would seem to insist on such a meaning, on such a justification. What Nietzsche suggests is that such a justification will always be an *aesthetic representation of what is*. To repeat from *The Will to Power*: we have art so that we not perish of the truth. In the language of *The Birth of Tragedy*: *nur als aesthetisches Phaenomen ist das Dasein der Welt gerechtfertigt*. I would like to take a careful look at this formulation, focusing on the word “aesthetisch.” The word has been used in a number of different ways. In this session I shall look at one of these, which deserves special consideration, not only because it is associated with Baumgarten, the thinker who founded philosophical aesthetics and gave the discipline its name, but because he gave extraordinarily clear expression to a thinking that continues to shape the production of and thinking about art. Key here, to, is the way beauty is thought to deliver us from contingency and time. In the following session I shall look at Nietzsche’s formulation in the light of Schopenhauer’s aesthetics, which offers perhaps the most potent key to an understanding of Nietzsche’s proposal of the doctrine of the eternal recurrence as an evangel for the modern age, which I shall relate to some remarks on repetition in *Being and Time*.

## 2

But let me return to the proposition:

*nur als aesthetisches Phaenomen ist das Dasein der Welt gerechtfertigt.*

I want to focus on three words, *aesthetisches*, *Phaenomen*, and *gerechtfertigt*.

1. First, what is the meaning of *gerechtfertigt* (justified)? When I ask, “Why are you for doing what you are doing?” I demand a reason that will justify your action. And what justifies that reason? Is there a final ground to which can appeal? How does that ground present itself to you?

Similarly I can demand a reason for natural events, but once again whatever reason is given, it will invite further questioning. What reason is there for things being the way they are? A totally justified world would be one totally subject to the principle of sufficient reason as Leibniz understood it. When we ask for a justification of reason we ask thus for something beyond the particular action or fact that can function as its justifying ground. Traditionally this ground has been located in being, where such being would have to present itself to us as having to be just as it is, *sub specie necessitatis* or *aeternitatis*. Being is thought in opposition to possibility. I cannot think of what thus has being as possibly other than it is.

Being has served as a justification of becoming. Think of Plato’s forms. Similarly God has been understood as the justifying ground of the world. And Kant looks to pure practical reason to justify action. We appeal to the timeless to justify what is fleeting.

In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche still invokes God, if not the Biblical God:

For to our humiliation *and* exaltation, one thing above all must be clear to us.  
The entire comedy of art is neither performed for our betterment or education  
nor are we the true authors of this art world. On the contrary, we may assume  
that we are merely images and artistic projections for the true author, and that  
we have our highest dignity in our significance as works of art—for it is only as  
an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified—  
while of course our consciousness of our own significance hardly differs from  
that which the soldiers painted on canvas have of the battle represented on it.  
(*Birth of Tragedy*, 52)

Nietzsche here is indebted to Heraclitus who “compares the world building force to a playing child that places stones here and there and builds sand hills only to overthrow



them again” (142). How important is this introduction of “God” in *The Birth of Tragedy*? Can “God” simply be crossed out? Related is the question: how does Nietzsche understand the **artistic imagination**? How is it linked to being? Nietzsche here holds an inspiration theory, it would seem.

To claim that there can be only an aesthetic justification, is to reject any attempt to offer a moral interpretation, as Nietzsche emphasizes:

It was against morality that my instinct turned with this questionable book, long ago; it was an instinct that aligned itself with life and that discovered for itself a fundamentally opposite doctrine and valuation of life—purely artistic and anti-Christian. What to call it? As a philologist and man of words I baptized it, not without taking some liberty—for who could claim to know the rightful name of the Antichrist?—in the name of a Greek god: I called it Dionysian. (“An Attempt at Self Criticism,” 24)

That leaves us with the question: just how are we to understand Nietzsche’s Dionysus?

### 3

But let us turn now to the word “phenomenon.” The word is familiar from Kant and Schopenhauer. As Heidegger points out in *Being and Time*, “phenomenon” derives from *phainesthai*, to show itself. Kant thus calls the phenomenon an *Erscheinung*, an appearance. The word suggests appearance; something shows itself. But the way things look may be misleading. Appearance thus tends to confuse itself with illusion, *Schein*.

In modern philosophy phenomenon tends to be understood in opposition to reality, as appearance. Lambert, in his *Neues Organon*, thus understood phenomenology as an inquiry into the nature of appearance so that we might not fall prey to the illusions into which one falls when one uncritically entrusts oneself to it. Kant wanted to write a *phenomenologia generalis* and at one point (1770) in a letter to Lambert thought of calling what was to become the *Critique of Pure Reason* a “Phenomenology.”

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant splits the earlier concept of phenomenon into *Schein* and *Erscheinung*, illusion and appearance. The latter pertains to sensibility, the former to reason. (Cf. B 350): *Schein* is contrasted with truth:

Wahrheit oder Schein sind nicht im Gegenstande, sofern er angeschaut wird, sondern im Urteile über denselben, sofern er gedacht wird.

Truth or illusion are not in the object in so far as it is perceived, but in the judgment about the same, insofar as it is thought

Kant draws a distinction between *empirischer* und *transzendentaler Schein*. The latter is said to be a *natürliche und unvermeidbare Illusion*, a natural illusion that cannot be avoided. Natural illusions have their foundation in the fact that reason, by its very nature, cannot help but project what really has its foundation in its own mode of operation into things.

I want to suggest that Nietzsche understands by phenomena natural illusions, as opposed to merely subjective, and therefore arbitrary illusions. Consider this rather Kantian passage from *The Will to Power*, dating from 1887:

569. Our psychological perspective is determined by the following:

1. that communication is necessary, and that for there to be communication something has to be firm, simplified, capable of precision...Thus the fuzziness and chaos of sense impressions are, as it were, logicized.
2. The world of “phenomena” is an adapted world which we feel to be real.
3. The antithesis to the phenomenal world is not “the true world” but the formless, unformulable world of the chaos of sensations—another kind of phenomenal world, a kind “unknowable” for us.
4. Hypothesis that only subjects exist—that “object” is only a kind of effect produced by a subject upon a subject—a modus of the subject.<sup>32</sup>

In this sense, phenomena, for Nietzsche, are natural illusions. They have their foundation in the necessity of communication. They are transcendental conditions of the possibility of communication. The question is whether there could not be many ways of creating such an apparent world (*scheinbare Welt*).

Nietzsche tends to see this constitution in more artistic, subjective terms, although restraints are placed on such constructions by the material in question and by the requirements of communication.

#### 4

How then is “**aesthetic phenomenon**” to be understood? What does “**aesthetic**” add?

The beautiful illusion of the dream worlds, in the creation of which every man is truly an artist, is the prerequisite of all plastic art, and, as we shall see, of an

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<sup>32</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. and ed. Walter Kayfmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), pp. 306-307.

important part of poetry also. In our dreams we delight in the immediate understanding of figures; all forms speak to us; there is nothing **unimportant or superfluous** [“*es gibt nichts Gleichgültiges und Unnötiges*”] But even when this dream experience is most intense, we still have, glimmering through it, the sensation that it is **mere appearance**: at least this is my experience, and for its frequency—indeed, normality—I could adduce many proofs, including the sayings of the poets. (34)

Everything in our dreams, Nietzsche suggests, possesses significance and seems necessary and thus justified, although attended by a sense that it is just illusion (The latter, my own dreams tend to confirm, although I am not so sure about the former. Most of my dreams seem to me quite insignificant and not at all necessary).

But let us consider the word *aesthetisch*. It is well to remember that as Nietzsche uses it he is thinking first of all of Schopenhauer. But behind Schopenhauer stands Kant, and behind Kant stands Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten. He gave us the word as the name of a philosophical discipline in his dissertation of 1735. Baumgarten defined aesthetics as **the science of taste**, where taste again refers to the faculty of sensed perfection. Beauty is defined as nothing other as sensed perfection and so Baumgarten defines the experience of the beautiful as a perception of perfection that is clear, but not distinct. The formulation looks back to Descartes, mediated here by Leibniz and Wolff.

## 5

The phrase *clear, but not distinct* is used to distinguish the perception of the beautiful from a perception that is *clear and distinct*. What then does Descartes mean by **clear and distinct**? In the *Principles* Descartes offers us the following definition:

I term that clear and distinct which is present to an attentive mind in the same way as we assert that we see objects clearly when, being present to the regarding eye, they operate upon it with sufficient strength. But the distinct is that which is so precise and different from all other objects that it contains within itself nothing but what is clear.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> René Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, I, XLV, *Philosophical Works of Descartes*, 2 vols., trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (New York: Dover, 1955), vol. I, p.237.

What presents itself clearly and distinctly is thus transparent. In it there is nothing that escapes the mind's grasp. Nothing is hidden, no mystery remains. From Descartes' definition it follows that whatever we are presented by our eyes may be clear, but can never be distinct; for to see something clearly and distinctly is to see it totally and with complete adequacy. The phenomenon of perspective precludes this. Perspectival understanding is inevitably partial. Clarity and distinctness demands thus a stand-point beyond perspective, the stand-point of thought. The evidence of perspective has to be replaced with a more perfect inner evidence. The self-certainty of the cogito is supposed to provide Descartes with his paradigm.

According to Descartes it is only the clear and distinct that gives us access to truth and to reality itself. **Reality is given its measure in our ability to comprehend it.**

Sensory perception has to be transformed into intellectual knowledge if it is to lead us to the truth. A downgrading of the senses is the inevitable consequence. It follows that if art is not to give up its claim to serve the truth, it must become as much like thought as possible, i.e., it must destroy itself as art. Nietzsche would have objected that what is called "reality" is but a human construction.

Descartes himself spent little time discussing perceptions that are clear, but not distinct. But their importance for aesthetics is brought out by a passage in Leibniz's *Discourse on Metaphysics*:

When I am able to recognize a thing among others, without being able to say in what its difference and characteristics consist, the knowledge is confused.

Sometimes indeed we may know clearly, that is without being in the slightest doubt, that a poem or a picture is well or badly done because there is in it an "I don't know what" which satisfies or shocks us. Such knowledge is not yet distinct.<sup>34</sup>

For Leibniz the knowledge that something is beautiful is thus clear, but not distinct. To know something distinctly is to be able to explain what something is. This is not the case with our perception of the beautiful.

Leibniz himself spent little time on beauty and clearly subordinates the clear and confused to the clear and distinct. The former is rehabilitated to some extent by his

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<sup>34</sup> Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics* XXIV, trans. Montgomery (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1953).

follower Christian Wolff. Wolff argues that our knowledge of particulars is never clear and distinct. I have no clear and distinct understanding of this tree in its particularity. Whatever I can say clearly and distinctly about this tree may indeed yield a description definite enough to single it out from all others, but this description will fit infinitely many possible trees, very much like the one I am now describing, equally well. But this is to say that the tree in its concrete particularity has eluded my description. To confine oneself to the clear and distinct is to confine oneself to abstractions from concrete particulars. To the extent that nature is understood clearly and distinctly it is inevitably understood as just happening to be as it is, as radically contingent. The discipline that, according to Wolff, deals above all with particulars is history, which is concerned with individuals. As the science of particulars, history has to take its place beside philosophy if our understanding of reality is not to remain one-sided.

It was Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, who, by applying Wolff's insights into history to art, became the founder of modern aesthetics. Baumgarten distinguishes **understanding** from **sensibility** as **distinct** from **confused** perception. A thought becomes distinct as I abstract from the concrete texture of reality

Par. 14. Distinct representations, complete, adequate, profound through every degree, are not sensate, and, therefore, not poetic<sup>35</sup>

Baumgarten infers from this the essential difference between poetic and philosophical discourse:

This is the principal reason why philosophy and poetry are scarcely ever thought able to perform the same office, since philosophy pursues conceptual distinctness above everything else, while poetry does not strive to attain this, as falling outside its province.

So far what I have said does not really allow us to distinguish history in Wolff's sense from poetry. Both are examples of sensate discourse. The difference is suggested by Baumgarten's definition of poetry as **perfect sensate discourse** or of the experience of the beautiful as **a perception of perfection that is clear, but not distinct**.

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<sup>35</sup> Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Reflections on Poetry*, trans. Karl Aschenbrenner and William B. Holther (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1954),

## 6

In his *Metaphysics* Baumgarten defines **perfection** as follows:

If many things considered together contain the reason for some other thing,  
they harmonize in respect to this thing. This harmony is perfection.<sup>36</sup>

In this sense the different steps of a proof may be said to harmonize with respect to the theorem to be proved. But the perfection of a proof must be distinguished from the perfection of a work of art, from beauty. **Beauty** Baumgarten understands as **perceived perfection**:

Perfection, in so far as it is to be found in appearance or in so far as it is  
recognized by the faculty of taste in its widest sense, is beauty.<sup>37</sup>

The notion of perfection refers thus to a manifold united by a common theme. The simple is thus never beautiful, a point Aristotle had already made in his *Poetics*. The beautiful is an **organized whole**. To appreciate beauty is to appreciate connections. Baumgarten thus likens **taste**, i.e. the faculty by which beauty is appreciated, to **reason**. But while the latter has a clear and distinct grasp of these connections, taste grasps them more intuitively. Or, to quote Baumgarten once more:

The faculty of recognizing the connections between things indistinctly is the  
analogon of reason (*analogon rationis*).<sup>38</sup> (**[cite]**)

This “analogon rationis” is taste. Just as logic is the science that investigates the norms that govern clear and distinct reasoning, aesthetics investigates the norms governing taste.

The implications of Baumgarten's understanding of the work of art are spelled out in the dissertation by his discussion of the poem's theme.

Par. 66. By **theme** we mean that whose representation contains the sufficient reason of other representations supplied in the discourse, but which does not have its own sufficient reason in them.

In creating a unity out of a manifold the poet is like another god, the work he creates like another world, having its own closure. The simile leads Baumgarten to make the following provocative claim:

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<sup>36</sup> Baumgarten, *Metaphysica* (Halle, Hemmerden, 1779), par. 73.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> *Metaphysica*, par. 640.

We observed a little while ago that the poet is like a maker or creator. So the poem ought to be like a world. Hence by analogy whatever is evident to the philosophers concerning the real world, the same ought to be thought of a poem.

This is to say that whatever the metaphysicians have said about the world is by analogy true of the poem. Aesthetics can thus appropriate the propositions of metaphysics — where Baumgarten is thinking above all of Leibniz and Wolff — if it understands them “by analogy.” Take Leibniz’s *Monadology*, which represents the world as a perfectly ordered whole. The philosopher’s discourse, to be sure, aims to be not sensate, but clear and distinct. But note what the simile suggests: the work of art has a structure that is very much like that of Leibniz’s best of all possible worlds. The poem’s theme is its God. Or, we can say, the world is a poem that has God for its theme. Today we are, to be sure, unlikely to be convinced by Leibniz’s metaphysics. But note that Baumgarten’s simile does not depend for its effectiveness on whether Leibniz is right or wrong. Baumgarten invites us, although this is hardly what he intended, to read the *Monadology* as a philosophical poem that presents a world whose order is not secured by clear and distinct reasoning but by an act of imagination. Just this makes it a poem, despite its medium.

According to Baumgarten, and in essence according to Aristotle in his *Poetics*, the work of art should contain nothing that does not make a direct contribution to the revelation of the theme. In a good poem nothing can be left out or added without a loss of perfection. Baumgarten speaks in this sense of the absolute brevity of a successful poem.

But let me return to the word “perfection.” It leads to the very center of the problematic divorce of the beautiful from the true and the good. To speak of the beauty as *perfection* is to insist on the self-sufficiency of the beautiful. The aesthetic object, and more especially the successful work of art, is autonomous: its point is not to refer beyond itself, to express some edifying thought or to represent some cherished object or person. To praise it for being true or to condemn it for being false is to have missed what matters: that it present itself to us as an **absorbing presence**. Presenting itself to us as being just as it should be, a beautiful work of art delivers us from the sense of arbitrariness and contingency that is so much part of our everyday life, that again and again lets us wonder: why this and not that? Absorbed in a work of art, we no longer face different possibilities. But this is to say also that we no longer face the future. In time, the artwork’s perfection

lifts the burden of time, allowing us to exist, if only for a moment, in a seemingly timeless present. Thus it answers to Plato's contemplative eros.

