THE QUESTION OF ETHICS AS THE PREPARATION FOR THE REBIRTH OF TRAGEDY IN NIETZSCHE'S PHILOSOPHY

BAREND KIEFTE

THE QUESTION OF ETHICS AS THE PREPARATION FOR THE REBIRTH OF TRAGEDY IN NIETZSCHE'S PHILOSOPHY

by

Barend Kiefte

A thesis submitted to the
School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Department of Philosophy
Memorial University of Newfoundland

1993

St. John's Newfoundland

ISBN 0-315-86681-0

Canada

ABSTRACT

In this thesis I raise Nietzsche's question of ethics, his question of the value of ethics itself, in light of his call for the rebirth of tragedy. I contend that, for Nietzsche, the question of ethics is the necessary preparation and education for the rebirth of tragedy and a new tragic sensibility beyond particular Christian-moral interpretations of existence.

I claim that there are three overlapping stages in the structure of Nietzsche's philosophy: his initial and premature hope for the rebirth of tragedy, his awareness that humanity must be free from morality to be prepared for the rebirth of tragedy, and his renewed hope for the rebirth of tragedy after overcoming morality.

Within the framework of this structure I discuss Nietzsche's question of ethics in three parts: his inquiry into the origins of morality through an appeal to sciences, his critique of the origins of morality through a method of genealogy, and his overcoming of morality defined as nihilism through a revaluation of values. I appeal to Foucault's and Deleuze's analysis of Nietzschean genealogy and I raise Heidegger's question of Nietzsche's nihilism in terms of whether he overcomes nihilism or whether he is entangled and encourages nihilism.

I maintain that art, specifically tragedy, is the vehicle of Nietzsche's overcoming of nihilism through the revaluation of values. I discuss the manner in which tragedy contributes to his overall project of establishing an aesthetic and anti-moral interpretation of existence through the figure of Dionysus.

Yet Nietzsche claims that morality overcomes itself through honesty and truthfulness and that tragedy redeems humanity and existence, which suggests that certain ethical and religious themes survive in his philosophy. In this context I raise the question of Nietzsche's ambiguous legacy with regards to the question of ethics. I also appeal to Camus's interpretation of Nietzsche in order to indirectly indicate that Nietzsche makes a positive contribution to the question of ethics in contemporary philosophy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Philosophy never occurs in a vacuum. It is fostered by institutions through financial support and other philosophers, both faculty and students, as well as personally through family and friends. Therefore, I gratefully acknowledge the support of those mentioned below.

I thank the School of Graduate Studies for awarding me University Fellowships for 1991-92 and 1992-93 as well as the Department of Philosophy and the Office of the Dean of Arts for securing me Teaching Assistantships for these years. Their financial support has enabled me to continue my study of philosophy.

I thank all faculty and students of the Department of Philosophy who played a significant role in my education while I completed the Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees. I thank particularly Dr. John Scott for his tireless efforts on my behalf as Head of the Department as well as Dr. James Bradley and Dr. Peter Harris for their continued enthusiasm for and encouragement of my work. My conversations with them and their commentaries helped to shape and direct this thesis and will continue to influence my work in the future. I thank also Dr. Peter Baehr of the Department of Sociology and Dr. Michael Shute of the Department of Religious Studies for their encouragement and friendship.

I thank my late mother, Diane (Berendina) Kiefte, who imparted to me a great joy for life. I thank my father, Harry Kiefte, for both his concerned advice and proud support. I thank my partner, Iris Power, for her patience, interest and encouragement, and especially her love during the time I was researching and writing this thesis which I dedicate to her.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

THE QUESTION OF ETHICS IN NIETZSCHE'S PHILOSOPHY

> An educator never says what he himself thinks, but always only what he thinks of a thing in relation to the requirements of those he educates. He must not be detected in this dissimulation; it is part of his mastery that one believes his honesty... Such an educator is beyond good and evil; but no one must know it.[1]

1.1 Nietzsche's Question of Ethics

My intention in this thesis is to raise Nietzsche's question of ethics in light of his call for the rebirth of tragedy. Nietzsche's question of ethics is radical in a manner unlike that of any earlier moral philosophers. Kant revolutionized modern moral philosophy, but he nonetheless still believed in the significance and value of morality.[2] Moral questions and questions about morality have always been raised. However, a new type and scope of questioning appears for the first time with Nietzsche. In a section of *The Gay Science* titled *Morality as a problem* Nietzsche writes:

---

[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1967), 980; cited hereafter as *WP*. Citations from Nietzsche's work refer to section or note numbers, while those from other sources refer to pages.

