

NIETZSCHE'S EXPLANATION OF  
SPIRIT IN TERMS OF THE WILL TO POWER

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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NIETZSCHE'S EXPLANATION OF SPIRIT IN TERMS OF  
THE WILL TO POWER

BY

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## ABSTRACT

The subject of this thesis is Nietzsche's criticism of the belief in spirituality or subjectivity. The tendency of Western civilization to regard the "inner" world as vastly more important than the "outer" world; to rank spirit above nature is, in Nietzsche's view, a sure indication of the triumph of nihilism. Given his principle of the will to power, it would not have been sufficient for Nietzsche merely to have decried the preoccupation with spirituality; he had to give an account of it in terms of that very principle. The difficulty, then, is to explain how the will to power can accommodate what normally would be considered to be its opposite: the spiritual realm.

The thesis is divided into three chapters: the first chapter relates Nietzsche's account of the creation of the soul as the effect of man's radical break with his animal nature and how this result is itself an effect of the state's coming into being; the second chapter attempts to give Nietzsche's explanation of how human life, having been forced out of its instinctive, natural forms, manages to reconstitute itself on a new, spiritual or "inner" plane, and as well, the fundamental role played by the ascetic priest in the formation of this new community will also be noted; the third and final chapter will examine the relationship of the ascetic will to power to philosophy, wherein, perhaps, asceticism reaches its apotheosis.

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## INTRODUCTION

It would, perhaps, be an understatement to say that Nietzsche's attitude toward Christianity was one of hostility. Unlike previous critics of the Christian church, Nietzsche was not interested in reform; it was the ideal itself which he attacked. More specifically, his target was the belief in a transcendent world, a belief which underlies both Christianity, in particular, and religion in general.

For Nietzsche, then, the real target is spirituality, wherever it is found. The spiritual attitude, in fact, is the foundation of civilization. Civilized man believes that he is free from the constraints of nature, free to build a life for himself in which material, bodily concerns are placed far behind the things of the spirit. Civilization thus conceived, is the triumph of spirit over nature.

Nietzsche's attitude cannot be accurately summarized by simply saying that he wished to reverse this situation. On the contrary, he sought to reduce both spirit and nature to modes of the will to power. Nietzsche's principle of the will to power is used to show that the boundaries of life extend beyond nature, even into its apparent opposite, the realm of spirit.

This attempt to account for spirituality in terms of the will to power is, at the same time, an attack on the claims of spirit. It is a denial of the belief in a transcendent reality. In specific terms, Nietzsche's claim is that spirit represents a repressed will to power, a will to power forced to turn back upon itself in an attempt to renounce its own nature. Spirituality conceals a hatred for natural, instinctive life; it is the attempt to create a way of life devoted to the denial of the body. The life of the spirit, of civilization, has therefore a strong attachment to asceticism as a necessary means to its achievement. Civilized life, at whatever level of abstractness, conceals within itself the ascetic imperative.

It is, therefore, the aim of this thesis to show that, in Nietzsche's view, the will to power is the principle upon which spiritual as well as natural life depends. In order to achieve this end, it will be necessary to set out Nietzsche's historical

account of the existence of the spiritual world as the manifestation of a will to power in contradiction with itself, a will to power devoted to the repression of life. A further goal of this thesis will be to point out how the ascetic will to power displays itself in, perhaps, the highest expression of spiritual life, namely, philosophy.

This thesis will be divided up in the following manner: the first chapter will relate the story of the creation of the soul as the effect of man's radical break with his animal nature and how this result is itself an effect of the state's coming into being; the second chapter will attempt to explain how human life, having been forced out of its instinctive, natural forms, attempts to reconstitute itself on a new, spiritual or "inner" plane and in addition, the fundamental role played by the ascetic priest in the formation of this new community will also be noted; the third and final chapter will examine the relationship of the ascetic will to power to philosophy, wherein, perhaps, asceticism reaches its apotheosis.

## Chapter 1

# THE ORIGIN OF SUBJECTIVITY

### 1.1. Life and the will to power

How can Nietzsche account for the existence of a realm of the subjective? That the existence of subjectivity must be explained is obvious, given Nietzsche's philosophical presuppositions. His basic principle is the will to power, and he must, therefore, show how everything can be reduced to it. He cannot allow subjectivity an independent existence without violating his monistic philosophy. Nietzsche's task, therefore, is to demonstrate how the soul can be nothing more than a mode of the will to power.

Another way of looking at this question, is to recognize that what Nietzsche is attempting to explain is nothing less than the origin of civilization. That mankind once lived at a level no higher than that of any species of animal, Nietzsche does not doubt; he is a follower of Darwin in this respect. The question as to how subjectivity arose is also the question as to how civilized societies grew out of primitive tribes. By what means did man cease to be a savage and become a refined bourgeois? Nietzsche's answer to this question is that such a transformation did not in fact occur; savage man did not cease to exist, he merely put on a disguise. He continues to live beneath the trappings of culture. Nietzsche's task, then, is to explain how the state replaced the tribe, how civilized, reflective man developed from an unthinking brute, by means of the will to power alone.

Nietzsche saw in the will to power a means of reducing all of man's

activities to a primitive unity. Both the natural, biological drives and the spiritual, cultural pursuits could be viewed, in the light of the will to power, as different aspects of the same being. By this means, Nietzsche attempted to integrate man and nature. This is the significance, it would seem, of the proliferation of biological metaphors in the description of, ostensibly, mental activities.<sup>1</sup>

Nietzsche, furthermore, often uses "life" interchangeably with "will to power," emphasizing, it would appear, the deep interconnection of spirit and nature.<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche, however, uses "life" in a rather special way. It is, for him, not a purely descriptive term, but rather an evaluative term as well. Life is beyond good and evil. While there are higher and lower forms of life, all expressions of life are on the same scale. By using the word life as an alternate term for will to power, Nietzsche expresses the fatalistic implications of his philosophy. The necessities of life render all moralistic evaluations nugatory.

Life itself is *essentially* appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker; suppression, hardness, imposition of one's own forms, incorporation and at least, at its mildest, exploitation....<sup>3</sup>

All living creatures interact with their environment. To live is, by definition, to be not static. Stasis is another word for death. Life is becoming; life is change; life is growth and decay; life is movement; life is action. The essence of life is activity, another of Nietzsche's favorite words.

To demand of strength that it should *not* express itself as strength, that it should *not* be a desire to overcome, a desire to throw down, a desire to become master, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs, is just as absurd as to demand of weakness that it should

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<sup>1</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, Walter Kaufmann, trans. (New York: Vintage Books, 1966) p. 160. Cited hereafter as BGE. The reference in this passage is to "spiritual digestion."

<sup>2</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, The Will To Power, Walter Kaufmann, ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), pp. 341-366. Cited hereafter as WP. The section in question is entitled, "The Will to Power as Life."

<sup>3</sup>Nietzsche, BGE, p. 203.



express itself as strength.<sup>4</sup>

At this level of the will to power, the most elementary, the individual does not exist. Here man, like any animal, is no more than the sum total of his activities; he cannot, logically, be separated from them. Man's relation to his environment is immediate. Indeed, to speak of a "relation," in this case, is to consider the matter too abstractly; the human animal is as much a part of the environment as the plants and the trees. In this period prior to the organization of civilized communities man, so Nietzsche thinks, is unable to abstract from his present, practical needs; the world around him is but a reflection of his own desires.

The problem for Nietzsche, then, is to explain how man is able to make the leap from nature to spirit, to explain how great civilizations arise from such simple beginnings. More especially, he is charged with the task of demonstrating how this great event can be accomplished by the principle of the will to power.

## 1.2. Subjectivity and the will to power

### 1.2.1. Punishment and civilization

Nietzsche's answer to this question is given in the second essay of On The Genealogy Of Morals, entitled "'Guilt,' 'Bad Conscience,' and the Like." The title is very significant in that the existence of a sense of guilt is thought to be the sign that a person is able to step back from his desires and wants, in order to consider his actions according to other than purely personal criteria. It implies that one is able to acknowledge the rights of others, or that one recognizes a law above one's own will. A sense of guilt has usually been considered to be the mark of a civilized human being, a being fit to live in a community, where co-operation is necessary and competitiveness is regulated.

<sup>4</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, On The Genealogy Of Morals, Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, trans., from On The Genealogy Of Morals and Ecce Homo, Walter Kaufmann, ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), p. 45. Cited hereafter as GM.

With regard to the question of the development of civilized man, one might wonder what sort of means are required in order to transform man's nature from the restlessness and unpredictability characteristic of the animal into the rule-governed behaviour of a social being? Nietzsche poses the question thus:

How can one create a memory for the human animal? How can one impress something upon this partly obtuse, partly flighty mind, attuned only to the passing moment, in such a way that it will stay there?<sup>5</sup>

The answer he gives to this question is that pain and suffering are the most important instruments in this process. This answer is not surprising since the will to power must be assumed to be involved somehow. "Man could never do without blood, torture, and sacrifices when he felt the need to create a memory for himself ... [P]ain is the most powerful aid to mnemonics."<sup>6</sup> One of the means by which we can determine the difficulty of this task is an examination of the kinds of punishments inflicted on wrongdoers in past ages.

[T]he severity of the penal code provides an especially significant measure of the degree of effort needed to overcome forgetfulness and to impose a few primitive demands of social existence as *present realities* upon these slaves of momentary affect and desire.<sup>7</sup>

In Nietzsche's estimation, the infliction of punishment has served to regulate man's behaviour, to make his actions predictable and, thus, to produce a fit member of society, that is, one who habitually conforms to its rules. It is important, he believes, that one not impute notions such as desert and freewill back into history as the guiding beliefs behind the institution of punishment. "[P]unishment, as requital, evolved quite independently of any presuppositions concerning freedom or non-freedom of the will...."<sup>8</sup> The system of legal punishment is itself derived from a practice of much greater antiquity.

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<sup>5</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 60.

<sup>6</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 61.

<sup>7</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 61.

<sup>8</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 63.