## 7

If the existence of the world is *justified* only as an aesthetic phenomenon it follows that human beings as such do not possess dignity. The ascription of such dignity to them is itself an aesthetic justification. According to Nietzsche, man as he exists in himself lacks dignity (*Würde*). What is "*Würde*"? An obvious place to look for an answer is Schiller's Kant-inspired *Über Anmut und Würde*: there he understands *Würde* as

*Ausdruck einer erhabenen Gesinnung...*

*Bei der Würde also führt sich der Geist im Körper als Herrscher auf, denn hier hat er seine Selbständigkeit gegen den gebieterischen Trieb zu behaupten.*

[Dignity is the] expression of a sublime state of mind...

In the case of dignity, thus, the spirit acts as ruler in the body, for here he has to maintain its autonomy against the demanding impulse.)<sup>39</sup>

Man, according to Schiller, has *Würde* only because he is more than a natural being. He must transcend himself as just a natural being. This is the Platonic and the Kantian interpretation. But what if we cannot appeal to such a supersensible essence? Then, Nietzsche suggests, human beings must themselves produce an ideal or theme that will illuminate their lives. The construction of such an ideal is the task of genius. Thus we find Nietzsche writing in *Der griechische Staat*:

Ich dachte, der kriegerische Mensch wäre ein *Mittel* des militärischen Genius und seine Arbeit wiederum nur ein Mittel desselben Genius; und nicht ihm, als absolutem Menschen und Nichtgenius, sondern ihm als Mittel des Genius — der auch seine Vernichtung als Mittel des kriegerischen Kunstwerkes belieben kann, — komme ein Grad von *Würde* zu, jener *Würde* nämlich, *zum Mittel des Genius gewürdigt zu sein*.

I thought, the warrior were a means of the military genius; and his labor again as a means of the same genius; and a degree of dignity belonged to him, not as an absolute human being and non-genius, but as the means of genius, which might even choose to destroy

<sup>39</sup> Friedrich von Schiller, "Über Anmut und Würde," *Schillers Werke*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Leipzig, Bibliographisches Institut, n.d.), vol 7, p. 137, 146.]



him as means to the military work of art, as having been considered worthy of having been considered such a means<sup>40</sup>

Nietzsche generalizes this thought and maintains that only the work of the genius gives dignity.

In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche speaks of *die schönen Verführungsworte von der Würde des Menschen und der Würde der Arbeit as verbraucht*, of the beautiful seductive words of the dignity of man and of labor as worn out.

Let us mark this well: the Alexandrian culture, to be able to exist permanently, requires a slave class, but with its optimistic view of life it denies the necessity of such a class, and consequently, when its beautifully seductive and tranquillizing utterances about the “dignity of man” and “the dignity of labor” are no longer effective, it gradually drifts toward a dreadful destruction. There is nothing more terrible than a class of barbaric slaves who have learned to regard their existence as an injustice, and now prepare to avenge, not only themselves, but all generations. In the face of such threatening storms, who dares to appeal to our pale and exhausted religions, the very foundations of which have degenerated into scholarly religions? (*Birth of Tragedy*, 111)

Only the work of genius, Nietzsche insists, can justify life and give it dignity. The human being must then serve art in one of two ways: by becoming a genius or by subordinating himself to the work of a genius. The latter defines the place Nietzsche assigned in *The Birth of Tragedy* to Wagner.

Given what I have said, we may well think of Nietzsche’s aestheticism in Kierkegaard’s terms. And yet Kierkegaard presents us with a sketch of the aesthetic life only to criticize it: the aesthetic individual, unable to find meaning in reality, replaces it with aesthetic constructions and as a result becomes alienated from reality. He lives in the subjunctive. Nietzsche on the other hand sees the turn to art as a turn to life. The turn to tragedy is to allow the greatest possible self-affirmation. Perhaps we should distinguish here between a **merely aesthetic** and a **mythic** work of art. Wagner could then be discussed as the inventor of a tragic myth. To be healthy, Nietzsche insists a culture needs the illumination of myth:

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<sup>40</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “Der griechische Staat,” *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montioni (Berlin/New York: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag/de Gruyter, 1980), vol.1, pp. 775-776.

But without myth every culture loses the healthy powers of its creativity: only a horizon defined by myths completes and unifies a whole cultural movement. Myth alone saves all the powers of the imagination and of the Apollonian dream from aimless wanderings. The images of youth have to be the unnoticed and omnipresent demonic guardians, under whose care the young soul grows to maturity and whose signs help the man to interpret his life and struggles. Even the state knows no more powerful unwritten laws than the mythical foundation that guarantees its connection with religion and its growth form mythical notions.

By way of comparison let us now picture the abstract man, untutored by myth; abstract education; abstract morality; the abstract state; let us imagine the lawless roving of the artistic imagination, unchecked by any native myth; let us think of a culture that has no fixed and primordial site but is doomed to exhaust all possibilities and to nourish itself wretchedly on all other cultures — there we have the present age. (*Birth of Tragedy*, 135)

How are we to understand Nietzsche's claim that myth is necessary to keep the imagination from "aimless wandering"? What is the "*fester und heiliger Ursitz einer Kultur*" ("fixed and primordial site of a culture")? Note here the earth metaphors, the desperate search for roots, for a rebirth of a new German myth on Dionysian foundations. To be sure, this is the young Nietzsche speaking. Soon he was to turn into a vitriolic critic of all things German. Not so in *The Birth of Tragedy*:

We think so highly of the pure and vigorous core of the German character that we dare to expect of it above all others this elimination of the forcibly implanted foreign elements, and consider it possible that the German spirit will return to itself. Some may suppose that this spirit must begin its fight with the elimination of everything Romanic. If so they may recognize an external preparation and encouragement in the victorious fortitude and bloody glory of the last war; but one must still seek the inner necessity in the ambition to be always worthy of the sublime champions on this way, Luther as well as our great artists and poets. But let him never believe that he could fight similar fights without the gods of his house, or his mythical home, without "bringing back" all German things! And if the German should hesitantly look around for a leader who might bring him back again into his long lost home whose ways and paths he hardly knows anymore, let him merely listen to the ecstatically luring call of the Dionysian bird that hovers above him and wants to point the way for him. (*Birth of Tragedy*, 138–139)

At this point the text sounds an ominous note. We need a *Führer*, Nietzsche tells his readers, and this call did not go unheard.

## 8

In the later preface Nietzsche criticizes the early work:

To say it once more: today I find it an impossible book: I consider it badly written, ponderous, embarrassing, image-mad and image-confused, sentimental, in places saccharine to the point of effeminacy, uneven in tempo, without the will to logical cleanliness, very convinced and therefore disdainful of proof, mistrustful even of the *propriety* of proof, a book for initiates, “music” for those dedicated to music, those who are closely related to begin with on the basis of common and rare experiences, “music” meant as a sign of recognition for close *relatives in artibus*—an arrogant and rhapsodic book that sought to exclude right from the beginning the profanum vulgus of the “educated” even more than “the mass” or “folk.” (“An Attempt at Self-Criticism,” 19)

What he had substituted for clear thinking was “music,” romantic music:

But, my dear sir, what in the world is romantic if *your* book isn’t? Can deep hatred against “the Now,” against “reality” and “modern ideas” be pushed further than you pushed it in your artists’ metaphysics? Believing sooner in the Nothing, sooner in the devil than in “the Now”? Is it not a deep bass of wrath and the lust for destruction that we hear humming underneath all of your contrapuntal vocal art and seduction of the ear, a furious resolve against everything that is “now,” a will that is not too far removed from practical nihilism and that seems to say: “sooner let nothing be true than that you should be right, than that your truth should be proved right!” (“An Attempt at Self-Criticism,” 25)

What is the relation between *romantisch* and *dionysisch*? Nietzsche now criticizes *The Birth of Tragedy* for having confused the two. In *Morgenröte* Nietzsche will have this to say about romanticism:

*es wird zu viel Kraft an alle möglichen Totenerweckungen gewegeworfen.  
Vielleicht versteht man die ganze Bewegung der Romantik am besten aus diesem Gesichtspunkte.*

Too much energy is wasted on all sorts of resurrections of the dead. Perhaps the whole movement of romanticism is best understood from this point of view.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Morgenröthe*, **III**, **159**, *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montionari (Berlin/New York: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag/de Gruyter, 1980), vol.1, p. 145.

## 10. Repetition and Redemption

### 1

I pointed out that Sartre appropriates the Augustinian understanding of pride when he makes the impossible project to become God the fundamental project of the human being. If the human situation is indeed correctly interpreted as ruled by this project, then the spirit of revenge, as Nietzsche understands it, i.e. the ill-will against time, is constitutive of it. **Time then becomes the anti-value.** Value comes to be defined in opposition to time. Let me quote Sartre once more:

Ontology has revealed to us, in fact, the origin and the nature of value; we have seen that value is the lack in relation to which the for-itself determines its being as a lack.<sup>42</sup>

“The lack in relation to which the for-itself determines its being as a lack” is the absent whole, the absent being that according to the *Symposium* is the object of eros, i.e. beauty:

By the very fact that the for-itself exists, as we have seen, value arises to haunt its being for-itself. It follows that the various tasks of the for-itself can be made the object of an existential psychoanalysis, for they all aim at producing the missing synthesis of consciousness and being in the form of value or self-cause.

43

The missing synthesis is understood as the value that haunts human being. With this Sartre has given us his account of eros. If Plato's eros mediates between being and becoming, Sartre's value mediates between for-itself and in-itself. It, too, provides something like a bridge, although such mediation is not so much an achievement as a promise that will always go unfulfilled. If for Plato every apprehension of beauty in this life is a recollection of a timeless beauty, so for Sartre everything we value, and that goes especially for beauty, is only a symbol of what must totally escape us:

In each apprehension of quality, there is in this sense a metaphysical effort to escape from our condition so as to pierce through the shell of nothingness about the “there is” and to penetrate to the pure in itself, but obviously we can apprehend quality only as a symbol of a being which totally escapes us, even

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<sup>42</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 626

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

though it is totally there before us; in short, we can only make revealed being function as a symbol of being-in itself.<sup>44</sup>

Human being is said by Sartre to be a vain passion. But that does not prevent human beings from giving meaning to their lives by creating such symbols that hint at the synthesis of for-itself and the in-itself, becoming and being. Beauty in the *Symposium* has such a symbolic function. Mundane beauty hints at an experience that will lift us out of time:

What may we suppose to be the felicity of the man who sees absolute beauty in its essence, pure and unalloyed, who, instead of a beauty tainted by human flesh and color and a mass of perishable rubbish, is able to apprehend divine beauty where it exists apart and alone. (*Symposium*, 94–95)

And in Schopenhauer, who explicitly invokes Plato by linking the experience of the beautiful to what he takes to be the apprehension of a Platonic idea, we meet with a similar understanding. In time such apprehension is said to lift the burden of time.

## 2

That understanding of the beautiful should by now be familiar. When we experience something aesthetically our normal attitude to things is bracketed. The voices of the everyday are silenced. That is implied by Kant's understanding of the beautiful as object of an entirely disinterested satisfaction. This is how Schopenhauer describes the experience of the beautiful:

Raised up by the power of the mind, we relinquish the ordinary way of considering things and cease to follow under the guidance of the forms of the principle of sufficient reason merely their relations to one other, whose final goal is always the relation to our own will. Thus we no longer consider the where, the when, the why, and the whither in things, but simply and solely the *what*. Further, we do not let abstract thought, the concepts of reason, take possession of our consciousness, but, instead of all this, devote the whole power of our mind to perception, sink ourselves completely therein, and let our whole consciousness be filled by the calm contemplation of the natural object actually present, whether it be a landscape, a tree, a rock, a crag, a building, or anything else. We *lose* ourselves entirely in this object, to use a pregnant expression; in other words we forget even our individuality, our will, and continue only to exist

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 603-604.

only as pure subject, as clear mirror of the object, so that it is as though the object alone existed without anyone to perceive it, and thus we are no longer able to separate the perceiver from the perception, but the two have become one, since the entire consciousness is filled and occupied by a single image of perception. (WWR vol. I, 178–179)

In aesthetic experience the human being exploits that distance from his desiring self, a distance that is part of his intellectual nature and makes him a being that not only desires, but knows. But such knowledge is here divorced from reason. The beautiful falls outside logical space, a point with which the young Wittgenstein would have agreed. As falling into logical space the thing is experienced as just happening to be. The experience of its beauty views it *sub specie aeternitatis*. For a time the will within us is negated. The human being is no longer interested—here Schopenhauer's debt to Kant requires no comment. For a time, time seems to stand still. Art

therefore pauses at this particular thing; it stops the wheel of time; for it the relations vanish; its object is only the essential, the Idea. We can, therefore, define it accurately as the way of considering things independently of the principle of sufficient reason, in contrast to the way of considering them which proceeds in exact accordance with this principle, and is the way of science and experience. This latter method of consideration can be compared to an endless line running horizontally, and the former to a vertical line cutting the horizontal at any point. The method of consideration that follows the principle of sufficient reason is the rational method, and it alone is valid and useful in practical life and in science. The method of consideration that looks away from the content of this principle is the method of genius, which is valid and useful in art alone. The first is Aristotle's method of; the second is, on the whole, Plato's. (WWR vol. I, 185)

Schopenhauer thus understands “the gift of genius” as “nothing but the completest objectivity” (WWR vol. I, 185–186). It follows that for Schopenhauer, spectator and artist are essentially the same:

The work of art is merely a means of facilitating that knowledge in which this pleasure consists. That the Idea comes to us more easily from the work of art than directly from nature and from reality, arises solely from the fact that the artist, who knew only the Idea and not reality, clearly repeated in his work only the Idea, separated it out from reality, and omitted all disturbing contingencies. (WWR vol. I, 195)

Why does the aesthetic experience please? Why do we take pleasure in the beautiful? By now Schopenhauer's answer should be obvious: art offers us something like redemption from our temporal situation. The temporality of aesthetic experience is thus very different from the temporality of everyday life. It allows us to exist, as it were, in the present, at one with ourselves. In time it promises to give us a fleeting deliverance from the burden of time, a secular redemption. It delivers us, if only for a time, from that contradiction between what we are and what we want that is part of our being.

## 3

As interest is bracketed, the aesthetic experience is no longer concerned with the particular thing in its reality. But Schopenhauer understands the Platonic idea as a representation that as such is still subject to the form of subject and object, but not to the principle of sufficient reason. Pure knowing, as he understands it, and the Platonic idea belong together:

The individual, as such, knows only particular things; the pure subject of knowledge knows only Ideas. For the individual is the subject of knowledge in its relation to a definite particular phenomenon of will and in subjection thereto. (WWR vol. I, 179)

In the aesthetic experience the human being frees himself from this subjection. Thus freeing himself, he also frees himself from his individuality. Within time he is himself in a sense transported *beyond* time. Once more we should think of Diotima's ladder.