[2] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), Preface, 3; cited hereafter as *D*.

> It is evident that up to now morality was no problem at all but, on the contrary, precisely that on which after all mistrust, discord, and contradiction one could agree - the hallowed place of peace where our thinkers took a rest even from themselves, took a deep breath, and felt revived. I see nobody who ventured a *critique* of moral valuations; I miss even the slightest attempts of scientific curiosity, of the refined, experimental imagination of psychologists and historians that readily anticipates a problem and catches it in flight without quite knowing what it has caught. I have scarcely detected a few meagre preliminary efforts to explore the *history of the origins* of these feelings and valuations (which is something quite different from a critique and again different from a history of ethical systems). In one particular case I have done everything to encourage a sympathy and talent for this kind of history - in vain it seems to me today... Thus nobody up to now has examined the value of that most famous of all medicines which is called morality; and the first step would be - for once to *question* it. Well then, precisely this is our task.[3]

It is one thing to raise moral questions and questions about morality, it is quite another to raise the question of ethics. The question of ethics makes morality itself questionable. It is not just a matter of choosing which moral code to adhere to or how best to fulfil one's chosen moral code, but a matter of determining the validity and efficacy of moral code themselves. As Nietzsche indicates, the question of ethics is the question of the value of morality: "Let us articulate this *new demand*: we need a *critique* of moral values, *the value of*

---

[3] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science, with a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1974), 345; cited hereafter as *GS*.

these values themselves must first be called into question."[4]

In *The Question of Ethics* Charles E. Scott writes about this matter in terms of an "interruption":

> The 'question of ethics' indicates an interruption in an ethos, an interruption in which the definitive values that govern thought and everyday action lose their power and authority to provide immediate certainty in their functions. They continue to function in a person's life and thought, but they become optional rather than axiomatic to the extent that they are in question... To say that ethics is in question is also to say that the complex structures of thought and action that fall under the category of ethics comes to be questionable. Ethics, as the body of values by which a culture understands and interprets itself with regards to what is good and bad, is interrupted.[5]

For Scott, "interruption" means that ethical dialogue and dialogue about ethics cannot continue as before, that ethical traditions can no longer be communicated from one age to the next or even within a single age, that ethical principles cannot be translated smoothly into ethical actions. The question of ethics interrupts or breaks into the conversation of our culture unbidden and insistent, after which it is impossible to ignore it.

---

[4] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic* in *On the Genealogy of Morals/Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1967) Preface, 6; cited hereafter as *GM*.

[5] Charles E. Scott, *The Question of Ethics: Nietzsche, Foucault, Heidegger*, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 4; cited hereafter as *QE*.

1.1.1 Ethics and Morality

Scott does not sharply distinguish ethics from morals since for him they both name the body of values of a culture and their underlying attitude to life (*QE*, 4). Yet he uses the term "ethics" and its root word "*ethos*" in order to focus on the operation of principles for both theoretical knowledge and non-theoretical conduct (*QE*, 4). However, I maintain a distinction between ethics in a wider sense, as the reflection on the meaning of existence and the human action appropriate to that meaning, and morality in a narrower sense, as any particular configuration of the meaning of existence and its corresponding code for human action, for example, Christian morality. I consider ethics as the perpetual questioning about meaning and action and morality as the answers given to that questioning. In my view, ethics is not and should not be exhausted by any morality. The question of ethics, then, challenges the manner in which we question the meaning of existence and human action. Ethics, the question and the questioning of ethics, interrupts particular forms of morality so that the continual process of ethical reflection can resume.

This is especially the case with Nietzsche. In light of his philosophy, another way of maintaining the ethics-morality distinction would be to distinguish "second order" or "speculative" ethics and "first order" or "applied" morality.