Throughout the greater part of human history punishment was *not* imposed *because* one held the wrongdoer responsible for his deed, thus *not* on the presupposition that only the guilty one should be punished: rather, as parents still punish their children, from anger at some harm or injury, vented on the one who caused it — but this anger is held in check and modified by the idea that every injury has its *equivalent* and can actually be paid back, even if only through the *pain* of the culprit. And whence did this primeval, deeply rooted, perhaps by now *irradicable* idea draw its power — this idea of an equivalence between injury and pain? ... [I]n the contractual relationship between *creditor* and *debtor*, which is as old as the idea of "legal subjects" and in turn points back to the fundamental forms of buying, selling, barter, trade, and traffic.<sup>9</sup>

### 1.2.2. The creditor-debtor relationship as primitive social bond

Punishment recapitulates the relationship of creditor to debtor. In the earliest times compensation to the creditor for failing to meet a debt consisted in the infliction of pain upon the debtor by the creditor. "[T]he creditor could inflict every kind of indignity and torture upon the body of the debtor; for example, cut from it as much as seemed commensurate with the size of the debt...."<sup>10</sup> One might well wonder what attraction there is in such a form of compensation. Why forego a material advantage, "money, land, possessions of any kind...."<sup>11</sup> in exchange for the right to cause someone pain? According to Nietzsche, this type of compensation is, to the creditor,

a kind of *pleasure* — the pleasure of being allowed to vent his power freely upon one who is powerless, ... the enjoyment of violation. This enjoyment will be greater the lower the creditor stands in the social order, and can easily appear to him as a most delicious morsel, indeed as a foretaste of higher rank. In "punishing" the debtor, the creditor participates in a *right of the masters*: at last he, too, may experience for once the exalted sensation of being allowed to despise and mistreat someone as "beneath him" — or at least, if the actual power and administration of punishment has already passed to the "authorities,"

<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche, GM, p.63.

<sup>10</sup> Nietzsche, GM, p.64.

<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche, GM, p.64.

to see him despised and mistreated. The compensation, then, consists in a warrent for and title to cruelty.<sup>12</sup>

The relationship of creditor to debtor is, in effect, a primitive expression of the will to power. It is an outlet, on the most basic level, for the violent passions natural to the human animal. It is not the suffering *per se* that is important. What is important is the sense that another person is under one's control, to be dealt with as one wills. The freedom to dominate another person is perhaps the simplest form in which the will to power expresses itself.

It is Nietzsche's contention that cruelty towards others and the enjoyment of seeing others treated cruelly, as a form of the will to power, is a basic fact of human nature, however much one nowadays would like to pretend otherwise.

It seems to me that the delicacy and even the tartuffery of tame domestic animals (which is to say modern men, which is to say us) resists a really vivid comprehension of the degree to which cruelty constituted the great festival pleasure of more primitive men and was indeed an ingredient of almost every one of their pleasures....<sup>13</sup>

Such enjoyment of cruelty has persisted up into more recent times.

[I]t is not long since princely weddings and public festivals of the more magnificent kind were unthinkable without executions, torturings, or perhaps an auto-da-fé, and no noble household was without creatures upon whom one could heedlessly vent one's malice and cruel jokes.<sup>14</sup>

The creditor-debtor relationship is, "the oldest and most primitive personal relationship...."<sup>15</sup> It predates the existence of the system of criminal justice and is, in fact, prior to all forms of civilization.

Buying and selling, together with their psychological appurtenances,

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<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche, GM, p. 65.

<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche, GM, p. 66.

<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche, GM, p. 66.

<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche, GM, p. 70.

are older even than the beginnings of any kind of social forms of organization and alliances: it was rather out of the most rudimentary form of personal rights that the budding sense of exchange, contract, guilt, right, obligation, settlement, first transferred itself to the coarsest and most elementary social complexes (in their relations with other similar complexes), together with the custom of comparing, measuring, and calculating power against power. ...[W]ith the blunt consistency characteristic of the thinking of primitive mankind ... one forthwith arrived at the great generalization, "everything has its price; all things can be paid for" -- the oldest and naivest moral canon of justice.... Justice on this elementary level is the good will among parties of approximately equal power to come to terms with one another, to reach an "understanding" by means of a settlement -- and to compel parties of lesser powers to reach a settlement among themselves.--<sup>16</sup>

The rules of justice established by the prehistoric communities represented nothing more than an induction from the creditor-debtor relationship in which the community became the creditor and the individual the debtor. "[T]he community, too, stands to its members in that same vital basic relation, that of the creditor to his debtors."<sup>17</sup> In exchange for the benefits of peace and security, each person owes a particular standard of behaviour to the community. Society, at this primitive level, has a precarious existence, and the lawbreaker is conceived as a threat to the viability of the community. For this reason, punishment takes a form similar to that treatment meted out to a defeated enemy.

The lawbreaker is a debtor who has not merely failed to make good the advantages and advance payments bestowed upon him but has actually attacked his creditor: therefore he is not only deprived henceforth of all those advantages and benefits, as is fair -- he is also reminded *what these benefits are really worth*. The wrath of the disappointed creditor, the community, throws him back again into the savage and outlaw state against which he has hitherto been protected: it thrusts him away -- and now every kind of hostility may be vented upon him. "Punishment" at this level of civilization is simply a copy, a *mimus*, of the normal attitude toward a hated, disarmed, prostrated enemy, who has lost not only every right and protection, but all hope of

<sup>16</sup>Nietzsche, GM, pp. 70-71:

<sup>17</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 71:

quarter as well...<sup>18</sup>

As societies become more stable and less easily threatened, penal codes become, in response, less harsh. "As the power and self-confidence of a community increase, the penal law always becomes more moderate..."<sup>19</sup> Eventually, the community as creditor may become so powerful as to, on occasion, forgive the debt as a sign of its power. In moral/legal language this activity is called mercy, and it represents the self-overcoming of justice. It represents both the completion and the annihilation of the law.

The justice which began with, "everything is dischargeable, everything must be discharged," ends by winking and letting those incapable of discharging their debt go free: it ends, as does every good thing on earth, by *overcoming itself*. This self-overcoming of justice: one knows the beautiful name it has given itself — *mercy*; it goes without saying that mercy remains the privilege of the most powerful man, or better, his — beyond the law."<sup>20</sup>

Through this feat of dialectical reasoning, Nietzsche manages to suggest that both justice and mercy, which would normally be thought to spring from different sources, are manifestations of the same will to power. By accounting for the legal and economic systems in terms of the will to power, one might think that Nietzsche had accomplished his task. This, however, is not the case. There yet remains to be explained perhaps the most important product of civilization: man's inner being, his soul.

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<sup>18</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p.71.

<sup>19</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p.72.

<sup>20</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 73.

### 1.2.3. The bad conscience, the creation of the state and the creditor-debtor relationship

The bad conscience, that symbol of the existence of the inner man, did not arise as a consequence of punishment. It is a great mistake, Nietzsche thinks, to assume that punishment causes the bad conscience to come into play.

Punishment is supposed to possess the value of awakening the *feeling of guilt* in the guilty person; one seeks in it the actual *instrumentum* of that psychical reaction called 'bad-conscience,' 'sting of conscience.' Thus one misunderstands psychology and the reality of things....<sup>21</sup>

In Nietzsche's view, punishment is precisely the worst instrument to use in order to invoke a sense of guilt or bad conscience. Punishment has, in this matter, the opposite effect than is supposed. Instead of making one feel remorse for one's crime, punishment produces a sense of prudence, a will not to be caught again.

[T]he actual *effect* of punishment must beyond question be sought, above all in a heightening of prudence, in an extending of the memory, in a will henceforth to go to work more cautiously, mistrustfully, secretly, in the insight that one is definitely too weak for many things, in a kind of improvement in self-criticism.<sup>22</sup>

It is Nietzsche's view that the bad conscience arose with the establishment of the state. The legal/political order of the state differed qualitatively from any previous form of human society. The movement from primitive society, based on the ties of blood and kinship, to the abstract relations embodied in the state, represented, "the most fundamental change ... [man] ever experienced -- that change which occurred when he found himself finally enclosed within the walls of society and peace."<sup>23</sup> In describing this development, Nietzsche, characteristically, makes a comparison with the theory of evolution.

<sup>21</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 81.

<sup>22</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 83.

<sup>23</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 84.

The situation that faced sea animals when they were compelled to become land animals or perish was the same as that which faced these semi-animals, well-adapted to the wilderness, to war, to prowling, to adventure: suddenly all their instincts were disvalued and "suspended." ... They felt unable to cope with the simplest undertakings; in this new world they no longer possessed their former guides, their regulating, unconscious and infallible drives: they were reduced to thinking, inferring, reckoning, co-ordinating cause and effect, these unfortunate creatures; they were reduced to their "consciousness," their weakest and most fallible organ!<sup>24</sup>

The state, upon its creation, gathered to itself a monopoly on the use of force. No longer could individuals practice personal justice. The state removed punishment from the hands of the its members. In addition, the state's creation established human life on a much less precarious footing. While it demanded strict obedience, the state's existence precluded the periodic threat of violence on the part of roaming bands of marauders. The price exacted for the state's assumption of a monopoly on the use of force, as well as its assurance of a relatively tranquil existence for its members, was that the instincts of natural man were not allowed to run their normal course.

Where an instinct or a drive is not permitted to express itself in its normal form it becomes sublimated. In other words, if the state prohibits men from punishing each other, they will begin to punish themselves. Such punishment is not to be understood literally (except perhaps in the case of certain ascetic practices). Being unable to express his instincts, man attempts, as a substitute, to suppress the very source of these drives: his own natural being. Through this procedure, the unity of his being, his instincts, are shattered. Man becomes, as it were, possessed of two, antithetical natures. The existence of the bad conscience, therefore, is the sign of a nature divided against itself.

All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly *turn inward* - this is what I call the *internalization* of man: thus it was that man first developed what was later called his "soul." The entire inner

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<sup>24</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 84.



world, originally as thin as if it were stretched between two membranes, expanded and extended itself, acquired depth, breath, and height, in the same measure as outward discharge was *inhibited*. Those fearful bulwarks with which the political organization protected itself against the old instincts of freedom -- punishments belong among these bulwarks -- brought about that all those instincts of wild, free, prowling men turned backward *against man himself*. Hostility, cruelty, joy in persecuting, in attacking, in change, in destruction -- all this turned inward against the possessors of such instincts: *that* is the origin of the "bad conscience."<sup>25</sup>

The account of the bad conscience, therefore, is the story of the origin of that dualism upon which all higher culture and perhaps civilization itself is based. The bad conscience represents, "an animal soul turned against itself, taking sides against itself..."<sup>26</sup> The life of the spirit is, in essence, the product of a psychological disturbance.

Essential to Nietzsche's explanation of the bad conscience is the proposition that the creation of the state was an imposition by a stronger group upon a weaker one.

Among the presuppositions of this hypothesis concerning the origin of the bad conscience is, first, that the change referred to was not a gradual or voluntary one and did not represent an organic adaptation to new conditions but a break, a leap, a compulsion, an ineluctable disaster which precluded all struggle and even all *ressentiment*. Secondly, however, that the welding of a hitherto unchecked and shapeless populace into a firm form was not only instituted by an act of violence but also carried to its conclusion by *nothing* but acts of violence...<sup>27</sup>

The "master race," which initiated the state by forcing its will upon a weaker group, did not itself develop the bad conscience.