For the Idea and the pure subject of knowing always appear simultaneously in consciousness as necessary correlatives, and with this appearance all distinction of time at once vanishes, as both are wholly foreign to the principle of sufficient reason in all its forms. Both lie outside the relations laid down by this principle; they can be compared to the rainbow and the sun that take no part in the constant movement and succession of the falling drops. Therefore if, for example, I contemplate a tree aesthetically, i.e., with artistic eyes, and thus recognize not it, but its Idea, it is immediately of no importance whether it is this tree or its ancestor that flourished a thousand years ago, and whether the contemplator is this individual or any other living anywhere and at any time. The particular thing and the knowing individual are abolished with the principle of sufficient reason, and nothing remains but the Idea and the pure subject of knowing, which



together constitute the adequate objectivity of will at this grade. (WWR vol. I, 209)

Here we get a sense of the importance of **repetition**. When I experience the first snowflake of winter and experience it as a repetition of what I have experienced many times before, I seem to touch what transcends the here and now. Or think of experiences where we have a sense that what we are now experiencing we experienced in just this way once before, perhaps in our childhood, in some immemorial past. And could one not consider the good life in analogous fashion: as a life experienced as a repetition of some remembered archetype? Heidegger speaks of the authentic life as such a repetition, where instead of speaking of a Platonic idea or an archetype he invokes a hero. Think of a Christian who attempts to live his life as an imitation of Christ,

For Plato, too, the good life may be understood as a repetition of the forms. Similarly the beautiful is understood as the descent of the Platonic idea into the visible: *splendor formae*, as the medievals put it. Beauty is understood as the epiphany of the Platonic idea:

When clouds move, the figures they form are not essential, but indifferent to them. But that as elastic vapor they are pressed together, driven off, spread out, and torn asunder by the force of the wind, this is their nature, this is the essence of the forces that are objectified in them, this is the Idea. The figures in each case are only for the individual observer. To the brook which rolls downward over the stones, the eddies, waves, the foam-forms exhibited by it are indifferent and inessential; but that it follows gravity, and behaves as an inelastic, perfectly mobile, formless, and transparent fluid, this is its essential nature, this, if known through perception, is the Idea. Those foam-forms exist only for us so long as we know as individuals. The ice on the window-pane is formed into crystals according to the laws of crystallization, which reveal the essence of the natural force here appearing, which exhibit the Idea. But the trees and flowers formed by the ice on the window-pane are inessential, and exist only for us. What appears in clouds, brook, and crystal is the feeblest echo of that will which appears more completely in the plant, still more completely in the animal, and most completely in man. (WWR vol. I, 182)

Like Sartre, Schopenhauer takes the human being haunted by a plenitude denied to him by his being. As the reasonable animal the human is concerned for his being and therefore also about the possible lack of being, i.e. his death:

Man alone carries about with him, in abstract conceptions, the certainty of his death. (WWR vol. 1, 281)

Philosophy and religion, Schopenhauer suggests, are responses to this dread, but what is it that makes death so terrifying? Is it that life is so pleasant? Schopenhauer could hardly find this a convincing answer. Death has indeed often been thought of as a release. Is it then simply the thought of our non-existence that fills us with dread? But were this the case the time before we were born would harbor as much dread as thoughts of the time when we shall be no longer:

If what makes death seem so terrible to us were the thought of non-existence, we should necessarily think with equal horror of the time when as yet we did not exist. For it is irrefutably certain that non-existence after death cannot be different from non-existence before infinity ran its course when we did not yet exist, but this in no way disturbs us. On the other hand, we find it hard, and even unendurable, that after the momentary intermezzo of an ephemeral existence, a second infinity should follow in which we shall exist no longer, (WWR vol. II, 466)

Why this dissimilarity between past and future non-existence? Is it because death is a particularly painful experience? Again the answer must be no: death is not experienced at all. As Epicurus put it, when we are, death is not, and when death is, we are not. How then are we to understand the fear of death? That fear is not supported by any reason:

The fear of death is, in fact, independent of all knowledge, for the animal has it, although it does not know death. Everything that is born already brings this fear into the world. Such fear of death, however, is *a priori* only the reverse side of the will-to-live, which indeed we all are. Therefore in every animal the fear of its own destruction, like the care for its maintenance, is inborn. Thus it is this fear of death, and not the mere avoidance of pain, that shows itself in the anxious care and caution with which the animal seeks to protect itself, and still more its brood, from everyone who might become dangerous. (WWR vol. II, 465)

The fear of death has no rational ground, but is just the other side of the will to live. Thus it could be said to be inseparable from the essence of the human being. That is the way we are.

This will-to-live, which has two faces, one directed to self, the other to one's offspring, is certainly not informed by a prior judgment that life is worth living. We just

want to live and want our offspring to live. We have not chosen to adopt this stance. It simply describes our being. Schopenhauer finds in the fear of death confirmation of his thesis that the human being is first of all a willing and not a knowing being.

And yet, what are we to make of the fact that we do not usually worry all that much about death? What kind of a culture would be most obsessed with and find it most difficult to accept death? I suspect that it would have to be one where the individual understands himself as his own end, as sufficient unto himself instead of as part of a larger order. If the human being on the other hand understands himself as part of something ongoing and larger that endures even when he is no longer, then his death will become more acceptable, even something one might choose for the sake of the larger whole. In the second volume Schopenhauer thus calls attention to the example of a Frenchman, whose son had received a draft notice, and who committed suicide so that his son would not be drafted (sons of widows were exempt from the draft). How are we to understand such self-sacrifice? It makes sense only if the peasant understands himself as part of larger order. What shows itself here is, according to Schopenhauer, something that links human beings to animals:

Since, however, animals are incapable of any reflection, the instinctive maternal affection in their case (the male is generally not conscious of his paternity) shows itself directly and genuinely, and hence with perfect distinctness and in all its strength. At bottom it is the expression of the consciousness in the animal that its true inner being lies more immediately in the species than in the individual. Therefore, in case of necessity, the animal sacrifices its own life, so that the species may be maintained in the young. Here, therefore, as well as in the sexual impulse, the will-to-live becomes to a certain extent transcendent, since its consciousness extends beyond the individual, in which it is inherent, to the species. (WWR vol. II, 515)

One should see here a connection between this and the Biblical account, which makes death the punishment of pride. For what is pride? It is the desire to be like God, to be self-sufficient. But the human being is not like God, even if he often aspires to godlike status. And nowhere does this fact that we are not God show itself more completely than in the certainty that we must die. In this sense St. Augustine can emphasize that death is a fitting punishment for pride. It is fitting because it offers a remedy for sin, a recognition that we do not belong to ourselves but to God, that we are not sufficient to

ourselves, but exist more fundamentally as parts. With Schopenhauer the recognition of being as a part expresses itself in a procreative eros: in sexual desire and in care for the young. A human being who remains caught up in pride, who sees the end of his life as satisfaction of his individual self, must end in despair:

Death is the great reprimand that the will-to-live, and more essentially the egoism essential thereto, receives through the course of nature; and it can be conceived as a punishment for our existence. Death is the painful untying of the knot that generation with sensual pleasure had tied; it is the violent destruction, bursting in from outside, of the fundamental error of our true nature, the great disillusionment. At bottom, we are something that ought not to be; therefore we cease to be. Egoism really consists in man's restricting all reality to his own person, in that he imagines that he lives in this alone, and not in others. Death teaches him something better, since it abolishes this person, so that man's true nature, that is his will, will henceforth live only in other individuals. (WWR vol. II, 507)

Given egoism, death must seem to undercut all meaning.

Can we give content to the phrase "the human being exists as a part"? How does Schopenhauer conceive of this being as a part? We have already been given his answer:

For individual knowledge, on the other hand, and hence in time, the *Idea* exhibits itself under the form of the *species*, and this is the *Idea* drawn apart by entering into time. The *species* is therefore the most immediate objectification of the thing in itself, i.e., of the will-to-live. Accordingly, the innermost being of every animal, and of man also lies in the *species*; thus the will-to-live, which is so powerfully active, has its root in the species, not really in the individual. On the other hand, immediate consciousness is to be found only in the individual; therefore it imagines itself to be different from the species, and therefore fears death. The will-to-live manifests itself in reference to the individual as hunger and the fear of death: in reference to the species as sexual impulse and passionate care for the offspring. In agreement with this, we find nature, as being free from that delusion of the individual, just as careful for the maintenance of the species as she is indifferent to the destruction of the individuals; for her the latter are always only means, the former the end. (WWR vol. II, 484–485)

This is in accord with that inversion of the traditional anthropology that we can call Schopenhauer's "iceberg" view of man: the individual is only the tip of the iceberg.

But in many ways we behave not so much as individuals, but as members of the species. Schopenhauer points here especially to the sexual impulse, where that impulse, which Schopenhauer in no way affirms, but rather deplores as the strongest expression of the will, is tied to procreation and care for the resulting offspring. Sex, for Schopenhauer, is not first of all an instrument that we use to amuse ourselves and others. That would be a superficial view of sex, in keeping with a superficial view of the self as first of all an individual. It would be more correct to say the opposite: the individual is an instrument of sex. Schopenhauer understands the sexual impulse as the most complete manifestation of the will to live. This impulse, as Schopenhauer understands it, is intimately linked to the ability to sacrifice oneself (Cf. Plato's *Symposium*, e.g., the reference to Alcestis who is willing to die so that her husband may live). And in this respect the human being is more of an animal than he may like to think.

It is a view that we have to take seriously. We need not think here only of the care of children in which most of us overcome at least in part our natural egoism. In Plato's *Symposium*, where this is considered the lowest form of eros, Diotima speaks of spiritual children. The artist and the statesman also give birth, creating a community that endures through time and in this sense extends beyond the individual and his death.

#### 4

But Schopenhauer also offers a second metaphysical consideration designed to show that death is not really a threat to our essence, even if it does mean the end of the individual. Let us remember again that for Schopenhauer the human being is an objectification of the will. As individual he is phenomenon, subject to the principle of sufficient reason and thus to time. But as will, the human being also transcends time:

We, however, wish to consider life philosophically, that is to say, according to its Ideas, and then we shall find that neither the will, the thing-in-itself in all phenomena, nor the subject of knowing, the spectator of all phenomena, is in any way affected by birth and death. Birth and death belong only to the phenomenon of the will, and hence to life; and it is essential to this that it manifest itself in individuals that come into being and pass away, as fleeting phenomena, appearing in the form of time, of that which in itself knows no time, but must be manifested precisely in the way aforesaid in order to objectify its real nature. Birth and death belong equally to life, and hold the balance as

mutual conditions of each other, or, if the expression is preferred, as poles of the whole phenomenon of life. The wisest of all mythologies, the Indian, expresses this by giving to the very god who symbolizes destruction and death (just as Brahma, the most sinful and the lowest god of the Trimurti, symbolizes generation, origination, and Vishnu preservation), by giving, I say, to Shiva as an attribute not only the necklace of skulls, but also the lingam, that symbol of generation, which appears as the counterpart of death. In this way it is intimated that generation and death are essentially correlatives which reciprocally neutralize and eliminate each other. It was precisely the same sentiment that prompted the Greeks and Romans to adorn the costly sarcophagi, just as we still see them, with feasts, dances, marriages, hunts, fights between wild beasts, bacchanalia, that is with presentations of life's most powerful urge. (WWR vol. I, 275–276)

Death is described by Schopenhauer as a sleep in which individuality is forgotten. Can the will ever die? Can it ever slip into the past? The will will always manifest itself in the present. In this sense past and future have no reality:

Above all, we must clearly recognize that the form of the phenomenon of the will, and hence the form of life or of reality, is really only the *present*, not the future or the past. Future and past are only in the concept, exist only in the connexion and continuity of knowledge insofar as this follows the principle of sufficient reason. No man has lived in the past, and none will live in the future; the present alone is the form of all life, but it is also life's sure possession which can never be torn from it. The present always exists together with its content; both stand firm without wavering, like the rainbow on the waterfall. For life is sure and certain to the will, and the present is sure and certain to life. (WWR vol. I, 278)

And yet, when we consider the order of phenomena things seem quite different:

Of course, if we think back to the thousands of years that have passed, to the millions of men and women who have lived in them, we ask, What were they? What has become of them? But, on the other hand, we need recall only the past of our own life and vividly renew its scenes in our imagination, and then ask again, What was all this? What has become of it? As it is with our life, so is it with the life of those millions. Or should we suppose that the past took on a new existence by its being sealed through death? Our own past, even the most recent, even the previous day, is only an empty dream of the imagination, and the past of all those millions is the same. What was? What is? The will, whose mirror is life and will-free knowledge beholding the will clearly in that mirror.

He who has not yet recognized this, or will not recognize it, must add to the above questions as to the fate of past generations this question as well: Why precisely is he, the questioner, so lucky as to possess this precious, perishable, and only real present, while those hundreds of generations of men, even the heroes and sages of former times, have sunk into the night of the past, and have thus become nothing, while he, his insignificant ego, actually exists? Or more briefly, although strangely: Why is this now, his now, precisely now and was not long ago? Since he asks such strange questions, he regards his existence and his time as independent of each other, and the former as projected into the latter. He really assumes two nows, one belonging to the object and the other to the subject, and marvels at the happy accident of their coincidence. (WWR vol. I, 278)

The reflection is interesting: to think in this manner we must have opposed ourselves to time.

The will cannot lose the present! Schopenhauer is not arguing here for a life before or after death. He points rather to a vertical dimension that connects the individual with the will. In essence the human being transcends time for Schopenhauer no less than for Plato — only for Schopenhauer the reinterpreted Kantian distinction between thing-in-itself and phenomenon has come to be of crucial importance. It is this transcendence that, according to him, expresses itself in the fact that we are not more upset about death. And yet this thought, as Schopenhauer insists, is no consolation for the egoist. Crucial here is the thought that egoism provides us with only a superficial understanding of human being.

From Schopenhauer's understanding of the will, refracted in the Platonic ideas, manifesting itself in endless phenomena, follows quite naturally a cyclical view. The Ideas reinstantiate themselves. Thus Schopenhauer, despite passages that point towards the theory of evolution, cannot finally make sense of progress. There is no end towards which the cosmos is tending. Here he is closer to Aristotle than to evolutionary views:

The genuine symbol of nature is universally and everywhere the circle, because it is the schema or form of recurrence; in fact, this is, the most general form in nature. She carries it through in everything from the course of the constellations down to the death and birth of organic beings. In this way alone, in the restless stream of time and its content, a continued existence, i.e., a nature, becomes possible...After these considerations, we now return to ourselves and our

species; we then cast our glance forward far into the future, and try to picture to ourselves future generations with the millions of their individuals in the strange form of their customs and aspirations. But then we interpose with the question: Whence will all these come? Where are they now? Where is the abundant womb of that nothing which is pregnant with worlds, and which still conceals them, the coming generations? Would not the smiling and true answer to this be: Where else could they be but there where alone the real always was and will be, namely in the present and its content?—hence with you, the deluded questioner, who in this mistaking of his own nature is like the leaf on the tree. Fading in the autumn and about to fall, this leaf grieves over its own extinction, and will not be consoled by looking forward to the fresh green which will clothe the tree in spring, but says as a lament, “I am not these! These are quite different leaves!” Oh, foolish leaf! Whither do you want to go? And whence are the others supposed to come? Where is the nothing, the abyss of which you fear? Know your own inner being, precisely that which is so filled with thirst for existence; recognize it once more in the inner, mysterious, sprouting force of the tree. This force is always one and the same in all the generations of leaves and it remains untouched by arising and passing away. “As the leaves on the tree, so are the generations of human beings.” Whether the fly now buzzing round me goes to sleep in the evening and buzzes again the following morning, or whether it dies in the evening and in spring another fly buzzes which has emerged from its egg, this in itself is the same thing. (WWR vol. II, 477)<sup>45</sup>

Schopenhauer’s thoughts here point in the direction of Nietzsche’s doctrine of the eternal recurrence. There is indeed a sense in which Schopenhauer may be said to have inscribed the possibility Nietzsche seized into his text.

Therefore, a philosophical knowledge of the nature of the world which has reached the point we are now considering, but went no farther, could even at this point of view, overcome the terrors of death according as reflection had power over direct feeling in the given individual. A man who had assimilated firmly into his way of thinking the truths so far advanced, but at the same time had not come to know, through his own experience or through a deeper insight, that constant suffering is essential to all life and took perfect delight in it; who desired, in spite of calm deliberation, that the course of his life as he had hitherto experienced it should be of endless duration or of constant recurrence; and

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<sup>45</sup> The central idea of these passages has found beautiful expression in an opera by Leos Janacek, *The Cunning Little Vixen*.



whose courage to face life was so great, that in return for life's pleasures, he would willingly and gladly put up with all the hardships and miseries to which it is subject; such a man would stand "with firm strong bones on the well-grounded, enduring earth," (Goethe, *Grenzen der Menschheit*) and would have nothing to fear. Armed with the knowledge we confer on him, he would look with indifference at death hastening towards him on the wings of time. He would regard it as a false illusion, an impotent spectre, frightening to the weak but having no power over him who knows that he himself is that will of which the whole world is the objectification or copy, to which therefore life and also the present always remain certain and sure. The present is the only real form of the phenomenon of the will. Therefore no endless past or future will frighten him, for he regards these as an empty mirage and the web of Maya. Thus he would no more have to fear death than the sun would the night. In the "Bhagavad-Gita" Krishna puts his young pupil Arjuna in this position, when, seized with grief at the sight of the armies ready for battle (somewhat after the manner of Xerxes), Arjuna loses heart and wishes to give up the fight, to avert the destruction of so many thousands. Krishna brings him to this point of view, and the death of those thousands can no longer hold him back; he gives the sign for battle. This point of view is also expressed by Goethe's *Prometheus*, especially when he says:

Here sit I, form men  
In my own image,  
A race that is like me,  
To suffer, to weep,  
To enjoy and to rejoice,  
And to heed you not.  
As I!