Nietzsche distinguishes between the ethical principles which underlie our moral deliberations and the practical expressions of those principles in particular moral codes. Yet the important issue for him is the recognition that what were once considered as ahistorical or eternal ethical principles, distinct from their particular historical expressions in moral codes, are just as historical and a part of our changing cultural ethos as their particular expressions. Nietzsche does not just question moral values but also the value of moral values, thereby implying that he engages in both a first order and a second order discussion with respect to morality.

Throughout the main part of my discussion of Nietzsche's inquiry, critique and overcoming of morality and moral interpretations of existence, I use the terms "morality" and "moral" because they are the terms Nietzsche uses to designate the particular configurations of morality which he opposes. The morality Nietzsche opposes is variously referred to as metaphysical morality, nihilistic morality, or especially Christian morality, but they all refer to the supposition of a dualism by which this sensuous world of becoming is negated in favour of another world of absolute values. In the Conclusion I discuss Nietzsche's philosophy in terms of ethics in order to suggest that even though he attempts to overcome Christian morality he nonetheless develops an ethic in that he is concerned with the meaning of existence and the basis for

a way of living that is adequate to existence. In fact, he attempts to overcome morality on ethical grounds. I discuss further the distinction between ethics and morality with respect to Nietzsche's ethic of honesty and truthfulness and the manner in which he applies it to overcome morality.

1.2 The Structure of Nietzsche's Philosophy

Nietzsche's work is sometimes considered by critics and enthusiasts alike to be an artistic amalgam of aphorisms, a collection of scattered thoughts that do not contain, yield, or merit serious philosophical reflection. However, I contend that underlying Nietzsche's style there is a continuity and progression in his philosophy which belies a serious philosophical project. This is not to say that his work is systematic. Indeed, he writes in the style he does in order to avoid fateful systematization either by his own hand or those of his unfaithful and faithful readers (*TI*, I, 26). It is for the reader to decide which I am. All the same, there is a certain internal coherence to Nietzsche's thought that must be worked through if we are to understand him at all. This is not a new attitude or approach. Many interpreters of Nietzsche are at pains to express and explain the relationship between his notions of the will to power, the eternal recurrence, and such. Despite the importance of these notions, they are not of central interest to me in this thesis, though I refer to them

at various points in order to clarify certain notions about the overcoming of nihilism and the revaluation of values through tragedy.

My concern in this thesis is to discuss what I consider as the basic structure of Nietzsche's philosophy with respect to his inquiry, critique and overcoming of morality in light of his notion of tragedy. As I see it, the basic structure has three stages. However, I do not mean to suggest that each stage is discrete unto itself and must be completed before the next stage continues; there is certainly overlap among them. While I recognize that dividing Nietzsche's work in this manner is a matter of much debate, Nietzsche himself continually outlines his work in terms of parts of a larger project, most notably as the revaluation of values. My main reasons for doing this is not so much to establish a chronology of definite periods in Nietzsche's philosophy as to call attention to certain themes within it. I propose the following structure and stages in order to better understand Nietzsche's philosophy as a whole and his notions of morality and tragedy in particular.

(1) Nietzsche's initial "faith" in the birth of tragedy. For Nietzsche, the rebirth of tragedy is a call for the return of a heroic and classical culture, a Dionysian tragic attitude towards the unity of all life, joy and suffering. Both *The Birth of Tragedy* and the *Untimely Meditations* give indication

of this.[6]

(2) Nietzsche's realization that the time is not yet ripe for the rebirth of tragedy and that the ground must be prepared for it. This realization may be responsible for the (not so) sudden "scientific" shift in Nietzsche's work and the (false) impression that he rejects his earlier "artistic" sensibility. This second stage which raises the question of ethics is the longest, encompassing *Human, All Too Human, Daybreak, The Gay Science, Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as well as *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morals*. In these works Nietzsche demonstrates the falsity of the idols of the time, specifically morality. His later philosophy in *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Anti-Christ* as well as his posthumously collected and edited notes in *The Will to Power* is the highest expression of his attempt to overcome Christian morality defined as nihilism.[7]

---

[6] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1967); cited hereafter as *BT*.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); cited hereafter as *UM*.

[7] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); cited hereafter as *HH*.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1969); cited hereafter as *Z*.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1966); cited hereafter as *BGE*.