It is not in *them* that the "bad conscience" developed, that goes without saying -- but it would not have developed *without them*, this

<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche, *GM*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>26</sup> Nietzsche, *GM*, p. 85.

<sup>27</sup> Nietzsche, *GM*, p. 86.

ugly-growth, it would be lacking if a tremendous quantity of freedom had not been expelled from the world, or at least from the visible world, and made as it were *latent* under their hammer blows and artists' violence.<sup>28</sup>

Both the actions of the master race and those of the conquered people are expressions of the will to power. The bad conscience, that is, the division of man's nature into body and soul and his identification with the latter, represents the same will to power that inheres in the actions of the master race.

[I]t is the same active force that is at work on a grander scale in those artists, of violence and organizers who build states, and that here, internally, on a smaller and pettier scale, directed backward, in the "labyrinth of the breast," to use Goethe's expression, creates for itself a bad conscience and builds negative ideals — namely the *instinct for freedom* (in my language: the will to power); only here the material upon which the form-giving and ravishing nature of this force vents itself is man himself, his whole ancient animal self — and *not*, as in that greater and more obvious phenomenon, some *other* man, *other* men.<sup>29</sup>

The difference between the two is derived from the level at which the will to power is expressed. A master race demonstrates the primitive form of the will to power, and a conquered people, the sublimated form of the same will to power. The expression of the will to power by the first group served to suppress the expression of that will on the part of the latter group, so that the latter's will was turned on itself. What man calls his soul, therefore, is nothing but an inversion of the will to power, a will to power that attempts to suppress its own nature.

Through the will to power, then, mankind has been able to pass out of the savage state and enter onto the level of civilization. The creation of the bad conscience is a sign that man has reached a level of reflectiveness whereby he is able to suppress his immediate wants and to evaluate a situation from the perspective of others. He is capable, therefore, of being "objective," and this

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<sup>28</sup>Nietzsche, *GM*, p. 87.

<sup>29</sup>Nietzsche, *GM*, p. 87.

capacity to consider things as they are in themselves is a prerequisite for the attainment of any degree of intellectual achievement and, hence, of civilization. And it is through the will to power, according to Nietzsche, that this result has been obtained.

The bad conscience, then, is the name for the suffering that man causes himself to undergo. It represents, "a piece of animal psychology, no more...."<sup>30</sup> In Nietzsche's terms, it is a perfectly innocent development, one bound to occur under the circumstances. The soul is the product and the sign of man's alienation from his animal nature. The soul or subject is the position (metaphorically) from which man causes suffering to himself as body or object. This division in man's nature, a kind of Manichaean separation into two opposite, warring entities, is the inevitable result of the sublimation of the will to power. Man has to split himself in two for one part to dominate the other. The bad conscience arises then as the product of this internal warfare.

Suffering itself is not a problem for man. According to Nietzsche, the important problem is the interpretation, the meaning of this pain. "Man, the bravest of animals and the most accustomed to suffering, does not repudiate suffering as such; he *desires* it, he even seeks it out, provided he shown a *meaning* for it, a purpose of suffering."<sup>31</sup> The solution that is found makes use of the creditor-debtor relationship. Man must suffer for failing to meet his debt. The cause of his suffering is, "in *himself*", in some *guilt*, in a piece of the past, he must understand his suffering as a *punishment*.<sup>32</sup> To what or to whom, it may be asked, is man in debt?

An answer to this question requires a further investigation of the

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<sup>30</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 140.

<sup>31</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 162.

<sup>32</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 140.

transformations of the creditor-debtor relationship. According to Nietzsche's speculations about prehistory, the earliest tribal communities saw themselves as being in debt to their ancestors for all the benefits that they enjoyed. "The conviction reigns that it is only through the sacrifices and accomplishments of the ancestors that the tribe *exists* -- and that one has to *pay them back* with sacrifices and accomplishments...."<sup>33</sup>

With the passage of time and the continued prosperity of the tribe, the tribal ancestors begin to take on a superhuman aspect. Eventually, Nietzsche thinks, they must come to be seen as gods. "[I]n the end the ancestor must necessarily be transfigured into a *god*. Perhaps this is even the origin of gods, an origin therefore out of fear!..."<sup>34</sup> The concept of the gods, in Nietzsche's view, is the symbol of supreme indebtedness. Man is in debt to the gods for his very existence.

History shows that the consciousness of being in debt to the deity did not by any means come to an end together with the organization of communities on the basis of blood relationships. Even as mankind inherited the concepts "good and bad" from the tribal nobility, ... it also inherited, along with the tribal and family divinities, the burden of still unpaid debts and the desire to be relieved of them.<sup>35</sup>

By referring to the origin of the state, Nietzsche attempts to link the bad conscience to the creditor-debtor relationship. Together with the creation of the state comes the bad conscience and a new interpretation, a new use of the creditor-debtor relationship. Nietzsche describes this development as, "the involvement of the bad conscience with the concept of god...."<sup>36</sup> and as, "[t]he moralization of the concepts guilt and duty, their being pushed back into the bad

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<sup>33</sup>Nietzsche, GM, pp. 88-89.

<sup>34</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 89.

<sup>35</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 90.

<sup>36</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 91.

conscience....<sup>37</sup>

The relation of creditor to debtor provides a structure, a scheme of interpretation, within which the suffering engendered by the creation of the bad conscience is given a meaning. This pain, which is actually the result of the will to power turning on itself, is understood through the creditor-debtor relationship as a punishment from God for failing to meet one's debts to Him. The bifurcation of man into body and soul, which is the result of the inversion of the will to power, is further exploited by this structure of guilt before God. Man's identification with his "spiritual" side and his attempt to suppress his carnal nature is rationalized (in the original, psychological use of the term) as a duty to God. The suffering caused by the imposition of the bad conscience is interpreted as punishment for failing to repress fully one's nature, which in turn leads to further acts of repression and to even more suffering and a greater sense of sinfulness. Man, fighting to deny his animal instincts, unconsciously translates his struggle onto the theological plane. God becomes anti-nature idealized; He is transformed into a pure spirit, the supreme soul.

With this new interpretation of the creditor-debtor relationship, the old structure is played out with new actors. According to this new schema, the creditor is God, the debtor is man as subject or soul and the debt to be paid is man's repressed animal nature. The sublimation of the creditor-debtor relationship is explained by Nietzsche in the following passage:

[T]hat will to self-tormenting, that repressed cruelty of the animal-man made inward and scared back into himself, the creature imprisoned in the "state" so as to be tamed, who invented the bad conscience in order to hurt himself after the more natural vent for this desire to hurt had been blocked — this man of the bad conscience has seized upon the presupposition of religion so as to drive his self-torture to its most gruesome pitch of severity and rigor. Guilt before God: this thought becomes an instrument of torture to him. He apprehends in "God" the ultimate antithesis of his own ineluctable animal instincts; he

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<sup>37</sup> Nietzsche, GM, p. 91.

reinterprets these animal instincts themselves as a form of guilt before God (as hostility, rebellion, insurrection against the "Lord," the "father," the primal ancestor and origin of the world); he stretches himself upon the contradiction "God" and "Devil"; he ejects from himself all his denial of himself, of his nature, naturalness, and actuality, in the form of an affirmation, as something existent, corporeal, real, as God, as the holiness of God, as God, the Judge, as God the Hangman, as the beyond, as eternity, as torment without end, as hell, as the immeasurability of punishment and guilt.<sup>38</sup>

In this quotation Nietzsche expresses the view that the Christian conception of God is a projection or a reflection onto a primitive tribal deity of man's own soul or spirit. The attributes of God, therefore, are nothing more than an idealization of the negation of the attributes of man's natural being.

The body-soul dichotomy, which is symbolized in the bad conscience, becomes firmly entrenched through the sublimation of the creditor-debtor relationship. This relationship not only provides an ideological justification for repressed cruelty (the will to power), but also provides an excuse for the intensification of man's cruelty to himself.

Man, having found his soul, could no longer live as he once did. He now had to learn a new way of life, one in accord with his status as a "spiritual" being. The question, which has yet to be answered, is how a "spiritual" existence is possible. What sort of form might it be expected to take? This is the next task for Nietzsche to accomplish.

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<sup>38</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 92.

## Chapter 2

# SUBJECTIVE LIFE, CIVILIZATION AND THE ASCETIC IDEAL

### 2.1. The ascetic ideal

The previous chapter described Nietzsche's view that the suppression of the weaker by the stronger (the mechanism through which the state was created) was the cause of an internalization of the will to power which, in turn, produced the human soul. The creation of the soul thus represented man's alienation from his own instinctive activity. In specific terms, the soul is the will to power sublimated. The question which needs to be answered is this: how is a spiritual life possible? If man's spirit or soul represents an attempt to negate his natural being, to deny it, how can a life be constructed which is "unnatural"? Obviously, this will require that a new meaning be given to "life." Of course, it is on this possibility that civilization rests. Civilization is a way of life very different from that of the tribal nomad. Its defining characteristic, perhaps, is its abstractness; the tie that binds civilized human beings is neither that of blood nor of marriage, but an impartial law. Civilization represents, therefore, the victory of right over might, spirit over nature. Nietzsche's problem, then, is to explain how, in civilized life, the spiritual and the natural are reconciled, and what role the will to power plays in this process.

In Nietzsche's writings, one finds his most sustained discussion of this question in the third essay of On The Genealogy Of Morals, entitled, "What Is The Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?" In the first paragraph of this essay, Nietzsche gives a clue as to what his answer will be, when he remarks on the ubiquitous

nature of the ascetic ideal. Art, philosophy and religion, the entire world of the spirit, have all followed the lead of the ascetic ideal.<sup>39</sup>

All manifestations of the ascetic ideal are not on the same level. Art, for example, is not essentially ascetic; it has merely accepted the rule of this dominant ideal. According to Nietzsche, artists,

do not stand nearly independently enough in the world and *against* the world for their changing valuations, to deserve attention *in themselves*! They have at all times been valets of some morality, philosophy, or religion....<sup>40</sup>

Philosophy, however, is more intimately related to asceticism.

As long as there are philosophers on earth, and wherever there have been philosophers, ... there unquestionably exists a peculiar philosopher's irritation at and rancor against sensuality.... There also exists a peculiar philosopher's prejudice and affection in favor of the whole ascetic ideal....<sup>41</sup>

The reason for this, Nietzsche thinks, is that the practice of philosophy necessitates an independence from the world and its cares. The practice of asceticism provides just such independence. The philosopher, therefore, is instinctively attracted to the ascetic ideal as the precondition of his very existence. In answer to his own question, "What, then, is the meaning of the ascetic ideal in the case of a philosopher?"<sup>42</sup> Nietzsche says, "[T]he philosopher sees in it an optimum condition for the highest and boldest spirituality...."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 97.