The philosophy of Bruno and that of Spinoza might also bring to this standpoint the person whose conviction was not shaken and weakened by their errors and imperfections. (WWR vol. I, 283)

That Nietzsche was aware of this passage is suggested by the way he uses the same stanza from Goethe's *Prometheus* in *The Birth of Tragedy*

Schopenhauer of course is convinced that suffering is essential to all life and that there is no higher meaning that might redeem it. Schopenhauer cannot find refuge in a "yes" to life that affirms death and battle. But it is interesting that at this stage of the argument he very much leaves this possibility open.

## 11. The Being of Value and the Spirit of Revenge

### 1

Once more let me return to this already cited statement by Sartre:

Ontology has revealed to us, in fact, the origin and the nature of value; we have seen that value is the lack in relation to which the for-itself determines its being as a lack. (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 626)

Value, we saw, is understood by Sartre, too, in terms of that lack. To find life meaningful, the human being cannot but measure what he is by what he might be, by what we can call an ideal image of himself, in Nietzsche's language, cannot but help cast golden words ahead of himself. This is what lets Zarathustra say in the Prologue that he loves "those who cast golden words before their deeds and always do more than they promise" (*Zarathustra*, 127-128).<sup>46</sup> Man, according to Nietzsche, is ever going beyond himself, projecting himself towards a better future, ever going to something else, but this something else is not some given ideal for the sake of which he is acting. That ideal has its foundation in the going beyond.

In *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche suggests that the human being is truly human only when he calls himself to account, when he can make promises. The human being needs to act according to principles. Once again, these principles are not given to him. He must himself create them. They are part of the human being's attempt to articulate what Nietzsche calls the "meaning of the earth." Being just conjectures, they should retain their measure in what more immediately claims us, the earth. The present is given priority over the future. But the present gains meaning only when we project ourselves into the future. For this reason we should allow our actions to overflow our principles. Thus Zarathustra says in the Prologue:

I love him who justifies future and redeems past generations: for he wants to perish of the present. (*Zarathustra*, 128)

The man who justifies the future cannot appeal to the future to give a meaning to his life. Neither can he appeal to an after-life or a millennium. In what we are and do we should justify the future. We must live in such a way that our life demands a future.

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<sup>46</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1954).

Why is the past in need of redemption? In itself the past for Nietzsche has no meaning, no more than does human being. But we can give the past a meaning by providing it with a meaningful end, the present, and by interpreting the past as leading to that end. What Hegel does with history we too have to do, only with more open eyes, keeping in mind that all such interpretations are but human creations.

But what are we to make of this statement:

I love him who chastens his god because he loves his god; for he must perish of the wrath of his god. (128)

This is an inversion of Hebrews 12:6, cited here in the German, which is evoked by Nietzsche's choice of words: *Den wen der Herr lieb hat den züchtigt er* ("For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves). "Perish" is a translation of "*zugrundegehen*," which does mean "perish," but more literally to go to the bottom, the ground from which we arose and to which we shall return.

But has Zarathustra not said that God is dead? Here, however, he speaks not of God, but of "his god." God and gods are human creations. But this does not mean that they are therefore arbitrary. They are, we can say, natural illusions. Think of Apollo and Dionysus, or of Hera and Aphrodite. In them the meaning of the earth finds expression. They are themselves Apollinian images. In them the Dionysian ground of our existence has been chastened.

But notice that in the second part of the sentence there is the suggestion that the god has a quite independent reality. What does "chasten" mean here? *Züchtigen, in die Zucht nehmen* suggests giving Apollinian form to the divine, as we do when we articulate or fashion an image of it. But by so doing, we also do violence to the divine. Consider the insistence in many religions that God not be named or imprisoned in an image. In chastening god we do violence to him and he revenges himself. And yet we cannot do without such violence. In the anger of the god the divine reasserts itself. Nietzsche's earth is holy in Otto's sense, a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. What is meant here by earth invites comparison with Schopenhauer's will.

## 2

I suggested that to find life meaningful the human being cannot but measure what he is by what he might be, by what we can call an **ideal image** of himself. But human being is essentially a being with others. An ideal image, to do justice to our social being, must belong to the community. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche thus looked for a communal **myth**. Consider once more:

Without myth every culture loses the healthy powers of its creativity: only a horizon defined by myths completes and unifies a whole cultural movement. Myth alone saves all the powers of the imagination and of the Apollonian dream from aimless wanderings.

Nietzsche compared there the mythical world view to that of the man of reason:

By way of comparison let us now picture the abstract man, untutored by myth; abstract education; abstract morality; the abstract state; let us imagine the lawless roving of the artistic imagination, unchecked by any native myth; let us think of a culture that has no fixed and primordial site but is doomed to exhaust all possibilities and to nourish itself wretchedly on all other cultures — there we have the present age. (*Birth of Tragedy*, 135)

How are we to understand Nietzsche's claim that myth is necessary to keep the imagination from "aimless wanderings"? What is this "fixed and primordial site" of a culture, this *fester und heiliger Ursitz einer Kultur*? Note the suggestion of a need for roots.

In the later preface Nietzsche was to criticize the early work for lacking a "will to logical cleanliness" (*Attempt at Self-Criticism*, 19). What he had substituted for clear thinking was "music," Wagner's music. Like Wagner, Nietzsche looked to art, and more especially to tragedy understood as a *Musikdrama*, to help us overcome the ills of modernity. But does Nietzsche ever really leave the *Birth of Tragedy* and the proclaimed need for myth behind? Is *Zarathustra* not his attempt to give us what Wagner had failed to provide, the myth needed by our modern age? In this connection it is interesting to note the connection between Zarathustra and Hölderlin's *Empedokles*. We can show that *Zarathustra* evolved from an Empedocles drama Nietzsche once hoped to write as a few sketches demonstrate.

## 3

How then does tragedy relate to the philosophy of Plato or to the Bible? Behind that question lies that other question: are both supported by that ill will against time that for Nietzsche is the deepest source of our self-alienation? I shall have to return to such questions.

For the time being let me return to Sartre's understanding of the fundamental project of man as a project to become God, i.e. to found reality in freedom. The idea of God, to be sure, like the idea of a *summum bonum* according to Schopenhauer, is self-contradictory. The project to become God is finally futile. Given that project, the human being must see the animal in him — his body, his sensuousness, his sexuality — as a burden. Nietzsche thus interprets God as a human creation that has to alienate the human being from himself. In its place Nietzsche wants to put the overman. His overman, too, is a human creation, but one that, instead of alienating the human being from the earth, leads to its affirmation. The overman is an ideal image that articulates the meaning of the earth.

What links Nietzsche to the tradition is his insistence that man measure himself by ideals, that he cast golden words ahead of himself, that he overcome what he is, but not in the sense of self-renunciation, but towards a fuller self-affirmation. It is precisely this willingness that Nietzsche finds lacking in the last man of the Prologue. Here we have the image of the person who has lost touch with the earth, has domesticated himself, no longer bears chaos within himself and therefore cannot give birth to new stars. He has found happiness and security in doing what one does.

But let me return to the idea of God. The thought of God and of a realm of being beyond this world which is the true reality and provides man with his measure and real home, an after-world, is born according to Nietzsche of the inability to accept the negativity which is part of the human condition. It is born of the inability to accept the wisdom of Silenus:

It was suffering and incapacity that created all afterworlds—this and that brief madness of bliss which is experienced only by those who suffer most deeply. Weariness that wants to reach the ultimate with one leap, with one fatal leap, a poor ignorant weariness that does not want to want anymore: this created all gods and afterworlds. (*Zarathustra*, 143–2)

We should note that in this sermon, “On the Afterworldly,” Nietzsche includes his own *Birth of Tragedy* among the attempts to escape from the negativity of time. He, too, speaks there of a deity that finds release from its suffering in the illusions it creates, the world of phenomena. This gives a justification to this world, an aesthetic justification. But the author of that justification is still imaged as a god. Nietzsche now rejects this interpretation:

At one time Zarathustra too cast his delusion beyond man, like all the afterworldly. The work of a suffering and tortured god, the world then seemed to me. (*Zarathustra*, 142)

How are we to understand this “beyond man,” (*Jenseits des Menschen*)? The golden words that Zarathustra praises presumably are not cast in this sense “beyond man.” When such words are cast “beyond man,” the creator denies the createdness of his creations. Or, if you like, he denies their metaphorical nature. All values and gods are necessarily precarious metaphors.

If there is to be a justification of reality the human being himself will have to furnish it. Instead of listening to those who speak of after-worlds, we should listen to the body:

Listen rather, my brothers, to the voice of the healthy body: that is a more honest and purer voice. More honestly and purely speaks the healthy body that is perfect and perpendicular: and it speaks of the meaning of the earth. (145)

Note the emphasis on **honesty** here, which contrasts sharply with the readiness of the *Birth of Tragedy* to accept illusion.

The body is said to speak of the meaning of the earth. That meaning, however, has been identified with the overman, where it is not clear at this point how Nietzsche would have us think the connection between earth and overman. But the general direction of his thinking is clear enough: the overman should not be understood as a timeless value, a *telos* towards which all humanity tends. The overman must be born again and again. He is not a fixed, but a “dancing star” (*Zarathustra*, 129).

We have here that inversion of Platonism that Schopenhauer performed in his anthropology carried over into ethics. The body replaces the forms as the source of values; the theory of recollection is inverted. For Nietzsche, all meaning finally has its origin in the body. But how are we to understand this body?

## 4

In the next sermon, “On the Despisers of the Body,” Nietzsche offers a brief account. Essentially his understanding is that of Schopenhauer:

“Body am I, and soul”—thus speaks the child. And why should one not speak like children?

But the awakened and knowing say: body am I entirely, and nothing else; and soul is only a word for something about the body.

The body is a great reason, a plurality with one sense, a war and a peace, a herd and a shepherd. An instrument of your body is also your little reason, my brother, which you call “spirit”—a little instrument and toy of your great reason. (*Zarathustra*, 146)

The attack on the tradition is clear enough. Note also the tension in Nietzsche’s **understanding of human being** between unity and plurality. We can live our life only as *one* life. From this flows the demand for problem-solving, self-integration. And yet our desires will pull us in different directions. One cannot eliminate that tension. To do so would be to lose human being. We have to do violence to ourselves and affirm the necessity of such violence. The dream of an overcoming of alienation is a false, profoundly alienating dream.

The spirit is seen as an instrument of that body, not the body an instrument of the spirit:

Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, there stands a mighty ruler, an unknown sage—whose name is self. In your body he dwells; he is your body.

There is more reason in your body than in your best wisdom. And who knows why your body needs precisely your best wisdom?

Your self laughs at your ego and at its bold leaps. “What are these leaps and flights of thought to me?” it says to itself. “A detour to my end. I am the leading strings of the ego and the prompter of its concepts.” (*Zarathustra*, 146)

If Nietzsche is right and all meaning finally has its seat in the body, then the instrumentalization of the body must lead to a loss of all meaning, must be intimately tied to nihilism. To deny this one has to argue that the spirit can discover meanings other than those of the body. Just this Nietzsche would deny and here he is indebted to Schopenhauer.

To be for man is already to be claimed, but what claims human beings and provides them with something like a vocation is not God, but the body:

Even in your folly and contempt, you despisers of the body, you serve your self.  
I say unto you: your self itself wants to die and turns away from life. It is no longer capable of what it would do above all else: to create beyond itself. That is what it would do above all else, that is its fervent wish. (*Zarathustra*, 147)

The passage recalls, if only from a distance, Plato's *Symposium*. Diotima had there distinguished the lower from the higher mysteries of love. The lower forms of eros are all examples of what Nietzsche here calls creating beyond oneself, whether we speak of the having of children, of creating a work of art, or of founding a city. Sartre would thus be wrong when he maintains that the fundamental project of human being is the project to become God. The main wish of man, according to Nietzsche here, is not just to love, but to *create* something beyond himself. And the most natural expression of this is the desire to have children. Note how this desire functions in Zarathustra himself. It is this desire that drove him off his mountain, and the whole book significantly concludes with Zarathustra saying: "my children are near." But this comparison makes clear also what separates Nietzsche from Plato: the higher forms of eros are seen as aberrations by the former, aberrations because the desire for satisfaction here has replaced the desire to create beyond oneself.

## 5

Zarathustra tells us to listen to the body, but does the body speak with one voice? The next sermon addresses this question. The very title is interesting, especially in the German, *Von den Freuden- und Leidenschaften*. It raises the question: why do we use a word like passion or *Leidenschaft*, which suggests suffering? What kind of metaphysical assumptions are buried in terms such as these? Nietzsche's title puts these **[what?]** into question:

My brother, if you have one virtue and she is your virtue, then you have her in common with nobody. To be sure, you want to call her by name and per her; you want to pull her ear and have fun with her. And behold, now you have her name in common with the people and have become one of the people and herd with your virtue.



You would do better to say: “Inexpressible and nameless is that which gives my soul agony and sweetness and is even the hunger of my entrails.”  
(*Zarathustra*, 148)

What Nietzsche here calls virtue I would like to call a “claim.” The body presents us with a multiplicity of claims. These claims are immediate and private. In being named they become public. And there is increasing tension between claim and word. Hunger or sexual desire would be obvious examples. These claims should be accepted for what they are, and not be devalued by being interpreted as signposts pointing towards something much more important and higher—Think once more of the *Symposium*, where sexual desire is seen as a sign, a low manifestation of something higher. Or perhaps even better: think of *The Song of Songs*.

Implicit is a critique of the traditional view of the passions as somehow evil:

Once you suffered passions and called them evil. But now you have only your virtues left: they grew out of your passions. You commanded your highest goal to the heart of these passions: then they become your virtues and passions you enjoyed. (*Zarathustra*, 148)

Nietzsche continues:

And nothing evil grows out of you henceforth, unless it be the evil that grows out of the fight among your virtues. My brother, if you are fortunate you have only one virtue and no more: then you will pass over the bridge more easily. It is a distinction to have many virtues, but a hard lot: and many have gone into the desert and taken their lives because they wearied of being the battle and battlefield of virtues. (*Zarathustra*, 149)

But what account can we then give of words like “bad” and “evil”? Nietzsche here points to the fact that if man is a field of claims, these claims do not form a harmonious whole. Man is a “battlefield” of claims. It is because of this that we have to take sides among our virtues. We have to adopt attitudes towards claims. Values are then human creations. Not arbitrary creations, however, but articulations of claims. But since not all claims can be affirmed, in creating our values we have to affirm some claims and reject others. The distinction between good and bad is unavoidable for this reason.

## 6

This account, however, is deficient in that it has left out the social dimension. Human being is essentially a being with others. This reflects itself in language. If he is to exist in some harmony with others the values that govern his life cannot be simply his own. Values must be held in common. As articulations of claims values are essentially public, while claims are essentially tied to the individual.

It is this social dimension that is developed in the sermon “On the Thousand and One Goals”:

Zarathustra saw many lands and many peoples: thus he discovered the good and evil of many peoples. And Zarathustra found no greater power on earth than good and evil.