<sup>40</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 102.

<sup>41</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 106.

<sup>42</sup>Nietzsche, GM, pp. 107-108.

<sup>43</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 108.



### 2.1.1. The ascetic priest and the interpretation of the bad conscience

It is only by contemplating the figure of the ascetic priest that the answer to the question about the meaning of the ascetic ideal becomes clear. "Only now that we behold the *ascetic priest* do we seriously come to grips with our problem: what is the meaning of the ascetic ideal?..."<sup>44</sup> Why is the ascetic priest so attached to this ideal? Because, he finds in it, "not only his faith but also his will, his power, his interest. His right to exist stands or falls with that ideal."<sup>45</sup>

To the ascetic priest, therefore, this ideal is not a mere means, as with a philosopher it appears to be, but an end in itself. What does the priest's attraction to the ascetic ideal reveal about his attitude towards life?

The idea at issue here is the *valuation* the ascetic priest places on our life: he juxtaposes it (along with what pertains to it: "nature," "world," the whole sphere of becoming and transitoriness) with a quite different mode of existence which it opposes and excludes, *unless* it turn against itself, *deny itself*: in that case, the case of the ascetic life, life counts as a bridge to that other mode of existence.<sup>46</sup>

The ascetic priest, like Socrates, treats life as but a preparation for death. The attitude of the ascetic priest towards life is no mere historical aberration. This attitude has, according to Nietzsche, existed through all the periods of history.

So monstrous a mode of valuation stands inscribed in the history of mankind not as an exception and curiosity, but as one of the most widespread and enduring of all phenomena. ...For consider how regularly and universally the ascetic priest appears in almost every age; he belongs to no one race; he prospers everywhere; he emerges from every class of society.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Nietzsche, GM, p. 116.

<sup>45</sup> Nietzsche, GM, p. 116.

<sup>46</sup> Nietzsche, GM, p. 117.

<sup>47</sup> Nietzsche, GM, p. 117.

At this point in his argument, Nietzsche pulls one of his dialectical tricks:

It must be a necessity of the first order that again and again promotes the growth and prosperity of this *life-inimical species* -- it must indeed be in the *interest of life itself* that such a self-contradictory type does not die out. For an ascetic life is a self-contradiction: here rules a *ressentiment* without equal, that of an insatiable instinct and power-will that wants to become master not over something in life but over life itself, over its most profound, powerful and basic conditions....<sup>48</sup>

According to Nietzsche's monism, the will to asceticism must have its roots in the will to power, which means that an ascetic life is not self-contradictory and not, therefore, impossible. Rather, asceticism represents, in Nietzsche's dialectical philosophy, a new level of the will to power. Both life and its apparent opposite derive from the same source.

The cunning of life is such that even its apparent opponents turn out to be unconscious supporters. The most explicit opponents of life and the will to power are to be accounted for in terms of the very principle that they oppose. In this way, Nietzsche gives another example of the prevailing irony in his way of thinking.

Since the ascetic ideal does not, in fact, represent a self-contradiction, that is, a life that is not a life, the ascetic ideal must be seen, according to Nietzsche, as the justification for a particular kind of life. "[T]he ascetic ideal springs from the protective instinct of a degenerating life which tries by all means to sustain itself and to fight for its existence...."<sup>49</sup> The pervasive character of this ideal is a very significant comment on the state of man's well-being.

That this ideal acquired such power and ruled over men as imperiously as we find it in history, especially wherever the civilization and taming of man has been carried through, expresses a great fact: the *sickness* of the type of man we have had hitherto, or at least of the tamed man, and the physiological struggle of man against death (more

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<sup>48</sup>Nietzsche, *GM*, pp. 117-118.

<sup>49</sup>Nietzsche, *GM*, p. 120.

precisely: against disgust with life, against exhaustion, against the desire for the "end".<sup>50</sup>

The ascetic ideal, according to Nietzsche, arose in conjunction with the creation of the state. This suggests that the ascetic ideal is the answer to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter, namely: how is a spiritual or subjective life possible? The answer to the question is this: a subjective life is possible through the mediation of the ascetic ideal. A life devoted to asceticism, to the mortification of the body through the practice of the ascetic virtues, namely, poverty, chastity and humility, is the solution offered by the priest to the suffering, spiritual man, whose nature is divided against itself. There is still, however, a question to be answered as to how the priest is able to persuade this group of suffering people to do as he wishes.

The priest persuades these world-weary people to continue to live by presenting the ascetic ideal to them as a way of interpreting their suffering and, thereby, dealing with it. The ascetic priest is, "the predestined saviour, shepherd and advocate of the sick herd...."<sup>51</sup> Nietzsche explains the attraction of the ascetic ideal to the sick herdman in this way: "The will of the weak to represent some form of superiority, their instinct for devious paths to tyranny over the healthy - where can it not be discovered, this will to power of the weakest!"<sup>52</sup>

The ascetic priest, then, is, "the natural opponent and despiser of all rude, stormy, unbridled, hard, violent beast-of-prey health and might."<sup>53</sup> He fights the strong on behalf of the weak, but with weapons of the latter's and not the former's choosing. "He will not be spared war with the beasts of prey, a war of

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<sup>50</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 120.

<sup>51</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 125.

<sup>52</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 123.

<sup>53</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 126.

cunning (of the 'spirit') rather than one of force, as goes without saying....<sup>54</sup>

The greatest service that the priest provides to his sickly flock is to protect it from itself, to prevent, "the baseness, spite, malice, and whatever else is natural to the ailing and sick and smoulders within the herd itself...."<sup>55</sup> from causing the disintegration of the herd. In this regard, the priest's most valuable service is to stop, "the most dangerous of all explosives, *ressentiment*...."<sup>56</sup> from detonating and breaking up the herd from within.

*Ressentiment*, the pre-eminent reactive affect, is the chief means employed by the weak to counter their ever present suffering. According to Nietzsche, every sufferer instinctively seeks a cause for his suffering; more exactly, an agent; still more specifically, a *guilty* agent who is susceptible to suffering -- in short, some living thing upon which he can, on some pretext or other, vent his affects, actually or in effigy....<sup>57</sup>

This desire to find someone to blame for one's pain, "represents the greatest attempt on the part of the suffering to win relief, *anaesthesia* -- the narcotic he cannot help desiring to deaden pain of any kind."<sup>58</sup> The idea, "is to *deaden*, by means of a more violent emotion of any kind, a tormenting, secret pain that is becoming unendurable, and to drive it out of consciousness at least for the moment...."<sup>59</sup>

*Ressentiment*, as the subtler poison employed to drive out the coarser, is thus a *medicine* with dangerous side effects. Directed against others,

<sup>54</sup>Nietzsche, *GM*, p. 126.

<sup>55</sup>Nietzsche, *GM*, p. 126.

<sup>56</sup>Nietzsche, *GM*, p. 126.

<sup>57</sup>Nietzsche, *GM*, p. 127.

<sup>58</sup>Nietzsche, *GM*, p. 127.

<sup>59</sup>Nietzsche, *GM*, p. 127.

*ressentiment* would, by introducing mutual suspicion and hatred, preclude the development of feelings of solidarity and trust necessary to the existence of a herd. The task of the priest is to direct *ressentiment* back onto its source, to blame the sufferer for his pain.

At this point in his argument, Nietzsche returns to the thesis of the second essay of On The Genealogy Of Morals. That argument was set out in the preceding chapter. On this occasion, however, Nietzsche approaches the argument from a new perspective, from the other side as it were. He proceeds from the point of view of the ascetic priest instead of from that of the man of the bad conscience.

According to Nietzsche, as has already been noted, the bad conscience is a product of a repressed will to power, a will forced to turn upon itself. The result of this is man's dislocation from his instincts and the creation of the human soul, that is, of self-consciousness. This internalization of the will to power causes a great deal of suffering on the part of the repressed individual. The great merit of the ascetic priest in this situation is to provide, for the sufferer, an explanation for his suffering.

Man, suffering from himself in some way or other but in any case physiologically like an animal shut up in a cage, uncertain why or wherefore, thirsting for reasons -- reasons relieve -- thirsting too, for remedies and narcotics, at last takes counsel with one who knows hidden things, too -- and behold! he receives a hint, he receives from his sorcerer, the ascetic priest, the first hint as to the "cause" of his suffering; he must seek it in *himself*, in some *guilt*, in a piece of the past, he must understand his suffering as a *punishment*.<sup>60</sup>

The ascetic priest used the sense of guilt to produce the necessary, "*orgies of feeling*...."<sup>61</sup> in order to combat, "all petty displeasure, gloom, and

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<sup>60</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 140.

<sup>61</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 139.

depression....<sup>62</sup> from which the herdman suffered. In Nietzsche's estimation, the priest's invention of sin has been perhaps the most fateful human discovery. "Sin" -- for this is the priestly name for the animal's 'bad conscience' (cruelty directed backward) -- has been the greatest event in the history of the sick soul....<sup>63</sup>

The erection of the ascetic ideal among the community of the weak served a twofold purpose. In the first place, the ascetic ideal provided a focal point around which the new community converged. It was, thus, instrumental to the creation of the herd community and, as well, served to define its essential nature. The never ending cycle of asceticism and guilt provided the context in which spiritual life could find a meaning. Guilt before God and the promise of Heaven justified and encouraged subjective man's sense of being at war with his body and with the natural world in general. The second purpose which the proliferation of the ascetic ideal served, was the promotion of the priest to the head of the new community of ascetics. In a situation where God and the soul are taken to be the most important, if not the only realities -- all reality is spiritual -- a mediator between these two would naturally become a very important person.

What has been the consequence of the victory of the ascetic ideal? How does the world appear in the light of the ascetic ideal? Nietzsche provides his view of the matter in the following:

[E]verywhere one looks there is the hypnotic gaze of the sinner, always fixed on the same object (on "guilt" as the sole cause of suffering); everywhere the bad conscience, that "abominable beast," as Luther called it; everywhere the past regurgitated, the fact distorted, the "jaundiced eye" for all action; everywhere the will to misunderstand suffering made the content of life, the reinterpretation of suffering as feelings of guilt, fear, and punishment; everywhere the scourge, the hair shirt, the starving body, contrition; everywhere the sinner breaking himself on the cruel wheel of a restless, morbidly

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<sup>62</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 139.

<sup>63</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 140.

lascivious conscience; everywhere dumb torment, extreme fear, the orgy of the tortured heart, convulsions of an unknown happiness, the cry for "redemption."<sup>64</sup>

### 2.1.2. Civilization and the ascetic ideal

If the ascetic ideal is the means whereby subjectivity works out for itself a way of living, it is to be expected that civilization, whose foundation is the subjective, "inner" man, must exhibit the ascetic ideal in all its manifold activities. How might this hatred of the body and devotion to a transcendental world make its influence felt in some practical or theoretical pursuit?