No people could live without first esteeming; but if they want to preserve themselves, then they must not esteem as the neighbor esteems. Much that was good to one people was scorn and infamy to another: thus I found it. Much I found evil here, and decked out with purple honors there. Never did one neighbor understand the other: ever was his soul amazed at the neighbor’s delusion and wickedness. (*Zarathustra*, 170)

Nietzsche stresses here the importance of the concrete situation of human beings in the articulation of his values:

A tablet of the good hangs over every people. Behold it is the table of their overcomings; behold it is the voice of their will to power. (*Zarathustra*, 170)

It is in this connection that we return to the idea that it is only the human being who by creating values gives dignity to life, although now it is expressed in somewhat different terms:

First, peoples were creators; and only in later times individuals. Verily, the individual himself is still the most recent creation. (*Zarathustra*, 171)

The individual is himself a human creation. Interesting is the last suggestion of the sermon: that there will be humanity only when it is united by one ideal image:

A thousand goals have there been so far, for there have been a thousand peoples. Only the yoke for the thousand necks is still lacking: the one goal is lacking. Humanity still, has no goal.

But tell me, brothers, if humanity still lacks a goal—is humanity itself not still lacking too? (*Zarathustra*, 172)

Humanity would seem to demand a global common sense presided over by an ideal of what human beings should be.

## 7

Let me try to sum up some of what I have been saying: the first part of *Zarathustra* implies a twofold critique of the established Platonic-Christian value system. It is, on the one hand, attacked for its **form**: by absolutizing values in such a way that they prevent a genuine openness to claims, it cuts values off from their foundations, or better, denies values the soil from which they arise and in which they must retain their roots to live. Values have to become hollow shells. On the other hand, the value system is criticized for its **content**. The value central to Christianity seems to Nietzsche to be born of a rancor against time and thus against the body. But perhaps these two points are related: the investment in form is itself governed by the rancor against time.

We have thus at least the sketch of a general theory of values, a sketch that, on one hand, lets us see values as human constructions and, on the other, shows why these constructions are not therefore arbitrary. But he who would attempt a revaluation has to break with the way the society to which he belongs sees things. It requires freedom, especially from that which is common (*Zarathustra*, 174). Nietzsche does not underestimate the difficulty of this path:

You call yourself free? Your dominant thought I want to hear, and not that you have escaped from a yoke. Are you one of those who had the *right* to escape from a yoke? There are some who threw away their last value when they threw away their servitude.

Free from what? As if that mattered to Zarathustra! But your eyes should tell me brightly: free for what? (*Zarathustra*, 175)

## 8

Why do human beings need values at all? That need is bound up with the need to make decisions (recall, “I have lost my way”). When several possibilities beckon and we need to make a decision, we have to take a stance towards our desires or whatever claims us, and we look for some authority to which we can appeal to make that decision. But if that decision is not to be experienced as something imposed on us, but as something we

really choose, that authority has to be understood in such a way that it issues from within us. In the end the authority must rest with the self. That is to say, we require an ideal image of man that we recognize as our measure. The traditional understanding of human being as created in the image of God gives one answer to this need, an answer that Zarathustra challenges with his teaching of the overman, or more generally with his insistence that all such measures be understood not as **given** but as human **creations**. How else could they issue from the self?

Let me return to this issue by turning to the section “On the Blessed Isles”:

Once one said God when one looked upon distant seas; but now I have taught you to say: overman.

God is a conjecture; but I desire that your conjectures not reach beyond your creative will.

Could you create a god? Then do not speak to me of any gods. But you could well create the overman. Perhaps not you yourselves, my brothers. But into fathers and forefathers of the overman you could recreate yourself: and let this be your best creation. (*Zarathustra*, 197)

Both God and the overman are said here to be conjectures. But they are different in both form and content. God is a conjecture that reaches beyond man’s creative will:

God is a conjecture, but who could drain all the agony of this conjecture without dying? Shall his faith be taken away from the creator, and from the eagle his soaring to eagle heights?

God is a thought that makes crooked all that is straight, and makes turn whatever stands. How? Should time be gone, and all that is impermanent be a mere lie? To think this is a dizzy whirl for human bones, and a vomit for the stomach; verily I call it the turning sickness to conjecture thus. Evil I call it, and misanthropic—all this teaching of the one and the Plenum and Unmoved and the Sated and the Permanent. All the permanent—that is only a parable. And the poets lie too much. (*Zarathustra*, 198)

God is a conjecture measuring human existence by the **One, the Plenum, the Sated, the Permanent**.

Note that this can be given a moral as well as an epistemological expression. Constitutive of human being is a desire for unity. But the temporality of our being precludes satisfaction. The human being on this view lacks the strength to actually

achieve that unity he seeks, to overcome the gap between the human and the divine.  
What he is precludes full satisfaction.

But what then makes human beings form such conjectures?  
I shall have to return to this question.

## 9

But let me return to the passage just quoted. It concludes with a reference to the *Chorus Mysticus* with which Goethe concludes his *Faust*. Kaufmann gives you a translation (Zarathustra, 194):

What is destructible  
Is but a parable;  
What fails ineluctably  
The undeclarable,  
Here it was seen,  
Here it was action;  
The Eternal-Feminine  
Lures to perfection

Since the translation loses the poetry, let me read it to you the German:

Alles Vergängliche  
Ist nur ein Gleichnis;  
Das Unzulängliche,  
Hier wird's Ereignis;  
Das Unbeschreibliche.  
Hier ist's getan;  
Das Ewig-Weibliche  
Zieht uns hinan.

Not only in *Zarathustra* is Nietzsche struggling with this ending: "All the permanent — that is only a parable. And the poets lie too much." *Alles Unvergängliche — das ist nur ein Gleichnis! Und die Dichter lügen zuviel.*

The first of the *Lieder des Prinzen Vogelfrei*, the songs of the Prince Free-as-a-Bird, which conclude Book Five of *The Gay Science* deserves mention in this connection:

**An Goethe**  
Das Unvergängliche  
Ist nur dein Gleichnis

Gott, der Verhängliche  
Ist Dichter-Erschleichenis ...

Welt-Rad das rollende,  
Streift Ziel auf Ziel:  
Not nennts der Grollende  
Der Narr nennts Spiel

Welt-Spiel das herrische  
Mischt Sein und Schein: -  
Das Ewig Närrische  
Mischt uns — hinein!

**To Goethe**

The indestructible  
Is only your parable  
God, the seductive one  
Is poet-invention

World-wheel the rolling one  
Touches goal after goal  
Need the resentful one calls it  
The fool play

World-play, the imperious  
Mixes being and illusion  
The eternal-foolish  
Mixes us — into this mix

The gods are only parables. In them we recognize, if only obscurely, the meaning of our own existence. Consider also the sermon “On Poets”:

“Since I have come to know the body better,” Zarathustra said to one of his disciples, “the spirit is to me only quasi-spirit; and all that is permanent is also a mere parable.”

“I have heard you say that once before,” the disciple replied; “and at the time you added, ‘But the poets lie too much.’ Why did you say that the poets lie too much?”

“Why?” said Zarathustra. “You ask, why? I am not one of those whom one may ask about their why. Is my experience but of yesterday? It was long ago that experienced the reasons for my opinions. Would I not have to be a barrel of memory if I wanted to carry my reasons around with me? It is already too much for me to remember my own opinions; and many a bird flies away. And now and then I also find a stray in my dovecot that is strange to me and trembles when I place my hand on it. But what was it that Zarathustra once said to you? That the poets lie too much? But Zarathustra too is a poet. Do you now believe that he spoke the truth here? Why do you believe that?” (*Zarathustra*, 238–239)

What, if anything, distinguishes Zarathustra from the poet?

# 10

Creation is said by Nietzsche to be the great redemption from suffering. Consider the following:

Whatever in me has feeling, suffers and is in prison: but my will comes to me as my liberator and joy-bringer. Willing liberates: that is the true teaching of will and liberty — thus Zarathustra teaches it. Willing no more and esteeming no more and creating no more — oh that this great weariness might always remain far from me! In knowledge too I feel only my will’s joy in begetting and becoming; and if there is innocence in my knowledge, it is because the will to beget is in it. Away from God and gods this will has lured me; what could one create if gods existed? (*Zarathustra*, 199)

Willing liberates. What is it not to be free? To **suffer**. We suffer as long as we give the created priority over the creating. That is, as long as we give the past priority over the future:

But my fervent wish to create impels me ever again toward man; thus is the hammer impelled toward the stone. O men, in the stone there sleeps an image, the image of my images. Alas, that it must sleep in the hardest, the ugliest stone! Now my hammer rages cruelly against its prison. Pieces of rock rain from the stone: what is it to me? I want to perfect it; for a shadow came over me — the stillest and lightest of all things once came to me. The beauty of the overman came to me as a shadow. O my brothers, what are the gods to me now? (199–200)

Nietzsche offers us here a “philosophy with a hammer,” a phrase which is incorporated into the subtitle of his later book *Twilight of the Idols*. But the hammer is here the sculptor’s hammer, which seeks to free the image sleeping in the stone. That should be kept in mind when there is talk of a “philosophy with a hammer.”

Here already we get a hint of what will be a pervasive theme in the second book of Zarathustra, one which makes it much darker than the first. What gives birth to that conjecture, which is God, is a suffering from temporality. As will to power lacking power, we find it difficult to forgive ourselves our temporality. That ill-will against time that Nietzsche calls the “**spirit of revenge**” appears constitutive of human being. But to affirm ourselves we have to overcome this spirit. And for Nietzsche personally that must mean that he has to overcome the Schopenhauer in himself. It is to this overcoming that we shall have to turn next time.



## 12. The Spirit of Revenge

### 1

Towards the end of the last session I suggested that the second book of *Zarathustra* is much darker than the first. As will to power lacking power we find it difficult to forgive ourselves our temporality. But to affirm ourselves we have to overcome what Zarathustra calls the **spirit of revenge**. And for Nietzsche that must mean also: he has to overcome the Schopenhauer in himself. He does not find this easy. Consider the end of *The Dancing Song*:

Thus sang Zarathustra. But when the dance was over and the girls had gone away, he grew sad.

“The sun has set long ago,” he said at last; “the meadow is moist, a chill comes from the woods. Something unknown is around me and looks thoughtful.” “What? Are you still alive, Zarathustra?”

Why? What for? By what? Whither? Where? How? Is it not folly to still be alive?

“Alas, my friends, it is the evening that asks thus through me. Forgive me my sadness. Evening has come. Forgive me that evening has come.”

(*Zarathustra*, 221–222)

The time is no longer noon. The sun has set. What kind of a request is this: to be forgiven that evening has come? Is this Zarathustra's fault? Does this not show that Zarathustra is himself subject to the spirit of revenge? That spirit threatens to overwhelm him who had so enthusiastically spoken of the beauty of the overman, gesturing towards a new image of man.

How does Zarathustra understand **beauty**? We are given an answer in the section “On Those Who Are Sublime.” Note that beauty is opposed here to the sublime, where beauty is the positive term:

One who was sublime I saw today, one who was solemn, an ascetic of the spirit; oh, how my soul laughed at his ugliness! With a swelled chest and like one who holds his breath, he stood there, the sublime one, silent, decked out with ugly truths, the spoil of his hunting, and rich in torn garments; many thorns too adorned him—yet I saw no rose. (*Zarathustra*, 228–229)

But let me focus on the definition of beauty we are given:

When power becomes gracious and descends into the visible—such descent I call beauty. (*Zarathustra*, 230–231)

What does it mean for power to become gracious (*gnädig*) and to descend into the visible? What does grace (*Gnade*) here mean?

To repeat a point I already made: like Heidegger and Sartre, Nietzsche, too, understands human being as willing power, lacking power. And all too often he finds it impossible to forgive himself his own lack of power. It is just this that fills him with the spirit of revenge. It is this spirit that lets us resent the greater power of others. Thus for Nietzsche the demand for equality is itself born of the spirit of revenge. But is Zarathustra himself free of the spirit of revenge? Consider the sermon *On the Tarantulas*: note how Nietzsche describes it:

There it comes willingly: welcome tarantula! Your triangle and symbol sits black on your back; and I also know what sits in your soul. Revenge sits in your soul: wherever you bite, black scabs grow; your poison makes the soul whirl with revenge. (*Zarathustra*, 211)

Note that the tarantula is characterized in two ways: the symbol of the trinity is tied to the spirit of revenge. The redemption of which Nietzsche dreams is redemption from the spirit of revenge:

For that man be delivered from revenge, that is for me the bridge to the highest hope, and a rainbow after long storms (*Zarathustra*, 211)

Particularly interesting is the suggestion that revenge lets us become thinkers who always go too far, who in the end have to lie down, weary, in the snow to sleep. (*Zarathustra*, 212) Unable to forgive themselves their lack of power, such thinkers are unable to enter into a meaningful relationship with others. Interesting, too, is the ending of this sermon, which suggests that Zarathustra himself is not free from the spirit of revenge: at the end of the sermon the tarantula bites Zarathustra and after that Zarathustra himself becomes weary and longs for the night.

## 2

But let me return to the claim that only as an aesthetic phenomena are the world and our life justified and reconsider that claim in the light of the definition of beauty we are now given. Beauty is now said to depend on the ability on the part of man to forgive

himself his lack of power, a lack that, if Nietzsche is right, lets human beings construct a God, who by extending to human beings his grace, delivers them from the power of death, that is, of time, but also from the tyranny of those stronger than they are. The meek shall inherit the earth. If we could be gracious to ourselves, Nietzsche suggests, we would not need divine grace. Nor would we need the kind of grace of which Schopenhauer speaks. But let us take a more careful look at grace.

The Christian tradition had understood the human being as fallen and in need of grace, where the source of this grace is placed beyond human being, in God.

Schopenhauer had appropriated and secularized this notion:

In the Christian teaching we find the dogma of predestination in consequence of election and nonelection by grace, obviously springing from the view that man does not change, but his life and conduct, in other words his empirical character, are only the unfolding of the intelligible character, the development of decided and unalterable tendencies, already recognizable in the child. (WWR vol. I, 293)

The kind of self-overcoming on which Nietzsche insists makes no sense on such a view. Every one of us is as he or she is, has his or her unchangeable character. Schopenhauer refers here to St. Paul's Letter to the Romans:

What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So it depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy. For the scripture says to Pharaoh: "I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth." So then he has mercy upon whomever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills. (Romans 9:14–21)

What is translated here as "mercy" in German is *Gnade*, which Kaufmann more adequately translates in *Zarathustra* as "grace." God's power becomes visible in Pharaoh. Once again we have a gracious descent of power that manifests itself in Pharaoh's power. A Christian might well understand beauty as a gracious descent of divine power. Think of the beauty of nature. The difference between that view and Nietzsche's would of course be that when Nietzsche thinks of power he is thinking first of all of a very human power. The grace that issues in beauty does not issue from beyond human beings, but from within them.

But before returning to Nietzsche let me consider one more passage from *The World as Will and Representation*. In the penultimate paragraph Schopenhauer writes that the self-suppression of the will which according to him is redemption cannot be “forcibly arrived at by intention or design... it comes suddenly as if flying from without. Therefore the Church calls it the effect of grace.” Grace here means the redemption from pride, from that original sin which founds all other sin:

This sinner was Adam, but we all existed in him; Adam became miserable, and in him we have all become miserable. The doctrine of original sin (affirmation of the will) is really a great truth which constitutes the kernel of Christianity, while the rest is only clothing and covering, or something accessory. (WWR vol. I, 405)

Grace redeems by granting us the power to deny the will to live by subverting the *principium individuationis*. This doctrine of redemption presupposes that human existence is fundamentally miserable and that we lack the power to escape such misery by intention or design.

If Schopenhauer may be said to have secularized the Christian notions of grace and redemption, Wagner, who also had a profound influence on Nietzsche, may also be said to have secularized, but also to have *eroticized* them. Consider this passage on Wagner and redemption:

There is nothing on which Wagner has reflected so much as on redemption: his opera is the opera of redemption. Somebody or other always wants to be redeemed: now a little man, now a little woman — that is his problem... The Flying Dutchman preaches the sublime doctrine that woman settles even the most unsettled man — in Wagnerian terms, she redeems him. Here we permit ourselves a question: Suppose this were true—does that also make it desirable? What becomes of the eternal “Wandering Jew” whom a wife adores and settles? He merely ceases to be eternal; he gets married and does not concern us any more. (*The Wagner Case*, 459–460)<sup>47</sup>

Crucial to this idea of redemption is the idea of rescuing the individual from a restlessness that seems constitutive of humanity. Human being has no fixed essence. We are the always **unsettled** being. This is why our being is always an issue for us.