*A priori*, it may be said that any mode of activity founded on the ascetic ideal is certain to be idealistic in its orientation. For the ascetic, the world of the senses is an illusion. Because reality is spiritual, the ascetic is compelled to think of it in terms of the negation of the sense world. More particularly, reality is not what is seen, felt, heard, etc.; it is, instead, what can be thought or imagined. The real world is, of necessity, highly abstract; it consists of such ideal entities as Justice, Truth, Goodness and Beauty, which, because of their nature, can be apprehended only in thought.

#### 2.1.2.1. Plato

The best representative of this position, perhaps, is Plato. It cannot be denied that Platonism has had a powerful influence on the development of Western culture. Neither can it be denied that Plato's philosophy is highly ascetic. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates describes philosophy as a preparation for, "death and dying...."<sup>65</sup> which, for him, means the separation of the soul from the body.<sup>66</sup> This separation will not be completely achieved until death; until that time a

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<sup>64</sup>Nietzsche, *GM*, p. 141.

<sup>65</sup>*Phaedo*, from *Dialogues Of Plato*, Jowett Translation, Justin D. Kaplan, ed. (New York: Pocket Books, 1951), p. 76. Cited hereafter as *DP*.

<sup>66</sup>*DP*, p. 77.

partial detachment may, perhaps, be achieved. The need for asceticism is rationalized by Plato as a necessary, preliminary step in the search for knowledge:

[J]ust as the eye was unable to turn from darkness to light without the whole body, so too the instrument of knowledge can only by the movement of the whole soul be turned from the world of becoming into that of being....<sup>67</sup>

### 2.1.2.2. Science and the apparent repudiation of the ascetic ideal

The ascetic ideal has, in Nietzsche's view, thoroughly dominated Western culture. Is there any likelihood that this situation will change? "The ascetic ideal," Nietzsche says, "expresses a will: *where* is the opposing will that might express an *opposing ideal*?"<sup>68</sup> The ascetic ideal has, for centuries, provided the only yardstick by which existence may be measured. "[The ascetic ideal] rejects, denies, affirms, and sanctions solely from the point of view of *its* interpretation (and has there ever been a system of interpretation more thoroughly thought through?)...."<sup>69</sup>

It has been suggested, Nietzsche writes, that modern science (The word Nietzsche uses, *Wissenschaft*, means knowledge as such, and not merely natural science) is the true opponent of the ascetic ideal. While it is true, says Nietzsche, that science, "has up to now survived well enough without God, the beyond, and the virtue of denial."<sup>70</sup> insofar as science inspires love and sacrifice in its name, "it is not the opposite of the ascetic ideal but *rather the latest and noblest form of it*."<sup>71</sup>

The professed opponents of the ascetic ideal among the scientists and scholars,

<sup>67</sup>Republic, from *DP*, p. 363.

<sup>68</sup>Nietzsche, *GM*, p. 146.

<sup>69</sup>Nietzsche, *GM*, p. 146.

<sup>70</sup>Nietzsche, *GM*, p. 146.

<sup>71</sup>Nietzsche, *GM*, p. 147.



these last idealists of knowledge in whom alone the intellectual conscience dwells and is incarnate today -- they certainly believe they are as completely liberated from the ascetic ideal as possible....<sup>72</sup>

But, says Nietzsche, they are the purest representatives yet of the ascetic ideal. Why? Because, *"they still have faith in the truth."*<sup>73</sup>

The ascetic ideal is manifested in the practice of modern scholarship. As proof, Nietzsche evinces his own experience with scholars and scholarship:

I know all this from too close up perhaps: that venerable philosopher's abstinence to which such a faith commits one; that intellectual stoicism which ultimately refuses not only to affirm but also to deny; that desire to halt before the factual, the *factum brutum*; that fatalism of *"petit faits"* (ce *petit fatalisme*, as I call it) through which French scholarship nowadays tries to establish a sort of moral superiority over German scholarship; that general renunciation of all interpretation (of forcing, adjusting, abbreviating, omitting, padding, inventing, falsifying, and whatever else is of the essence of interpreting) -- all this expresses, broadly speaking, as much ascetic virtue as any denial of sensuality (it is at bottom only a particular mode of this denial).<sup>74</sup>

Not only are scholars ascetic in their practice, but their faith that behind appearances a world of absolute truths, a metaphysical world, does indeed exist, is the substance of the ascetic ideal, if not its typical form.

That which *constrains* these men, however, this unconditional will to truth, is *faith in the ascetic ideal itself*, even as an unconscious imperative -- don't be deceived about that -- it is the faith in a *metaphysical value*, the absolute value of *truth*, sanctioned and guaranteed by this ideal alone (it stands or falls with this ideal).<sup>75</sup>

The scholar's unconditional will to truth is, according to Nietzsche, a fact

<sup>72</sup>Nietzsche, *GM*, pp. 148-149.

<sup>73</sup>Nietzsche, *GM*, p. 150.

<sup>74</sup>Nietzsche, *GM*, p. 151.

<sup>75</sup>Nietzsche, *GM*, p. 151.

which needs to be explained. Why is the truth valued above all else? What is it about the truth as such that makes it so supremely important?

Nietzsche explains the relation of the will to truth to the ascetic ideal by recalling a passage from one of his earlier books, The Gay Science. The passage to be quoted is as it is found in that earlier work. It differs slightly in form, but not in substance, from that presented in the Genealogy.

[T]hose who are truthful in that audacious and ultimate sense that is presupposed by the faith in science *thus affirm another world* than the world of life, nature and history; and insofar as they affirm this "other world" -- look, must they not by the same token negate its counterpart, this world, *our world*?... [I]t is still a *metaphysical* faith upon which our faith in science rests -- that even we seekers after knowledge today, we godless anti-metaphysicians still take our fire, too, from the flame lit by a faith that is thousands of years old, that Christian faith which was also the faith of Plato, that God is the truth, that truth is divine.<sup>76</sup>

Nietzsche appears to reason in the following fashion: a faith in science is the belief that all things are ultimately intelligible; the world as we experience it does not present any such neat, logical picture; truth, therefore, does not belong to the world in which we live, but is a property of another, transcendent world. Faith in science, therefore, is the belief in a true world that is beyond our illogical, everyday world. Insofar as this true world is accorded the ultimate value, our everyday world is, by that action, degraded. To value truth above all else is to grant it the status usually reserved for God.

It is for this reason, the identification of the Truth with the divine, that science has never questioned itself or its will to truth.

Consider on this question both the earliest and most recent philosophers: they are all oblivious of how much the will to truth itself first requires justification; here there is a lacuna in every philosophy -- how did this come about? Because the ascetic ideal has hitherto dominated all philosophy, because truth was posited as being, as God,

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<sup>76</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science, Walter Kaufmann, trans. (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), pp. 282-283.

as the highest court of appeal -- because truth was not *permitted* to be a problem at all.<sup>77</sup>

Science is not, as it claims to be, the opponent of the ascetic ideal. On the contrary, it represents a higher development of that ideal. It destroys the old forms of asceticism while preserving the substance.

[Science] might ever be said to represent the driving force in ... [the ascetic ideal's] inner development. It opposes and fights, on closer inspection, not the ideal itself but only its exteriors, its guise and masquerade, its temporary dogmatic hardening and stiffening, and by denying what is exoteric in this ideal, it liberates what life is in it.<sup>78</sup>

Even the atheist that all such free spirits profess, because it draws on the will to truth as its justification, is,

not the antithesis of that [ascetic] ideal, as it appears to be; it is rather only one of the latest phases of its evolution, one of its terminal forms and inner consequences -- it is the awe-inspiring *calastrophe* of two thousand years of training in truthfulness that finally forbids itself the lie involved in belief in God.<sup>79</sup>

Concluding his discussion, Nietzsche notes that man's understanding of the meaning of his life has been, up to now, defined solely in terms of the ascetic ideal. The significance of this fact, Nietzsche believes, is that it shows man's inability to provide a non-transcendental framework through which his existence can be interpreted. The ascetic ideal demonstrates that man has hitherto been unable to define himself except in opposition to the world. He is not of this world. He is a spiritual entity and his body is but a limitation on that spirit. Nietzsche describes the situation concisely: "[T]he will for man and earth was lacking...."<sup>80</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Nietzsche, *GM*, pp. 152-153.

<sup>78</sup> Nietzsche, *GM*, p. 152.

<sup>79</sup> Nietzsche, *GM*, p. 160.

<sup>80</sup> Nietzsche, *GM*, p. 162.

The main function of the ascetic ideal has been to explain suffering, to provide an account of it that rescued it from meaninglessness. Unfortunately, "it placed all suffering under the perspective of *guilt*."<sup>81</sup>

In the concluding paragraph of his essay, Nietzsche explains what he takes to be the full significance of the ascetic ideal. "[A]ll that willing which has taken its direction from the ascetic ideal..." (and this includes, in particular, the scholar's will to truth) is an expression of:

this hatred of the human, and even more of the animal, and still more of the material, this horror of the senses, of reason itself, this fear of happiness and beauty, this longing to get away from all appearance, change, becoming, death, wishing, from longing itself....<sup>82</sup>

The ascetic will, therefore, is, "a will to *nothingness*", an aversion to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life, but it is and remains a will!....<sup>83</sup>

The ascetic will is the medium through which subjectivity or spirituality establishes a life for itself. This ideal expresses the spirit's dislocation from natural, instinctive life. Civilization, which rests on the ascetic ideal, is the means through which subjective man attempts to hide his sickness from himself. The life of culture is the expression of subjectivity or the ascetic will to power; it panders to man's conceit that he is a pure spirit. How the will to power in its ascetic mode, that is, under the form of subjectivity, influences the content of a particular division of culture, remains to be seen.

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<sup>81</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 162.

<sup>82</sup>Nietzsche, GM, pp. 162-163.

<sup>83</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 163.

## Chapter 3

# THE ASCETIC WILL TO POWER AS PHILOSOPHY

### 3.1. Reason in philosophy

Spirit, subjectivity, soul. All of these terms express man's belief that he is a being whose essence is not defined in terms of psychological, physiological or mechanical laws. As such, these terms are interchangeable: they mean the same thing; the only difference is the context in which each is used. Spirit (or subjectivity or soul) is the incarnation of a will to power which has turned upon itself, an ascetic will to power. Civilization is the context in which the ascetic will to power works itself out. It is to be expected, therefore, that any significant department of culture, such as philosophy, for example, will accept, as its point of reference, the subjective perspective. It is in Nietzsche's interest, then, to show how philosophy is pervaded by the ascetic will to power, how subjectivity has made its home in the most abstract concepts.