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<sup>47</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Wagner Case* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1954).

Redemption settles. And since most of us lack the strength to become Schopenhauerian hermits, to live in the forest with bears and bees, the next best thing may be to follow Wagner's advice and allow ourselves to be settled, without questioning:

*Tristan and Isolde* glorifies the perfect spouse who, in a certain situation, has but one question: "But why didn't you tell me that before? Nothing simpler than that," The answer  
That I may not tell you  
And what you ask  
That you may never know  
*Lohengrin* contains a solemn excommunication of inquiry and questioning.  
Wagner here advocates the Christian concept: "You shall and must have *faith*."  
(*The Wagner Case*, 460, 461)

That Nietzsche cannot accept any of these versions of redemption should be obvious. And yet, one of the last sections of Book Two is called "*On Redemption*." It should be clear that whatever it might mean, it surely will mean that redemption in the Christian, Schopenhauerian, and Wagnerian senses will become unnecessary.

### 3

In this sermon "*On Redemption*" Zarathustra is addressing the cripples. These are human beings who lack something that a normal human being possesses. To them Zarathustra says that they should not condemn themselves for what they lack, but accept it, affirm themselves and also their lack. Otherwise their being cripples will also cripple them spiritually. But Zarathustra is more interested in those whom he calls "inverse cripples":

There are human beings who lack everything, except one thing of which they have too much—human beings who are nothing but a big eye or a big mouth or a big belly or anything at all that is big. Inverse cripples I call them.  
(*Zarathustra*, 250)

Among these inverse cripples is one with a bloated soul. What has bloated his soul? The inability to forgive himself that in him which is tied to the body. He has crippled himself. Zarathustra then expands on this notion of the cripple in a way that includes his predecessors and contemporaries:

This is what is terrible for my eyes, that I find man in ruins and scattered as over a battlefield or a butcher-field. And when my eyes flee from now to the past,

they always find the same: fragments and limbs and dreadful accidents, but no human beings. (*Zarathustra*, 250)

This should be compared with the passage on page 149 where Zarathustra speaks of the human being as a battlefield of virtues. This battle leads human beings to cripple themselves. Zarathustra looks ahead to a more integrated existence.

I walk among men as among the fragments of the future, that future which I envisage. And that is all my creating and striving, that I create and carry together into One what is fragment and riddle and dreadful accident. And how could I bear to be a man if man were not also a creator and guesser of riddles and redeemer of accidents? (*Zarathustra*, 251)

Zarathustra seeks to justify human existence by creating an image that allows for the gathering together of what is now at war in the individual. Such creation is likened to solving a riddle.

When Zarathustra is described as a guesser of riddles that invites us to compare Zarathustra with **Oedipus**. The riddle that Oedipus solves is a riddle about time, about getting older. The riddle of the sphinx is given by the tradition also another form: there are two sisters, the first is the daughter of the second, the second the daughter of the first. The riddle that Zarathustra addresses is also a riddle about time.

That Zarathustra should call himself a redeemer of accidents should recall what I said before about aesthetic justification. Nietzsche seeks to tell a story, project an ideal, a tragic vision that is to allow for full self-affirmation. First of all, reality presents itself to us as contingent. How are we to overcome this sense of contingency, that is, transform past accident, into something that we will?

With this we have returned to the topic of time. Does time not make such poetic reconstruction of past accidents a mere fantasy, mere illusion? Is it not itself born of the inability to accept one's impotence, one's subjection to time, a subjection that cannot be separated from the human condition? Consider what Zarathustra says about redemption:

To redeem those who lived in the past and to recreate all 'it was'; into a 'thus I willed it'—that alone should I call redemption. Will—that is the name of the liberator and joy-bringer...Willing liberates; but what is it that puts even the liberator himself in fetters? "It was"—that is the name of the will's gnashing of teeth and most secret melancholy. Powerless against what has been done, he is an angry spectator of all that is past. The will cannot will backwards; and that

he cannot break time and time's covetousness, that is the will's loneliest melancholy. (*Zarathustra*, 251)

In the spirit of revenge Nietzsche locates the deepest source of all self-alienation. It is the power that cripples. It is also the power that lets us long for redemption. What we want to be redeemed from is time, mortality:

This, indeed this alone, is what revenge is: the will's ill will against time and its 'it was.' (*Zarathustra*, 252)

The spirit of revenge lets us see our present condition as a punishment of sorts, something inflicted on us because of some transgression, where that transgression turns out to be nothing other than our humanity, our individuality. Zarathustra opposes to all such accounts his insistence on the creative power of the will (*Zarathustra*, 253). But how can we affirm all that is dreadful in the past — past suffering, pointless death, torture, murder? By telling a story about it? By emphasizing something like reason in history? To overcome the spirit of revenge we have to learn to will the past, to will backward. And this is what is most difficult.

The hunchback's question with which the sermon concludes, "why does Zarathustra speak otherwise to his pupils than to himself?" startles Zarathustra (*Zarathustra*, 254). He stands on the threshold of the thought of the eternal recurrence and at the same time shies away from this threshold.

#### 4

Let me introduce that thought with a few remarks from *Ecce Homo*:

Now I shall relate the history of *Zarathustra*. The fundamental conception of this work, the idea of the eternal recurrence, this highest formulation of affirmation that is at all attainable, belongs in the August of 1881: it was penned on sheet with the notation underneath: "6000 feet beyond man and time." That day I was walking through the woods along the lake of Silvaplana; at a powerful, pyramidal rock not far from Surlei I stopped. It was then that this idea came to me.<sup>48</sup>

Nietzsche tells us that it was preceded by a change in his taste, especially his taste in music. The following winter, near Rapallo, the Zarathustra idea came over him:

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<sup>48</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans, Walter Kaufmann, Basic Writings of Nietzsche, New York: Modern Library, 1968), p. 751.

It was on these two walks that the whole of Zarathustra I occurred to me, and especially Zarathustra himself as a type: rather he *overtook* me. (

To understand this type, one has to become clear about his physiological presupposition: This is what I call the *great health*. (Ecce Homo, p. 754)

How are we to understand here “physiological presupposition”? The thought of the eternal recurrence and of Zarathustra is said to have an **affective** base, and we must approach that thought with reference to that base. This also requires us to think the connection between **truth** and **affect**. Heidegger will speak of a *Grundstimmung*, a fundamental mood that determines how we stand in the world and encounter persons and things. Zarathustra wants to recast this *Grundstimmung*.

That there is a connection between a particular mood and the doctrine of the eternal recurrence is suggested by paragraph 54 of Schopenhauer’s *World as Will and Representation*, in which, as I pointed out, Schopenhauer seems to have inscribed a reader like Nietzsche into his text. I cited it before. Let me read it once more:

A man who had assimilated firmly into his way of thinking the truths so far advanced, but at the same time had not come to know through his own experience or through a deeper insight, that constant suffering is essential to all life; who found satisfaction in life and took perfect delight in it; who desired, in spite of calm deliberation, that the course of his life as he had hitherto experienced it should be of endless duration or of constant recurrence; and whose courage to face life was so great that, in return for life’s pleasures, he would willingly and gladly put up with all the hardships and miseries to which it is subject; such a man would stand “with firm, strong bones on the well-grounded, enduring earth, and would have nothing to fear.” (WWR vol. I, 283)

Schopenhauer offers a number of examples. He concludes these with this remark:

Finally, many men would occupy the standpoint here set forth, if their knowledge kept pace with their willing, in other words, if they were in a position, free from every erroneous idea, to become clearly and distinctly themselves. This is for knowledge the viewpoint of the complete affirmation of the will-to-live. (WWR vol. I, 284–285).

This affirmation forms of course the very opposite of Schopenhauer’s renunciation.

The first point to make is that what Nietzsche presents as an inspiration would seem to be at least in part a recollection of something he had read in Schopenhauer. But what is it that allows Schopenhauer to speak with such confidence on this point?



Presupposed is, as we saw, the distinction between timeless will and temporal representation”

Above all, we must clearly recognize that the form of the phenomenon of the will, and hence the form of life and reality, is really only the present, not the future or the past. (WWR vol. I, 278)

Is Nietzsche entitled to this understanding? It would seem that he would have to reject it. And in what sense are future and past only in the concept? Is there not something similar that must be said of the present?

Schopenhauer presupposes that the will as the thing in itself is not subject to the principle of sufficient reason and thus to time. What right does Schopenhauer have to this devaluation of time? He relies of course on Kant, but such reliance is hardly convincing.

## 5

The content of the doctrine of the eternal recurrence would not seem to go significantly beyond what Schopenhauer asserts. And Zarathustra’s reaction to this doctrine is likewise at first not at all one of affirmation.

Consider the section “The Soothsayer,” which precedes the sermon in which Zarathustra teaches his version of redemption:

And I saw a great sadness descend upon mankind. The best grew weary of their works. A doctrine appeared, accompanied by a faith: ‘All is empty, all is the same, all has been!’  
(*Zarathustra*, 245)

Zarathustra himself is touched by the soothsayer’s, the *Wahrsager*’s teaching. Weary himself, he refuses to eat, and falls into a deep sleep. When he finally wakes he tells his disciples this dream:

“Listen to the dream which I dreamed, my friends, and help me guess its meaning. This dream is still a riddle to me; its meaning is concealed in it and imprisoned and does not yet soar above it with unfettered wings.

“I had turned my back on all life, thus I dreamed. I had become a night watchman and a guardian of tombs upon the lonely mountain castle of death. Up there I guarded his coffins: the musty walls were full of such marks of triumph. Life that had been overcome looked at me out of glass coffins. I

breathed the odor of dusty eternities: sultry and dusty lay my soul. And who could have aired his soul there?

“The brightness of midnight was always about me; loneliness crouched next to it; and as a third, death-rattling silence, the worst of my friends. I had keys, the rustiest of all keys; and I knew how to use them to open the most creaking of all gates. Like a wickedly angry croaking, the sound rang through the corridors when the gate’s wings moved: fiendishly cried this bird, ferocious at being awakened. Yet still more terrible and heart constricting was the moment when silence returned and it grew quiet about me, and I sat alone in this treacherous silence.

“Thus time passed and crawled, if time still existed — how should I know? But eventually that happened which awakened me. Thrice, strokes struck at the gate like thunder; the vaults echoed and howled thrice; then I went to the gate: ‘Alpa,’ I cried, ‘who is carrying his ashes up the mountain? Alpa! Alpa! Who is carrying his ashes up the mountain?’ And I pressed the key and tried to lift the gate and exerted myself; but still it did not give an inch. Then a roaring wind tore its wings apart; whistling, shrilling, and piercing, it cast up a black coffin before me.

“And amid the roaring and whistling and shrilling the coffin burst and spewed out a thousandfold laughter. And from a thousand grimaces of children, angels, owls, fools, and butterflies as big as children, it laughed and mocked and roared at me. Then I was terribly frightened; it threw me to the ground. And I cried in horror as I have never cried. And my own cry awakened me—and I came to my senses.” (*Zarathustra*, 246–247)

His favorite disciple offers an interpretation that identifies Zarathustra with the wind and the coffin.

Your life itself interprets this dream for us, O Zarathustra. Are you not yourself the wind with the shrill whistling that tears open the gates of the castles of death? Are you not yourself the coffin full of colorful sarcasms and angelic grimaces of life? Verily, like a thousandfold children’s laughter Zarathustra enters all death chambers, laughing at all the night watchmen and guardians of tombs and at whoever else is rattling with gloomy keys... And even when the long twilight and the weariness of death come, you will not set in our sky, you advocate of life...Henceforth children’s laughter will well forth from all coffins; henceforth a strong wind will come triumphantly to all weariness of death: of this you yourself are our surety and soothsayer. Verily, this is what you dreamed of: your enemies. That was your hardest dream. But as you awoke

from them and came to your senses, thus they shall awaken from themselves—  
and come to you. (*Zarathustra*, 247–248)

Zarathustra rejects that interpretation. But how is his dream to be interpreted?

Among other things this dream would seem to describe the birth of an inspiration, where again it is well to keep in mind what Nietzsche has to tell us in *Ecce Homo*:

Has anyone at the end of the nineteenth century a clear idea of what poets of strong ages have called *inspiration*? If not, I will describe it. — If one had the slightest residue of superstition left in one's system, one could hardly reject altogether the idea that one is merely incarnation, merely mouthpiece, merely a medium of overpowering forces. The concept of revelation — in the sense that suddenly, with indescribable certainty and subtlety, something becomes *visible*, audible, something that shakes one to the last depths and throws one down — that merely describes the facts. One hears, one does not seek; one accepts, one does not ask who gives; like lightning, a thought flashes up, with necessity, without hesitation regarding its form — I never had any choice. (*Ecce Homo*, 756)

### 13. Conclusion

#### 1

Last time I began to introduce the doctrine of the eternal recurrence. I pointed out its proximity to Schopenhauer. And that proximity is suggested by Nietzsche himself in the section “The Soothsayer,” which precedes the sermon in which Zarathustra teaches his version of redemption. Zarathustra is shown touched by the soothsayer’s, the *Wahrsager's*, teaching:

—And I saw a great sadness descend upon in mankind. The best are weary of their works. A doctrine appeared, accompanied by a faith: ‘All is empty, all is the same, all has been!’  
(*Zarathustra*, 245)

Weary himself, Zarathustra falls into a deep sleep. When he finally wakes his favorite disciple offers an interpretation that identifies Zarathustra with the wind and the coffin. Zarathustra rejects that interpretation. But how is it to be interpreted?

The first and the second book had both closed with Zarathustra taking leave from his friends. At the end of Part One this leave-taking is said to be for the sake of his disciples who have to learn to walk alone, learn to resist Zarathustra, to even deny him, so that they may become themselves and his friends in higher sense. The leave-taking from his friends at the end of the Second Part is for the sake of Zarathustra himself, who knows “it,” and yet resists what he knows and does “not want to say it” (*Zarathustra*, 257):

“The pride of youth is still upon you; you have become young late; but whoever would become as a child must overcome his youth too.” And I reflected for a long time and trembled. But at last I said what I had said at first: “I do not want to.”

Then laughter surrounded me. Alas, how this laughter tore my entrails and slit open my heart! And it spoke to me for the last time: “O Zarathustra, your fruit is ripe, but you are not yet ripe for your fruit. Thus you must return to your solitude again; for you must yet become mellow.” (*Zarathustra*, 259)

Like a river returning to its source, Zarathustra, who we are told became young late, must once again become a child.

The theme of homecoming is raised explicitly in the very beginning of the Third Part, in the section called “The Wanderer.”

I am a wanderer and mountain-climber he said to his heart; I do not like the plains, and it seems I cannot sit still for long. And whatever may yet come to me as destiny and experience will include some wandering and mountain climbing: in the end, one experiences only oneself. The time is gone when mere accidents could still happen to me; and what could still come to me now that was not mine already? What returns, what finally comes home to me, is my own self and what of myself has long been in strange lands and scattered among all things and accidents. And one further thing I know: I stand before my final peak now and before that which has been saved up for me the longest. Alas, I have begun my loneliest walk! But whoever is of my kind cannot escape such an hour—the hour which says to him:

“Only now are you going your way to greatness! Peak and abyss—they are now joined together.”

Homecoming is described here as a homecoming of the self to the self. This homecoming is also a self-integration, where we should keep in mind the traditional Platonic understanding of recollection as a kind of homecoming, transformed by St. Augustine into “*memoria*.” What comes home, Zarathustra tells us, is the part of himself that had long been in strange lands and scattered among all things. This should be read together, not just with what had been said about redemption and the cripples in the preceding book (*Zarathustra*, 250–251), but also with the discussion of *curiositas* in Augustine’s *Confessions*.

Note that the integration that here is placed in the future is described as also a return to the origin, to what was. Homecoming means an appropriation of the past that is inseparable from full self-affirmation: “The time is gone when mere accidents could happen to me.” This raises the question of what is required so that a human being may understand him- or herself in such a way that accidents can no longer happen to him or her. Was the fact that I was born at a particular time, of a particular sex, into a particular family, an accident? The integrating love of self requires *amor fati*.

But at this stage Zarathustra has not yet achieved such self-integration. It still awaits him as a task, requires further journeying. That journey leads beyond oneself:

“But the lover of knowledge who is obtrusive with his eyes—how could he see more of all things than their foregrounds (*vordern Gründe*)? But you, O Zarathustra, wanted to see the ground (*Grund*) and background

(*Hintergrund*) of all things; hence you must climb over yourself—upward, up, until even your stars are *under* you!”

Indeed, to look down upon myself and even upon my stars, that alone I should call my peak; that has remained for me as my ultimate peak. (*Zarathustra*, 265)

Note the distinction between *vordern Gründe*, *Grund*, and *Hintergrund*.

What is the significance of the fact that he is about to leave the blessed isles, the *glückselige Inseln*? The second sermon of Book II is called “Upon the Blessed Isles” (*Zarathustra*, 197). It is the sermon in which Zarathustra says the beauty of the overman came to him “like a shadow.” We find a reference to Zarathustra’s blessed isles also in the section “On Great Events” where an island with a fire spewing mountain is said to be not far from the blessed isles. In *Human, All To Human* we find an interesting reference to Tribschen, where he spent so many happy hours with Cosima and Richard Wagner, as “eine ferne Insel der Glückseligen, “a far away isle of the blessed” After the disappointment of Bayreuth these days now seem very far away.

## 2

In the very next section Nietzsche first presents the thought of the eternal recurrence. Important is to whom he tells his vision:

To you, the bold searchers (*Sucher*), researchers (*Versucher*) and whoever embarks with cunning sails on terrible seas — to you, drunk with riddles, glad of the twilight, whose souls flutes lure astray to every whirlpool, because you do not want to grapple along a thread with cowardly hand; and where you can guess, you hate to deduce — to you alone I tell the riddle that I saw, the vision of the loneliest. (*Zarathustra*, 267–268)

The German is important there — *Versucher* means not only researcher, but more obviously tempter; the devil is the *Versucher*! — as is the reference to seafaring — Nietzsche liked to think himself in the image of Columbus, as a Genoese.<sup>49</sup>

Zarathustra describes a mountain-journey:

Not long ago I walked gloomily through the deadly pallor of dusk—gloomy and hard, with lips pressed together. Not only one sun had set for me. A path that

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<sup>49</sup> See Karsten Harries, “The Philosopher at Sea,” *Nietzsche's New Seas. Explorations in Philosophy, Aesthetics, and Politics*, ed. Michael Allen Gillespie and Tracy B. Strong (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988), 21-44.

ascended defiantly through stones, malicious, lonely, not cheered by herb or shrub—a mountain path crunched under the defiance of my foot. Striding silently over the mocking clatter of pebbles, crushing the rock that made it slip, my foot forced its way upward. Upward, defying the spirit that drew it downward toward the abyss, the spirit of gravity, my devil and archenemy. Upward—although he sat on me, half dwarf, half mole, lame, making lame, dripping lead into my ear, leaden thoughts into my brain. (*Zarathustra*, 268)

Who is the dwarf: the spirit of gravity? The question is important because it is the dwarf who first announces the doctrine that time is not a straight line.

This is not the first mention of this dwarf. Earlier he had been introduced as Zarathustra's devil:

I would believe only in a god who could dance. And when I saw my devil I found him serious, thorough, profound, and solemn: it was the spirit of gravity—through him all things fall. (153)

He returns in the “Dancing Song”:

“Do not cease dancing, you lovely girls! No killjoy has come to you with evil eyes, no enemy of girls. God's advocate am I before the devil: but the devil is the spirit of gravity.” (*Zarathustra*, 219)

Presumably, Eros, *der kleine Gott*, as he is called in the very next paragraph, is meant when Zarathustra calls himself the advocate or *Fürsprecher* of God. Zarathustra is the advocate of love. Recall the passage in the prologue where Zarathustra says, I love him who chastens his god. The present section refers us back to this prologue. It bids us think of this God as cupid, where the *chastening of cupid* is a traditional topos in art.

A fuller explanation is given later in the section entitled “The Spirit of Gravity”:

We are presented with grave words and values almost from the cradle: “good” and “evil” this gift is called. For its sake we are forgiven for living.

And therefore one suffers little children to come unto one—in order to forbid them betimes to love themselves: Thus the spirit of gravity orders it.

And we—we carry faithfully what one gives us to bear, on hard shoulders and over rough mountains. And should we sweat we are told: “Yes, life is a grave burden.” But only man is a grave burden for himself! That is because he carries on his shoulders too much that is alien to him. Like a camel, he kneels down and lets himself be well loaded. Especially the strong, reverent spirit that would bear much: he loads too many alien grave words and values on himself, and then life seems a desert to him. (*Zarathustra*, 305-306)

The spirit of gravity, who imposes grave words and values, is thus the God that gave Moses the law. Zarathustra has recast the old God as his devil because he presents us with a law that is brought to us from without, as Moses carried God's tablets down from Mount Sinai:

Man is hard to discover—hardest of all for himself: often the spirit lies about the soul. Thus the spirit of gravity orders it. He, however, has discovered himself who says, “This is *my* good and evil”: with that he has reduced to silence the mole and dwarf who says, “Good for all, evil for all.” (*Zarathustra*, 306)

Zarathustra recasts the old God as his devil because he stands in the way of his commandment: “love thyself,” which is also *amor fati*.

The dwarf warns and mocks Zarathustra:

“O Zarathustra,” he whispered mockingly, syllable by syllable; “you philosopher's stone! You threw yourself up high, but every stone that is thrown must fall. O Zarathustra, you philosopher's stone, you slingstone, you star-crusher! You threw yourself up so high; but every stone that is thrown must fall. Sentenced to yourself and to your own stoning — O Zarathustra, far indeed have you thrown the stone, but it will fall back on yourself.” (*Zarathustra*, 268)

The dwarf here speaks of the futility of the attempt to place our creations, to cast ourselves so far ahead of ourselves that our work can take the place of God. He speaks of the futility of the overman:

Then the dwarf fell silent, and that lasted a long time. His silence, however, oppressed me; and such twosomeness is surely more lonesome than being alone. I climbed, I climbed, I dreamed, I dreamed, I thought; but everything oppressed me. I was like one sick whom his wicked torture makes weary, and who as he falls asleep is awakened by a still more wicked dream. (*Zarathustra*, 268–269)

The dwarf falls silent: God has become silent. God's silence is nihilism. This silence recalls the melancholy that seized Zarathustra after he had heard the soothsayer, the *Wahrsager* who proclaims the truth that there is no God. But even this truth burdens us. So our identification of the *Geist der Schwere* with the old God would seem not to have been quite right. The *Geist der Schwere* is rather the spirit of the place that God occupies. But the spirit of that place is the spirit of revenge.

Zarathustra confronts this spirit with a courage that lets him pronounce an either—or: “Dwarf! It is you or I!” The thought of the eternal recurrence presupposes courage. Either God is the author of meaning or Zarathustra, that is to say the human being, that



human being whose beginning was said to be the beginning of tragedy. In *Either-Or* Kierkegaard's "A" suggests that the true either-or is between the religious and the tragic. Nietzsche could have agreed with this. I, at any rate, would agree with it.

Courage slays dizziness at the edge of abysses. The deepest abyss is said to be pity. Courage is said to slay even death. But is this slaying of death not a fantasy, a brave show covering up grim reality, as the term "*klingendes Spiel*," the (brass) music that accompanies an army venturing into battle, suggests, a term that suggests a drowning out of the horrors of battle.<sup>50</sup>

"Stop dwarf!" I said. "It is I or you! But I am the stronger of us two: you do not know my abysmal thought. That you could not bear." (*Zarathustra*, 269)

We should note the reversed order: I or you. The dwarf is now confronted with Zarathustra's abysmal thought. The spirit of gravity weighs on us only as long as we are possessed by the spirit of revenge. The thought of the eternal recurrence is said to overcome just this spirit:.

"Behold this gateway, dwarf!" I continued. "It has two faces. Two paths meet here; no one has yet followed either to its end. This long lane stretches back for an eternity. And the long lane out there, that is another eternity. They contradict each other, these paths, they offend each other face to face; and it is here at this gateway that they come together. The name of the gateway is inscribed above: 'moment.' But whoever would follow one of them, on and on, farther and farther — do you believe dwarf, that these paths contradict each other eternally?" (*Zarathustra*, 269–270)

Zarathustra presents his thought as a riddle, but the spirit of gravity seems quite unimpressed. He gives his answer rather quickly and contemptuously:

"All that is straight lies," the dwarf murmured contemptuously. "All truth is crooked; time itself is a circle." (*Zarathustra*, 270)

Why is the dwarf able to move so easily to the thought that time is a circle? We should note how close his words are to the words his animals attribute to Zarathustra.

"Now I die and vanish," you would say, "and all at once I am nothing." The soul is as mortal as the body. But the knot of causes in which I am entangled recurs and will create me again. I myself belong to the causes of the eternal recurrence. I come again, with this sun, with this earth, with this eagle, with this serpent — not to a new life or a better life or a similar life: I come back eternally to this same, selfsame life, in what is greatest as in what is smallest, to

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<sup>50</sup> Recall Schopenhauer's reference to Arjuna, the warrior of Hindu mythology.

teach again the eternal recurrence of all things, to speak again the word of the great noon of earth and man, to proclaim the overman again to men. I spoke my word, I break of my word: thus my eternal lot wants it; as a proclaimer I perish. The hour has now come when he who goes under should bless himself. Thus ends Zarathustra's going under." (*Zarathustra*, 333)

Thought through, the eternal recurrence for the self-same means, strange as it may seem, that everything happens only once, but that time is a circle.

But let me return to the question: why does the spirit of gravity have so little difficulty thinking the thought of the eternal recurrence? I already suggested the answer in our earlier discussion of Schopenhauer's paragraph 54. The answer becomes obvious once we understand the spirit of gravity as a mask of the old God. For the old God dwells in eternity. Try now to think the relationship of this God to time. God must be thought of as equidistant from every point of time. God is the center of that circle which is creation. As we saw, the thought of the eternal recurrence suggested itself already to Christian theologians.

**But why does Zarathustra reject the dwarf's reply?**

In Zarathustra's formulation the thought is different in that it accepts the linearity of time and does not attempt to think it from an external vantage point. Eternity here seems to mean something like endlessness. The problem is: how are we to think this endlessness?

But let us look first more carefully at Nietzsche's text: "must not whatever can walk have walked down this lane before?" How are we to think: whatever can walk, whatever can happen? We are asked to think a totality of possibilities. If you wish, we are to think logical space as a limited whole. Just this Kant would forbid us to do. But before returning to Kant I would like to consider briefly some propositions from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*:

6. 45 The contemplation of the world *sub specie aeterni* is its contemplation as a limited whole.

The feeling of the world as a limited whole is the mystical feeling.

6. 522. There is indeed the inexpressible. This *shows* itself; it is the mystical.

In Wittgenstein's or Carnap's sense, Nietzsche might be said to attempt to say what is *inexpressible*. It must show itself. It has its base in an experience.

But what kind of experience are we talking about? The aesthetic?

Before I take up this question, let me turn to Kant. Especially relevant for our purposes is the first antinomy. The thesis states that the world has a beginning in time. For suppose the contrary: that up to the present moment an eternity had passed, and an infinite chain had come to an end, had been completed. But this cannot be. Therefore the world must have a beginning in time.

The antithesis denies this. Suppose there had been a beginning. Then there would have to be a time before the time the world began, an empty time. But in this empty time the beginning of something cannot be thought.

Kant's solution to the antinomy rests on his insistence that "the whole of the world" is a concept that can never be given in intuition. There is only an endless regress. The infinite cannot be mastered by the idea of totality. That goes not only for the world as a whole, but for every thing, and more especially for every person. The idea of a thing as such an infinite, but limited whole is a mere idea.

What then lets Nietzsche insist on the idea of a limited whole? We have to turn to an experience. Wittgenstein gives us here a pointer: he speaks of the mystical experience, which for him is inseparable from the aesthetic, which in turn fuses for him with the ethical. Here one could consider Nietzsche's discussion of the Psychology of the Artist in *Twilight of the Idols*. He speaks there of intoxication (*Rausch*). *Rausch* idealizes. It transforms reality into something perfect. Beautiful reality is reality thus transformed. Is the doctrine of the eternal recurrence then mere poetry? And has Zarathustra himself not said that "the poets lie too much?" And did he not call himself a poet?

In *The Will to Power* Nietzsche appears to claim truth for the thought of the eternal recurrence:

1066. If the world may be thought of as a certain definite (*bestimmt*) quantity of force and as a certain definite number of centers of force — and every other representation remains indefinite and therefore useless — it follows that in the great dice game of existence, it must pass through a calculable number of combinations. In infinite time, every possible combination would at some time or another be realized: moreover, it would be realized an infinite number of times. And since between every combination and its next recurrence all other possible combinations would have to take place, and each of these combinations conditions the entire sequence of combinations in the same series, a circular movement of absolutely identical series is thus demonstrated.

Note that the thought is expressed in the subjunctive. The only useful way of thinking the world is said to be to think it as definite (*bestimmt*).

Kant would reject such a thought: although what we experience is given to us as determinate and determined, it is not given to us as a determinate whole in the sense that it is not constituted by what is other than it. The set of its conditions has similarly no closure. This is also at the heart of Schopenhauer's formulation of the principle of sufficient reason. Today we may want to invoke such notions as "alterity" or "différance." Only by refusing to heed the injunction laid down by Kant in his antinomies can someone think, as Nietzsche here appears to think, the world as a definite force inserted into a definite space (1067), *eine bestimmte Kraft, in einen bestimmten Raum eingelegt*. Kant would have insisted that the thought of the world as in this sense a definite whole is only a *transcendent idea*, a mere thought.

Note that this idea defeats contingency. And to do so, it would seem, it does not have to assume the dwarf's vantage point and posit an eternal being outside time.

And yet, it should be obvious that here the idea of determination (*Bestimmung*) is inseparable from that of eternity. The elements that enter into different combinations have to preserve their distinct character through time. **They take the place of eternal being.** But again, as Kant points out, the world is not given to us as a whole. Our thought of it as such a whole remains a mere idea of reason. It is thus significant that Nietzsche speaks of the eternal recurrence most often in the subjunctive, although he also suggests that science will support that thought. Thus he writes that "the law of the conservation of energy demands eternal recurrence."

**We must keep in mind that for Nietzsche the truths of science are not truths at all, if by truth is meant the congruence with things as they are. They are conjectures that give us power.** But must we then not say the same of the thought of the eternal recurrence? Is it more than a mere thought, a transcendent idea in Kant's sense, meaningless rather than demonstrably true or false, an idea at any rate than can never be given adequate support? But why does Nietzsche then advance an argument that, it would seem, rests on premises he himself would have to consider false. Is that argument itself meant as a parable?