It is not enough, perhaps, to demonstrate that the philosopher wears the garb of the ascetic ideal, as was shown in the last chapter. A more sophisticated approach would be to reveal how the presuppositions upon which philosophy proceeds express the values of spirituality. The prosecution of this end will commence with an examination of several passages in Twilight Of The Idols.

In Twilight Of The Idols, in the section entitled "Reason in Philosophy," Nietzsche summarizes his complaints against philosophy by listing a number of philosopher's "idiosyncrasies." He lists first, "their lack of historical sense, their

hatred of the very idea of becoming, their Egypticism."<sup>84</sup> That which changes cannot be real. Of course, life itself is a process of change. Life, therefore, must be unreal. According to Nietzsche, "Death, change, old age, as well as procreation and growth, are to their minds objections -- even refutations."<sup>85</sup>

The ascetic character of philosophy reveals itself in this attitude to change, the belief that, as Nietzsche puts it:

Whatever has being does not become; whatever becomes does not have being. Now they all believe, desperately even, in what has being. But since they never grasp it, they seek for reasons why it is kept from them. "There must be mere appearance, there must be some deception which prevents us from perceiving that which has being: where is the deceiver?"<sup>86</sup>

The answer to the problem of how to put oneself in a position to know anything, which Nietzsche puts in the mouths of some imagined philosophers, is the same as that given by Socrates, which was reported in the previous chapter:

"We have found him," they cry ecstatically; "it is the senses! These senses, which are so immoral in other ways too, deceive us concerning the true world. Moral: let us free ourselves from the deception of the senses, from becoming, from history, from lies; history is nothing but faith in the senses, faith in lies. Moral: let us say No to all who have faith in the senses, to all the rest of mankind; they are all 'mob.' Let us be philosophers! Let us be mummies! Let us represent monotonism by adopting the expression of a grave digger! And above all, away with the body, this wretched *idée fixe* of the senses, disfigured by all the fallacies of logic, refuted, even impossible, although it is impudent enough to behave as if it were real!"<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight Of The Idols*, Walter Kaufmann, trans., from *The Portable Nietzsche*, Walter Kaufmann, ed. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd, 1976), p. 479. Cited hereafter as *TI*.

<sup>85</sup>Nietzsche, *TI*, p. 479.

<sup>86</sup>Nietzsche, *TI*, pp. 479-480.

<sup>87</sup>Nietzsche, *TI*, p. 480.

Like Socrates, Nietzsche's philosophers find the bodily senses to be the source of error and asceticism to be the surest means to the Truth. Behind the philosophers' apparent contempt for the body lies a significant judgement. This judgement is the identification of reality with the changeless. There seems to be a belief that by stripping away the particular wants and desires of a person, which exist through the presence of the body, the result of this process of abstraction will be a "time-less, will-less subject," a universal ego, capable of seeing things as they really are, in all their eternity and immutability. To express this in a brief formula, one might say that to know being one must become like it.

At this point, it may prove worth while to consider briefly how this attitude towards reality compares with that of the pre-self-conscious, natural man. The instinctive man, the master race type, has an immediate relation to his world. He understands reality in terms of categories drawn from his own wants and needs. Something is good, for example, insofar as it serves this man's purpose. The abstract concept of goodness, of the in-itself, has no meaning for him.

The Idea of goodness is a product of asceticism, in that there is an implied demand that one tear oneself away from a particular object, suppress whatever feelings one has about it, and evaluate that object's goodness according to some universal, non-subjective criterion. This process of objectification is based on the principle of self-consciousness. It involves the severing of the immediate relationship of subject and object, through the suppression of that link which is the body. Self-consciousness involves the abstraction of the "I" from its feelings, desires and needs. The self is seen as something apart from and above them all. This process is, of course, highly ascetic.

Abstract concepts such as goodness, truth and beauty only arise when this process of suppression and abstraction is complete. In other words, self-consciousness and the Ideas go hand-in-hand. The belief that the concepts of goodness, truth and beauty are not tied to a particular caste, class or nation but are, instead, intelligible to a universal subject or self-consciousness represents, in

Nietzsche's view, an attempt on the part of the weak herdman to impose, surreptitiously, his values on the superior individual. For it is the herdman who is the inventor of the soul, of self-consciousness.

This process of objectification involves, according to Nietzsche, a sleight-of-hand. The notion of a thing-in-itself is, he says, an absurdity.

That things possess a constitution in themselves quite apart from interpretation and subjectivity, is a quite idle hypothesis: it presupposes that interpretation and subjectivity are not essential, that a thing freed from all relationships would still be a thing.<sup>88</sup>

This same view is expressed by Nietzsche in a logical formula: "The properties of a thing are effects on other 'things': if one removes other 'things,' then a thing has no properties, i.e., there is no thing without other things, i.e., there is no 'thing-in-itself'."<sup>89</sup>

If it makes no sense to speak of an object as it is in itself, in relation to what object do the Ideas exist? The answer, which has already been suggested, is that it is in relation to the pure subject or self-consciousness that the Ideas exist. The Ideas exist insofar as they partake of the principle of self-consciousness. The principle of self-consciousness is the notion that behind a multitude of transitory phenomena there lies a unity and a permanence which is the reality or the essence, towards which the transitory phenomena stand as its appearance. As the body is to the soul so the empirical world is to the Idea. It is by projecting the subject onto the natural world that the Idea is formed.

Returning to Twilight Of The Idols, one finds Nietzsche, in section two of the chapter, "Reason in Philosophy," contrasting the attitudes of the "philosophic folk" and Heraclitus on the question of the reliability of the senses as

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<sup>88</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, The Will To Power, Walter Kaufmann, ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), pp. 302-303. Cited hereafter as WP.

<sup>89</sup>Nietzsche, WP, p. 302.



instruments of knowledge. Both claimed that the senses gave false evidence about reality: "the philosophic folk rejected the testimony of the senses because they showed multiplicity and change...." while Heraclitus, "rejected their testimony because they showed things as if they had permanence and unity."<sup>90</sup>

Both, in fact, are mistaken. With regard to the "philosophic folk," Nietzsche writes: "Insofar as the senses show becoming, passing away, and change, they do not lie."<sup>91</sup> In reply to Heraclitus he says that, [the senses] do not lie at all. What we *make* of their testimony, that alone introduces lies; for example, the lie of unity, the lie of thinghood, of substance, of permanence. 'Reason' is the cause of our falsification of the testimony of the senses.<sup>92</sup>

Nietzsche concludes: "The 'apparent' world is the only one: the 'true' world is merely added by a lie."<sup>93</sup> The "true" world exists only as a negation of the "apparent" world. It takes its character precisely from this negation.

The "apparent" world is, of course, the world of, "becoming, passing away, and change...." It is the world of the senses. It is, in fact, the only reality. The "true" world is, as Nietzsche says, "added by a lie." The lie, "of unity ... of thinghood, of substance, of permanence." is introduced by us, by "Reason." The "being" of things, therefore, is secretly imported into the world by means of what Nietzsche calls "Reason."

It is apparent that Nietzsche's analysis relies on Kant's belief that the concepts by which we comprehend the world are not themselves part of it; they are, in fact, introduced by the subject. This is to say that Nietzsche assumes the

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<sup>90</sup>Nietzsche, *TI*, p. 489.

<sup>91</sup>Nietzsche, *TI*, pp. 480-481.

<sup>92</sup>Nietzsche, *TI*, p. 480.

<sup>93</sup>Nietzsche, *TI*, p. 481.

idealist account in order, ultimately, to undermine it. Whereas Kantian idealism insists on the primacy of the subject in knowledge, Nietzsche insists that both the subject and the object are conditioned by the will to power.

In the penultimate section of "Reason" in philosophy, Nietzsche sets forth what he believes is the truth about "Reason," its real as opposed to its imagined origin. "Formerly," he notes, "alteration, change, any becoming at all, were taken as proof of mere appearance, as an indication that there must be something which led us astray."<sup>94</sup> Now, says Nietzsche, we have overcome that belief. We now know that it is, "the prejudice of reason [which] forces us to posit unity, identity, permanence, substance, cause, thinghood, being...."<sup>95</sup>

Nietzsche's phrase, "the prejudice of reason" appears, on the surface, to be self-contradictory. "Reason" and prejudice are thought to be completely opposed to one another. How can "reason" itself be prejudiced?

Nietzsche is not promoting a paradox. His use of irony is a rhetorical device, intended to drive home the point that "reason" is itself the product of certain circumstances. Furthermore, it is unaware of its own nature, that it is, in fact, a scheme of interpretation imposed upon reality. There is, therefore, no such thing as critical reason. Its employment is necessarily dogmatic.

Abstract thought, that is, "reason," should, in accordance with Nietzsche's position, be classed as ideology. It is a method of interpreting the world whose true purpose is the rationalization of domination. The domination, in this case, is that of the herdman over the master type. This point was described in the previous chapter where the character of the ascetic priest was established.

If "reason" is not self-critical, as Nietzsche suggests that it is not, if it is

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<sup>94</sup>Nietzsche, TJ, p. 482.

<sup>95</sup>Nietzsche, TJ, p. 482.

actually a mould imposed upon reality, the question arises as to what lies behind it, what "reason" truly represents. Nietzsche provides an account of what he takes to be, "the presuppositions of reason." in the following quotation:

[I]t [reason] believes in the ego, in the ego as being, in the ego as substance, and it projects this faith in the ego-substance upon all things - only thereby does it *create* the concept of "thing." Everywhere "being" is projected by thought, pushed underneath, as the cause; the concept of being follows, and is a derivative of, the concept of ego.<sup>96</sup>

These "errors," as Nietzsche calls them, are fossil relics from an "age of the most rudimentary form of psychology."<sup>97</sup> at which time they embedded themselves in language, only to emerge centuries later to mislead philosophers into believing that "Reason" is of divine origin rather than being simply the product of an ascetic will to power.<sup>98</sup> Philosophers mistakenly assumed that since the categories and concepts of "reason" are not empirically derived, the only way they could have arrived is as a kind of divine dispensation. In this way philosophers promulgated the myth of the true world and thereby became the standard-bearers and rationalizers for the ascetic priest and his suffering flock.

It is through language, the foundation of culture, that the ascetic will to power came to dominate man. If the words in which reality is (supposedly) described are themselves tainted with the biases of spirituality, language becomes, not a window but a mirror. Through language man learns to close himself off from the real character of things and to surround himself with reflections of his own subjectivity.

According to Nietzsche, the concept of being or substance is generalized from "reason's" belief in the ego. The notion of something which endures through change and which thereby serves as a point of unity is abstracted from

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<sup>96</sup>Nietzsche, TI, p. 483.