## 3

Let me return to *On the Vision and the Riddle*. The thought is found frightening:

Thus I spoke, more and more softly; for I was afraid of my own thoughts and the thoughts behind my thoughts. The suddenly I heard a dog howl nearby. Had I ever heard a dog howl like this? My thoughts raced back. Yes, when I was a child, in the most distant childhood: then I heard a dog howl like this. And I saw him, too, bristling, his head up, trembling, in the stillest midnight when even dogs believe in ghosts — and I took pity: for just then the full moon, silent as death, passed over the house; just then it stood still, a round glow — still on the flat roof, as if on another's property — that was why the dog was terrified, for dogs believe in thieves and ghosts. And when I heard such howling again I took pity again. (*Zarathustra*, 270)

The dog's howling leads to pity, which had been called the deepest abyss. Note here the fusion of past and present (cf. Proust). A new image follows:

Where was the dwarf gone now? And the gateway? And the spider? And all the whispering? Was I dreaming then? Was I waking up?  
Among wild cliffs I stood suddenly alone, bleak, in the bleakest moonlight. But there lay a man. And there—the dog, jumping, bristling, whining—now he saw me coming; then he howled again; he cried. Had I ever heard a dog cry like this for help? And verily, what I saw, I had never seen the like. A young shepherd I saw. Writhing, gagging, in spasms, his face distorted and a heavy black snake hanging [check] out of his mouth. Had I ever seen so much nausea and pale dread on one face? He seemed to have been asleep when the snake crawled into his throat, and there bit itself fast. My hand tore at the snake and tore in vain; it did not tear the snake out of his throat. Then it cried out of me: “Bite! Bite its head off! Bite!” thus it cried out of me—my dread, my hatred, my nausea, my pity, all that is good and wicked in me cried out of me with a single cry.  
(*Zarathustra*, 271)

Later, in the section *The Convalescent*, we are given an interpretation:

The great disgust with man—this choked me and had crawled into my throat, and what the soothsayer said: ‘All is the same, nothing is worthwhile, knowledge chokes.’ A long twilight limped before me, a sadness, weary to death, drunken with death, speaking with a yawning mouth. ‘Eternally recurs the man of whom you are weary, the small man’—thus yawned my sadness and dragged its feet and could not go to sleep. Man's earth turned into a cave for me, its chest sunken; all that is living became human mold and bones and musty past to

me. My sighing sat on all human tombs and could no longer get up; my sighing and questioning croaked and gagged and gnawed and wailed by day and night: 'Alas, man recurs eternally! The small man returns eternally!' (*Zarathustra*, 331)

To someone who cannot affirm life, someone filled with Schopenhauerian pity, the thought of the eternal recurrence has to appear as a negative thought, which just compounds the burdensome character of life. It serves to make that burden infinite.

And consider how negative that thought is: it suggests a process without either goal or purpose, just the opposite of the Christian conception of time, which is future-oriented. Here life is given a goal that is placed beyond life, a contradictory goal: eternal life.

How should we understand the biting off of the head of the snake? The thought of the eternal recurrence has its foundation in the affirmation of life in all its negativity. But this is the mood of tragedy. This is why **tragedy and the doctrine of the eternal recurrence belong together**.

#### 4

Zarathustra suggests that this thought is more than just an idea. It has its foundation in a particular mode of perceiving what is, a mode governed by courage and *amor fati*. Such love transfigures and perfects our perceptions. The doctrine of the eternal recurrence thus has its foundation in something like an aesthetic, perhaps we should say mystical or religious, experience. We could indeed try to define aesthetic experience as the experience of something as a whole. I would insist that this whole is imaginary, a product of the *Einbildungskraft*.

Nietzsche describes the thought of the eternal recurrence as the thought that allows for the fullest self-affirmation. It is indeed a thought that gathers the self into a whole, but in a way that is at the same time an overleaping of the old self. Recall the sermon *On Redemption*. Zarathustra there addresses the cripples. Zarathustra's creating could be said to be *a carrying into one of what is fragment and riddle and dreadful accident*. The mood that accomplishes such gathering is *amor fati*. That love so completely embraces the self that it must also embrace the world. And like all love it perfects what it embraces, that is to say, makes it whole. In this embrace the fragmentary

self that presents itself first of all and most of the time is leapt over. Zarathustra's homecoming is a homecoming to this enlarged self:

I, Zarathustra, the advocate of life, the advocate of suffering, the advocate of the circle, I summon you, my most abysmal thought.

Hail to me! You are coming, I hear you. My abyss speaks. I have turned my ultimate depth inside out into the light! Hail to me! Come here! Give me your hand! Huh! Let go! Huhuh! Nausea, nausea, nausea — Woe unto me!  
(*Zarathustra*, 328)

Is it the depth that speaks, the *Abgrund*, or only a *Gedanke*, even if it is called the *abgründlichste Gedanke*, the most abysmal thought?

Nietzsche also speaks of a vision rising from the abyss. The thought articulates that vision. It is, I have suggested, a vision of what is as a whole. **Is this vision free of the spirit of revenge?** Is it not the spirit of revenge that lets Zarathustra, too, leap over man, leap over life? **Does the affirmation of life demand perhaps a renunciation of the whole? Of the vain insistence that one perceive the whole?**

I have suggested that the vision of the eternal recurrence is born of love. That love idealizes the beloved. This idealizing love gives birth to the thought of the eternal recurrence. But is such idealization really compatible with full affirmation? The thought of the eternal recurrence is to allow for the most complete affirmation of all that is. As a teacher of the eternal recurrence, Zarathustra is to play the part of the great tragic poets. But does that thought really allow us to embrace reality; does it not rather, precisely because it attempts to embrace **all** of reality, **overleap reality**? Is it not yet another thought born of the spirit of revenge?

## 5

In *Ecce Homo*, as I pointed out, Nietzsche describe the thought of the eternal recurrence as an inspiration. The human being is seized by something higher, or perhaps more appropriately, something lower. The abyss speaks. Dionysian being becomes word.

Being becomes Word? Is this thought then the truth? But what then is truth?

First of all, Nietzsche argues, what we take to be true has its measure in inevitably perspectival phenomena. Our world is constituted by our will to power.

This is especially true of our concepts and values. Both are creations of the will to power, which seeks to secure itself by holding on to something firm, by placing itself on a firm foundation. This is how Nietzsche would have us understand Descartes when he makes our ability to perceive something clearly and distinctly the measure of truth. So understood, the insistence that the human being is capable of the truth and on the conditions that make this possible (in the case of Descartes, God), has its foundation in the will to power that cannot forgive itself its lack of power, i.e. in the spirit of revenge. But the thought of the eternal recurrence presupposes that the spirit of revenge has been overcome. Must it then not also presuppose an overcoming of truth in the Cartesian Platonic sense?

But once more: what then is truth? All truth, Nietzsche says a number of times, has its foundation in the Will to Power. But Nietzsche also gives us a stronger formulation: Truth, he says, is a name for the will to power.

What then is will to power? With that term Nietzsche attempts to interpret the meaning of both human being and of being as a movement from chaos to form. Using the language of *The Birth of Tragedy*, we can say that it is an endless overflowing of chaos into form, a constant overpowering and being overpowered. Think of a river about to freeze. Nietzsche's understanding may once again be considered the inverse of Plato's. Instead of understanding definition in terms of an imposition of timeless forms on the Heraclitean river, Nietzsche understands it as an emergence of such forms from this river.

As Heidegger points out, of these two conceptions of truth, truth as correspondence and truth as chaos made definite, the latter may be said to be the more fundamental in that it is presupposed by the former. When I call a proposition such as "there is a red book on the table" true, then the red book on the table is understood by Nietzsche as itself the product of a process of definition.

Given this general background we can now distinguish two kinds of truth:

1. Truth born of the will to power unable to forgive itself its lack of power, i.e. truth born of the spirit of revenge: Platonic or Cartesian truth.
2. Truth born of the will to power strong and courageous enough to forgive itself its lack of power, i.e. truth born of grace: Dionysian truth.



In the *Will to Power* Nietzsche calls it childish to insist on clarity and distinctness as a criterion of truth. And just as Nietzsche calls on our will to power to affirm itself in its lack of power, so he calls on us to acknowledge that truth in its deepest sense is given to us only in the subjunctive, conjecturally, in parables. Philosophy, like science, should be **experimental**.

Let me return now to the thought of the eternal recurrence and ask: in what sense is it true? Is it an experimental truth in the described sense? Somewhat like the conjectures of science?

Yet in a crucial respect the thought of the eternal recurrence is unlike the conjectures of science. In science our will to power is directed outward — we are trying to understand something other. The thought of the eternal recurrence is inseparable from the will to power's attempt to understand its own abysmal being. Here the will to power is struggling to grasp its own essence. It would then be not simply a movement from chaos to form, but an attempt to think the movement which is precisely the essence of the will to power. The thought of the eternal recurrence is the result of an attempt to think the essence of being, that essence which Schopenhauer had thought in terms of will, and which we ourselves are. Nietzsche follows Schopenhauer, but cannot divorce the essence of will from time.

What resists such attempts to think being or will is precisely its infinity, its abysmal, Dionysian aspect. Thus the attempt to think time entangles us in Kant's antinomies.

Why not leave it at that? Why insist on thinking the infinite as a whole? Nietzsche here points to love. We transfigure what we love, perfect it, make it whole.

## 6

The story that Nietzsche tells in the Third Part of *Zarathustra* is no doubt one that shows *Zarathustra* struggling with and seeming to overcome the spirit of revenge. But does he really succeed? Consider *The Other Dancing Song* and the *The Seven Seals* with which the book concludes.

The first shows *Zarathustra* between his two loves, life and wisdom:

Then life looked back and around thoughtfully and said softly: "O Zarathustra, you are not faithful enough to me. You do not love me nearly as much as you say; I know you are thinking of leaving me soon. There is an old heavy, heavy growl-bell that growls at night all the way up to your cave; when you hear this bell strike the hour at midnight, then you think between one and twelve—you think, O Zarathustra, I know it, of how you want to leave me soon."

"Yes" I answered hesitantly, "but you also know—" and I whispered something into her ear, right through her tangled yellow foolish tresses.

"You know that, O Zarathustra? Nobody knows that."

And we looked at each other and gazed on the green meadow over which the cool evening sun was running just then, and we wept together. But then life was dearer to me than all my wisdom ever was. (*Zarathustra*, 221)

Is it life Zarathustra loves or his wisdom? Remember the melancholy end of the first dancing song.

Whom does Zarathustra love? Every section of *The Seven Seals* ends with the same words; "*For I love you, O eternity!*"

It is not time that Zarathustra loves, but time transfigured into eternity. But this is an old Platonic theme: we find it impossible to make peace with time and so we retreat from time to eternity. Zarathustra's wisdom offers him and us a parable of life. It is a parable said to be born of love of life. But is it that parable Zarathustra loves, or is it life?

Must the thought of the eternal recurrence not bring with it a downgrading of all that ties us into time? Of care, anticipation, suffering — and human love, that love that looks beyond itself, beyond the beloved, to the offspring of that love, to children. Zarathustra and Nietzsche himself both confess that they never found the woman from whom they want children. But what kind of child can eternity give birth to? The dwarf has already hinted at the answer: the thought that time is a circle. Inseparable from the thought of the eternal recurrence is the thought of the cosmically expanded self. But this expansion of the self is imaginary, is only poetry. Is the eternal recurrence the stone of which the dwarf spoke, thrown high but bound to fall back on Zarathustra to crush him? The love of Zarathustra would seem to be a barren, narcissistic love.

To test that interpretation, consider the *Drunken Song* of the Fourth Part, which offers an interpretation of the *Dancing Song*:

You vine! Why do you praise me? Did I not cut you? I am cruel, you bleed; what does your praise of my drunken cruelty mean?

“What is perfect, all that is ripe—wants to die”—thus you speak. Blessed, blessed be the vintager’s knife! But all that is unripe wants to live: woe!

Woe entreats: Go! Away, woe! But all that suffers wants to live, so that it may become ripe and joyous and longing—longing for what is farther, higher, brighter. “I want heirs”—thus speaks all that suffers, “I want children, I do not want myself!”

Joy, however, does not want heirs or children—joy wants itself, wants eternity, wants recurrence, wants everything eternally the same.

Woe says, “Break, bleed, heart! Wander, leg! Wing, fly! Get on! Up! Pain! Well then, old heart!” Woe implores, ‘Go!’ (*Zarathustra*, 434–435)

The desire to have children would seem to have been subordinated here to the theme of self-affirmation, as woe is subordinated to joy. And in a very traditional way joy wants eternity, wants eternal recurrence.

What then are we to make of Zarathustra’s *Yes and Amen Song*, this hymn to the eternal recurrence, to this nuptial rings of rings? What kind of wedding is this? The wedding of eternity and life, where the offspring is the eternal recurrence? Does this offspring have the same status as the traditional idea of eternal life, is it too a contradiction? Is Zarathustra, too, just an inventor of another afterworld born of the spirit of revenge? Does he too not cover up reality with the imaginary? Is he, too, only fool, only poet, as the Old Magician sings of himself (*Zarathustra*, 409)? But in this song it is not really the Old Magician who mocks himself, but life. Is life mocking Nietzsche, too?

Remember that in the section *On the Blessed Isles* Zarathustra had said:

All that is permanent—that is only a parable. And the poets lie too much.  
(*Zarathustra*, 198)

And since Nietzsche is referring here to Goethe, let me conclude by referring to one of Goethe’s poems, a poem that Schopenhauer refers to in par. 54 as expressing the worldview of someone really able to affirm life. Significantly it bears the title *Grenzen der Menschheit*, Limits of Mankind:

Wenn der uralte  
Heilige Vater

Mit gelassener Hand  
Aus rollenden Wolken  
Segnende Blitze  
Über die Erde sät,  
Küss ich den letzten  
Saum seines Kleides,  
Kindliche Schauer  
Treu in der Brust.

Denn mit Göttern  
Soll sich nicht messen  
Irgend ein Mensch.  
Hebt er sich aufwärts  
Und berührt  
Mit dem Scheitel die Sterne,  
Nirgends haften dann  
Die unsichern Sohlen,  
Und mit ihm spielen  
Wolken und Winde,

Steht er mit festen  
Markigen Knochen  
Auf der wohlgegründeten  
Dauernden Erde,  
Reicht er nicht auf,  
Nur mit der Eiche  
Oder der Rebe  
sich zu vergleichen.

Was unterscheidet  
Götter von Menschen?

Das viele Wellen  
Vor jenen wandeln,  
Ein ewiger Strom  
Uns hebt die Welle,  
Verschlingt die Welle,  
Und wir versinken.

Ein kleiner Ring  
Begrenzt unser Leben,  
Und viele Geschlechter  
Reihen sich dauernd  
An ihres Daseins  
Unendliche Kette.

When the ancient  
Holy father  
With calm hand  
From the rolling clouds  
Sends blessed lightning  
Over the earth,  
I kiss the last  
Seam of his cloak  
With childlike awe  
Deep in my breast.

For with gods  
Shall never compete  
Mortal Man.  
If he lifts himself up  
And touches

The stars with his head,  
Then nowhere are anchored  
His uncertain feet,  
And with him sport  
The clouds and the wind.

If he stands with firm,  
Vigorous bones,  
Upon the well-founded  
and enduring earth,  
He does not reach up  
Even to the oak tree,  
Or the vine  
To compare himself.

What distinguishes  
Gods from Men?  
That many waves  
Pass before them  
An eternal stream:  
Us the wave lifts;  
Devours us,  
And we drown.

A small ring  
Limits our life,  
And many generations  
Continuously join,  
To form their existence's  
Endless chain.

(Trans. Emily Ezust, changed,  
[www.recmusic.org/lieder/get\\_text.html?TextId=6438](http://www.recmusic.org/lieder/get_text.html?TextId=6438))

“Ein kleiner Ring/ Begrenzt unser Leben” — “A small ring/ Limits our life.” Our life is limited. What limits it is first of all death. With Heidegger we can say that the anticipation of death is inseparable from an understanding of my life as my own. Death lets us understand our life as a whole, as a *kleiner Ring*. But granted that it is possible to gather life together into such a whole in this way, should we do so? Goethe suggests that the ring be understood as member of a *Kette*, a chain. That chain is not given as a whole. Self-affirmation in the fullest sense demands we affirm ourselves on one hand as limited by the little ring that encloses our life and yet at the same time joined in the chain of generations. That is to insist that genuine homecoming requires an overcoming of the narcissistic eros, requires something like a looking beyond the self to the children. The end of *Zarathustra* gestures uncertainly in this direction:

“Am I concerned with my happiness? I am concerned with my work.”

“Well then! The lion came, my children are near, Zarathustra has ripened. My hour has come: this is my morning. My day is breaking: rise now, rise now, rise though great noon!”

Thus spoke Zarathustra, and he left his cave, glowing and strong as a morning sun comes out of dark mountains. (*Zarathustra*, 439)