<sup>97</sup>Nietzsche, TI, p. 482.

<sup>98</sup>Nietzsche, TI, pp. 482-483.

this belief and universalized. From this process "being" arises. What one conceives to be real, to have being, depends on the character of the individual philosopher. In Plato's case, the outcome is the world of Ideas; in the case of Democritus, atomism. In this way, Nietzsche unites both idealism and materialism as creeds which posit a unity underlying the empirical world. Both attempt to provide that fixed point to which everything else can be related. Materialistic atomism is, in Nietzsche's view, no less of an abstraction than the Platonic Ideas.<sup>99</sup>

Nietzsche concludes and summarizes the arguments of "Reason" in Philosophy in terms of four propositions.

*First proposition.* The reasons for which "this" world has been characterized as "apparent" are the very reasons which indicate its reality; any other kind of reality is absolutely indemonstrable. *Second proposition.* The criteria which have been bestowed on the "true being" of things are the criteria of not-being, of *naught*; the "true world" has been constructed out of contradiction to the actual world: indeed an apparent world, insofar as it is merely a moral-optical illusion. *Third proposition.* To invent fables about a world "other" than this one has no meaning at all, unless an instinct of slander, detraction and suspicion against life has gained the upper hand in us: in that case, we avenge ourselves against life with a phantasmagoria of "another" a "better" life. *Fourth proposition.* Any distinction between a "true" and an "apparent" world - whether in the Christian manner or in the manner of Kant (in the end, an underhanded Christian) - is only a suggestion of decadence, a symptom of the decline of life.<sup>100</sup>

The first two propositions set down Nietzsche's views on the errors of philosophy with respect to reality; "Death, change, old age, as well as procreation and growth" are to Nietzsche, the real world, and the "true" world is determined by criteria derived from the negation of these realities; the "true" world exists as a contradiction to the real world. The third and fourth propositions serve to

<sup>99</sup>Nietzsche, *TI*, p. 483. See also *TI*, p. 495 and *BGE*, pp. 19-21.

<sup>100</sup>Nietzsche, *TI*, p. 484.

explain why this confusion should have arisen and what end it serves; the intention is to defame the fullness of life and, thus, is a sign of decadence or declining life.

The last two propositions serve to complete the connection between the philosopher and the ascetic priest. Philosophers are themselves sickly herd animals, allies of the ascetic priest and, therefore, ideologists for asceticism. Philosophy has been, at least up to Nietzsche's time, nothing more than a rationalization of asceticism.

### 3.2. Objectivity

Having considered the issue of the relation of asceticism to philosophy, in a general and abstract way, it may prove worthwhile to conclude with a brief sketch of Nietzsche's arguments concerning the way in which the ascetic will to power specifically manifests itself in a few of the concepts employed by philosophy.

The first concept to be examined is that of objectivity. This notion, second only, perhaps, to that of truth, is regarded as necessary to the conduct of any possible investigation. Objectivity, it appears, is essentially a characteristic of a person, and only by extension is it applied to an inquiry. To be objective is to be in a position to see the thing as it is in itself, without the screening effect of any emotional attachments or preconceived notions on the part of a subject. It involves an abstraction from the circumstances in which one finds oneself, whether these be political, religious, or even temporal and geographical. In essence, objectivity requires a suppression of one's personality, one's very self.

Underlying this belief in objectivity, is the idea that the soul is capable of assuming the form of a *tabula rasa* or, to vary the metaphor slightly, a mirror. In both cases, the image that immediately comes to mind is that of a fixed, impersonal medium in which Truth may find itself accurately reflected.

It is not difficult to see that Nietzsche would find the ascetic will to power implicit in the notion of a universal, changeless subject.

However gratefully we may welcome an *objective spirit* ... in the end we also have to learn caution against our gratitude and put a halt to the exaggerated manner in which the "unselfing" and depersonalization of the spirit is being celebrated nowadays as if it were the goal itself and redemption and transfiguration.<sup>101</sup>

The objective man is likened by Nietzsche to a mirror.

The objective man is indeed a mirror: he is accustomed to submit before whatever wants to be known, without any other pleasure than that found in "knowing" and "mirroring"; he waits until something comes, and then spreads himself out tenderly lest light footsteps and the quick passage of spiritlike beings should be lost on his plane and skin.<sup>102</sup>

It is a mark of the ascetic will to power that it acts only after having been provoked. Its action is always only a reaction. The objective man certainly fits that description: "His mirror soul, eternally smoothing itself out, no longer knows how to affirm or negate; he does not command, neither does he destroy."<sup>103</sup> Such a type bespeaks a corruption of the will.

Objectivity is the modern disguise of the ascetic ideal. The question arises as to whether or not it is possible to arrive at a non-ascetic concept of objectivity. This, of course, is part of the larger question as to whether it is possible to overcome spirit while at the same time retaining the achievements of culture, such as art, science and philosophy. If this is not possible, one is then left with the choice of either accepting the present state of affairs or of attempting to return to the pre-spiritual outlook of the age of barbarism, that is, of a time prior to the creation of civilization.

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<sup>101</sup>Nietzsche, BGE, p. 126.

<sup>102</sup>Nietzsche, BGE, pp. 126-127.

<sup>103</sup>Nietzsche, BGE, pp. 127-128.

The latter prospect is not what Nietzsche has in mind, though it is, perhaps, the popular belief. The first possibility is not, for Nietzsche, a realistic alternative. The nihilistic spirit of the modern age cannot be altered from its course.

Nothing avails: one *must* go forward -- step by step further into decadence (that is my definition of modern 'progress'). One can *check* this development and thus dam up degeneration, gather it and make it more vehement and sudden: one can do no more.<sup>104</sup>

How then might this overcoming of spirit work, if it is the only alternative? Nietzsche says very little on this point. Obviously, the *Uebermensch* is meant to stand as the symbol of this development, but a symbol is not an explanation. Perhaps a hint of what might be involved is revealed by Nietzsche, in a discussion of objectivity, in section twelve of the third essay of On The Genealogy Of Morals.

In this section Nietzsche notes that objectivity understood as, 'contemplation without interest'....<sup>105</sup> is simply absurd. To eliminate the will from knowledge is impossible. It is rather a question of which will to power will be allowed to interpret: the active or the reactive (ascetic) will. The objectivity that presupposes a, 'pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject'....<sup>106</sup> is a self-contradictory notion. It and other kindred notions:

demand that we should think of an eye that is completely unthinkable, an eye turned in no particular direction, in which the active and interpreting forces, through which alone seeing becomes seeing *something*, are supposed to be lacking; these always demand of the eye an absurdity and a nonsense.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup>Nietzsche, TI, p. 547.

<sup>105</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 119.

<sup>106</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 119.

<sup>107</sup>Nietzsche, GM, p. 119.

Nietzsche suggests, instead, that objectivity should be thought of as, the ability to control one's Pro and Con and to dispose of them, so that one knows how to employ a variety of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge.<sup>108</sup>

In defence of this statement he makes the following points:

There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective 'knowing'; and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our 'concept' of this thing, our 'objectivity,' be.<sup>109</sup>

Just as the painter must adopt a point of view towards his subject before he can begin – the painting does not compose itself – so too, Nietzsche seems to be saying, an object must stand in some relation to a subject in order for the object to be known. Accordingly, the belief that an object can be abstracted from its relation to a subject and still be known, is false. The only alternative to the belief in an absolute perspective (a contradiction in terms), a God's eye view of the world, is the possibility that one might employ a plurality of perspectives so that, in the balance, a human and not a super-human truth might be attained. Nietzsche is not substituting a comfortable relativism for a rigid absolutism; he is simply making the point that there is not an inherent priority among perspectives: no one view in particular is, by nature, more valuable than any other. To select the ascetic perspective and to rank it above all others is a completely arbitrary act. Because there is no natural ordering of perspectives, the strategy involved is rhetorical rather than scientific: compromise and not Truth is the goal to be reached. Precisely how a balance of opinions or perspectives is to be achieved, Nietzsche does not say. Like Marx, Nietzsche is rather restrained when it comes to describing the state of affairs which will exist after the asceticism and nihilism of the modern age have been overcome.

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<sup>108</sup> Nietzsche, GM, p. 119.

<sup>109</sup> Nietzsche, GM, p. 119.



### 3.3. Will, causality and the ego

Another and, perhaps, a more interesting example of the infiltration of spirituality into the concepts employed in philosophy is to be found in the unsuspected relations between the will, causality and the ego. In another section of Twilight Of The Idols entitled "The Four Great Errors," Nietzsche examines the origin of our notions about causality.

People have believed at all times that they knew what a cause is; but whence did we take our knowledge -- or more precisely, our faith that we had such knowledge?<sup>110</sup>

The answer to this question is stated by Nietzsche very simply: "From the realm of the famous 'inner facts,' of which not a single one has so far been proved to be factual."<sup>111</sup> Having made this point, Nietzsche immediately moves to identify those 'inner facts' which he says have provided us with our notion of causality:

We believed ourselves to be causal in the act of willing: we thought that here at least we caught causality in the act. Nor did one doubt that all the antecedents of an act, its causes, were to be sought in consciousness and would be found there once sought as 'motives': else one would not have been free and responsible for it. Finally, who would have denied that a thought is caused? that the ego causes the thought?<sup>112</sup>

According to Nietzsche, then, it is from our understanding of the will, consciousness and the ego that we derive our concept of causality. Of these three, however, "the first and most persuasive is that of the will as cause."<sup>113</sup> The other two have been derived after the already existing model: "[F]irst the

<sup>110</sup>Nietzsche, TI, p. 494.

<sup>111</sup>Nietzsche, TI, p. 494.

<sup>112</sup>Nietzsche, TI, p. 494.

<sup>113</sup>Nietzsche, TI, p. 494.

causality of the will was firmly accepted as given, as *empirical*.<sup>114</sup>

It is the virtue of the modern age to have recognized that the 'inner world' is unreal, that it "is full of phantoms and will-o'-the-wisps...."<sup>115</sup> This recognition bears specifically on the three 'inner facts':

The will no longer moves anything, hence does not explain anything either - it merely accompanies events; it can also be absent. The so-called *motive*: another error. Merely a surface phenomenon of consciousness, something alongside the deed that is more likely to cover up the antecedents of the deed than to represent them. And as for the *ego*! That has become a fable, a fiction; a play on words: it has together ceased to think, feel, or will!<sup>116</sup>

The claim: "the will no longer moves anything ... it can be absent." may, perhaps, seem paradoxical for the supposed "philosopher of the Will to Power." This apparent paradox is easily cleared up when one realizes that what Nietzsche means by "will" is somewhat different from what is normally meant.

The kind of will that Nietzsche repudiates is that of a faculty of the soul. The will is not the instrument of a subject, a mediator between the soul and the body. "My proposition is: that the will of psychology hitherto is an unjustified generalization, that this will *does not exist at all*...."<sup>117</sup> The subject, as has already been mentioned, is itself the incarnation of a will: an ascetic will, specifically.

The kind of willing which Nietzsche is prepared to acknowledge as real is no other than the principle of life itself. Willing is neither irrational or rational, because it cannot be under the control of a subject. Strictly speaking, it is

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<sup>114</sup>Nietzsche, TL, p. 494.

<sup>115</sup>Nietzsche, TL, p. 494.

<sup>116</sup>Nietzsche, TL, p. 495.

<sup>117</sup>Nietzsche, WP, p. 369.

arational; in Nietzsche's words, it is instinctive. Neither the ascetic nor the instinctive man choose to behave as they do.

The ascetic herdman -- the "rational" man -- no more chooses his "goodness" than the master type, his "villainy." The ancient philosophical argument as to whether the will is or is not free is meaningless because the disputing parties base their arguments on a false conception of the will as the faculty of a subject. The will does not carry out the dictates of an "I," so the question as to whether or not what the "I" wants is self-determined, is irrelevant. In Nietzsche's view, "The 'unfree will' is mythology; in real life it is only a matter of strong and weak wills."<sup>118</sup>

The remarks which Nietzsche makes in this section of Twilight Of The Idols express, in the form of a conclusion, thoughts which have been scattered throughout a number of his works. In a section of Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche attempts to analyze what actually occurs when one "wills." Against those, such as Schopenhauer, who regard willing as a simple and unambiguous activity, Nietzsche remarks: "Willing seems to me to be above all something complicated, something that is a unit only as a word...."<sup>119</sup>

Willing, as Nietzsche sees it, is a complex activity combining sensation, thought and, especially what he calls "the affect of the command."<sup>120</sup> With regard to this latter point, Nietzsche notes that, "A man who *wills* commands something within himself that renders obedience, or that he believes renders obedience."<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Nietzsche, BGE, p. 29.

<sup>119</sup> Nietzsche, BGE, p. 25.

<sup>120</sup> Nietzsche, BGE, p. 25.

<sup>121</sup> Nietzsche, BGE, p. 26.

According to Nietzsche, then, commanding and obeying equally pertain to the willing subject. Since the 'I' is as much the subject as the object of the will, it is not possible to regard the will as an instrument or faculty under the command of a subject. The will, therefore, is not the mediator between the soul and the body; on the contrary, it is an epiphenomenon which arises only after action has become habitual. In other words, willing, as it is commonly understood, is a psychological event wholly unrelated to bodily action.

Since in the great majority of cases there has been exercise of will only when the effect of the command -- that is, obedience, that is, the action -- was to be *expected*, the *appearance* has translated itself into the feeling, as if there were a *necessity of effect*. In short, he who wills believes with a fair amount of certainty that will and action are somehow one; he ascribes the success, the carrying out of the willing, to the will itself, and thereby enjoys an increase of the sensation of power which accompanies all success.<sup>122</sup>

This duality of commanding and obeying, the essence of willing, "we are accustomed to disregard ... and to deceive ourselves about it by means of the synthetic concept 'I' ...."<sup>123</sup> The result of this tendency to identify ourselves solely with that part which commands is that, "a whole series of erroneous conclusions, and consequently of false evaluations of the will itself ... [have] become attached to the act of willing...."<sup>124</sup>

The cause of our mistaken understanding of the will is, as Nietzsche points out, "the synthetic concept 'I'." The false conception of willing, which has been the accepted view for centuries, arose as a solution to the problem of human action as it relates to the body/soul model. That human beings act, is obvious. That body and soul are distinct in nature, is an assumption which gives rise to the following question: how does the soul act on the body? There must be some form

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<sup>122</sup> Nietzsche, BGE, p. 26.

<sup>123</sup> Nietzsche, BGE, p. 26.

<sup>124</sup> Nietzsche, BGE, p. 26.

of mediation between these two different natures. The will, as it has been typically understood, provides a solution. It connects the soul to the body. It is a lever through which the soul acts on the body. Because of the will's character as a neutral tool of the soul, one is able to infer another's motives and intentions, though they are mental entities, by means of his actions.

The point to be recognized is that our conception of the will presupposes the separation of body and soul and, more significantly, a very definite relation of soul to body, namely, of ruler to ruled. Nietzsche's analysis of willing, therefore, is designed to discredit this dualistic conception of human beings and to replace it with another view. That, it appears, is the significance of his description of the body as, "a social structure composed of many 'souls'."<sup>125</sup> By means of this metaphor Nietzsche attempts to substitute, for the dichotomy of body and soul, a hierarchical view of human nature, in which the soul and the body are seen as occupying different positions on the same structure (the will to power). Considered as individual substances, body and soul are simple abstractions. In reality, they are merely different perspectives from which the one being is seen. This interpretation seems to be in line with the trend of Nietzsche's thought in Beyond Good and Evil,<sup>9</sup> one element of which is to criticize what he there refers to as, "The fundamental faith of the metaphysician, ... the faith in opposite values."<sup>126</sup> The title "Beyond Good and Evil," attests to Nietzsche's concern with this point.

To return to Twilight of the Idols, one finds Nietzsche drawing his conclusions after having disposed of the belief in the will's causal powers:

What follows from this? There are no mental causes at all. The whole of the allegedly empirical evidence for that has gone to the devil. That is what follows!<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Nietzsche, BGE, p. 27.

<sup>126</sup> Nietzsche, BGE, p. 10.

<sup>127</sup> Nietzsche, TI, p. 496.

Nietzsche then moves to explain how our belief in mental causes originated:

[W]e created the world ... as a world of causes, a world of wills, a world of spirits. The most ancient and enduring psychology was at work here and did not do anything else: all that happened was considered a doing, all doing the effect of a will; the world became to it a multiplicity of doers; a doer (a "subject") was slipped under all that happened. It was out of himself that man projected his three "inner facts" -- that in which he believed most firmly, the will, the spirit, the ego.<sup>128</sup>

According to Nietzsche, then, the false conception of man as a soul in a body was taken as the model in terms of which all activity in nature was to be understood. As the third term in this relationship between body and soul, will became transmuted into cause. If, as Nietzsche says, our notion of the will and its supposed function as mediator between body and soul is false, then it follows that belief in causation is mistaken and, more generally, our understanding of nature is corrupted by our imposition on the "outer" world, of our beliefs concerning the relation of the soul to the body.

One could summarize Nietzsche's thoughts on this matter thus: our idea of causation is derived from our experience of willing; the concept of the will presupposes that human beings are souls controlling bodies; this relation of soul to body is mistaken, and, therefore, our notion of the will is incorrect, as is our idea of causation.

Perhaps the real significance of the belief in free will, that is, a will under the direction of a subject, is that it serves as an instrument of power. It is no coincidence that the priestly caste has been the most active promoter of the notion of the freedom of the will. By making people responsible for their actions, one gains a hold over them. Nietzsche addresses this point in another section of "The Four Great Errors":

Today we no longer have any pity for the concept of 'free will'; we know only too well what it really is -- the foulest of all theologians

<sup>128</sup> Nietzsche, TI, p. 495.

artifices, aimed at making mankind 'responsible' in their sense, that is, dependent upon them.<sup>129</sup>

The belief in free will degrades rather than ennobles man because it places all of his actions under the perspective of guilt and punishment, and under the eye of the priest:

[T]he doctrine of the will has been invented essentially for the purpose of punishment, that is, because one wanted to impute guilt. The entire old psychology, the psychology of the will, was conditioned by the fact that its originators, the priests at the head of the ancient communities, wanted to create for themselves the right to punish -- or wanted to create this right for God. Men were considered "free" so that they might be punished -- so that they might become guilty: consequently, every act had to be considered as willed, and the origin of every act had to be considered as lying within the consciousness (and thus the most fundamental counterfeit in *psychologism* was made the principle of psychology itself).<sup>130</sup>

In opposition to this position, Nietzsche puts forth the view that,

no one gives man his qualities -- neither God, nor society, nor his parents and ancestors, nor he himself.... No one is responsible for man's being there at all, for his being such-and-such, or for his being in these circumstances or in this environment. The fatality of his essence is not to be disentangled from the fatality of all that has been and will be.<sup>131</sup>

That man is not responsible either to God or to his conscience, that he is not subject to an other-worldly sanction, Nietzsche believes will help to restore, "the innocence of becoming...."<sup>132</sup>

This, perhaps, is what Nietzsche means by "The Eternal Recurrence"; it is an expression of this attitude of not being responsible for one's actions, of not

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<sup>129</sup>Nietzsche, *TI*, p. 499.

<sup>130</sup>Nietzsche, *TI*, pp. 499-500.

<sup>131</sup>Nietzsche, *TI*, p. 500.

<sup>132</sup>Nietzsche, *TI*, p. 501.

always looking back over one's shoulder at what one has done: whether regretfully or guiltily. It is meant to suggest a state of affairs in which God and freewill have no place. The significance of the Eternal Recurrence is existential rather than theoretical; it stands as a challenge, to be interpreted either as a blessing or a curse, depending on the character of the individual who receives it. Its counterpart is the concept of the will to power, whose point of view renders meaningless the notion of an absolute beginning. It is Nietzsche's irony, perhaps, that in "will to power," he expresses an idea directly contrary to the usual view of will as a faculty of choice.

### 3.4. Conclusion

Civilized man's belief in his spirituality is not so much an affirmation as a denial. It is a belief that one's nature is not circumscribed by the needs and wants of the body; that the real man is something apart from and above nature. Civilization itself is regarded as proof of the triumph of spirit over nature.

One mark of a civilized man is objectivity, the capacity to abstract from one's interestedness in order to consider an issue on its own merits. The objective, self-denying, spiritual man is the paradigm of civilized virtue; entire political philosophies, including that of Kant and, more recently, John Rawls take this individual as their starting point. Objectivity, in Nietzsche's estimation, is simply a rationalization of asceticism, of being cruel to oneself. Spirituality itself is but the incarnation of a repressed will to power, one devoted to denying itself. The life of civilization is the attempt to carry through this program of self-denial.

By describing human subjectivity in terms of a will to power forced back upon itself and dedicated to self-torture, and by, furthermore, attempting to reduce civilization to the same will to power, Nietzsche has carried through a re-evaluation of man's place in nature. His use of the reductivist principle of the will to power is in line with much of nineteenth century thought. Whether one considers Marx's dialectical materialism or Darwin's natural selection, it is obvious



that a profound disquiet exists as to the traditional understanding of man. Nietzsche is surely a part of this trend, no matter how radical and idiosyncratic many aspects of his philosophy appear to be.

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