(3) Nietzsche's reintroduction and reinterpretation of the rebirth of tragedy. Though the interest in tragedy remains constant throughout Nietzsche's work, for example, *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in his later work he once again becomes increasingly concerned with tragedy and the role of art as the countermovement to nihilism, as evidenced by references to Dionysian tragedy in *Ecce Homo* and *The Will to Power*.[8]

The proposed structure of Nietzsche's philosophy is reflected in the structure of this thesis. The chapters are titled so as to name some of the various roles or masks which Nietzsche assumes throughout his philosophical career - there are many Nietzsches. He dissimulates deliberately because he cannot but dissimulate. In his view, everything we say is always only an interpretation from a particular perspective. We cannot tell the "truth" because there is no "truth" to tell. We cannot simply say what we think because we always speak from a certain role or from behind a certain mask,

---

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, or How to Philosophize with a Hammer* in *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1968); cited hereafter as *TI*.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ* in *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1968); cited hereafter as *AC*.

[8] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is* in *On the Genealogy of Morals/Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1967); cited hereafter as *EH*.

depending on the relative position of our audience. Nietzsche draws this to our attention by utilizing various roles and masks in his own philosophy. Most of this thesis is devoted to the second stage of the proposed structure, the stage of Nietzsche's question of ethics and his preparation and education for the rebirth of tragedy. The second stage itself can be divided into three parts which correspond to the first three chapters of this thesis and three roles or masks which Nietzsche assumes in the preparation for the rebirth of tragedy.

1.2.1 Scientist, Genealogist, Nihilist

Chapter 2. Science discusses the manner in which Nietzsche, through an appeal to various sciences, inquires into the origin and history of morality. He reveals that it does in fact have an origin and history, and hence reveals that it is not eternal and immutable.

Chapter 3. Genealogy discusses the manner in which Nietzsche engages in the genealogical critique of the origins of morality. He challenges the very notion of origin as essential and unitary, and hence challenges the essence and unity of morality itself. Foucault's and Deleuze's interpretation help to understand the operation and implications of Nietzsche's genealogy.

Chapter 4. Nihilism analyzes Nietzsche's attempt to

overcome Christian morality defined as nihilism. This is the crucial crux of Nietzsche's entire project. His reflections turn back on himself with respect to nihilism. As Heidegger demonstrates throughout *Nietzsche* and other essays, the decisive question must be asked and addressed as to whether Nietzsche overcomes nihilism or whether he is entangled in and further encourages nihilism.[9]

I appeal to Foucault, Deleuze and Heidegger in order to articulate the structure of Nietzsche's philosophy in terms of the question of ethics as the preparation and education for the rebirth of tragedy. Their interpretations of Nietzsche figure largely in this thesis. They work close to the spirit of Nietzsche and help to demonstrate the nature of Nietzschean philosophizing in their own work. Yet they not only raise questions in the manner of Nietzsche, they also raise questions about Nietzsche which he could not raise himself. This is especially true of Heidegger.

---

[9] Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Volumes I-IV, ed. David Farrell Krell, trans. David Farrell Krell, Joan Stambaugh and Frank A. Capuzzi, (New York: Harper Collins, 1991); cited hereafter as *N*. The four volumes are organized as follows - *I: The Will to Power as Art, II: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same, III: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics, IV: Nihilism*. References to this work include volume number.

1.2.2 Preparatory Educator

Nietzsche can be considered as an educator with respect to the second stage of his work. In *Ecce Homo*, in the context of his review of the *Untimely Meditations*, he refers to himself as "Nietzsche as Educator" in opposition to "Schopenhauer as Educator" (*EH*, UM, 3). That is, his is an education in classical and strong pessimism rather than romantic and weak pessimism. Yet Nietzsche's education, what and how he teaches, depends on who he considers to be his audience and where he considers them to be with respect to his own thought at any given time (*WP*, 980). This is why he assumes different roles and masks. For example, he finds it necessary to raise the question of ethics in various ways before he can relate the full scope of his tragic vision.

However, we must be careful not to see Nietzsche's teaching as an attempt to "improve" humanity (*EH*, Preface, 2). In *The Will to Power* he renounces any attempt to enhance humanity through morality in favour of creating the conditions for a "morality" as a discipline of strength.

> *Not* to make men "better," *not* to preach morality to them in any form, as if "morality in itself," or any ideal kind of man were given; but to *create conditions* that *require stronger men* who for their part need, and consequently will *have*, a morality (more clearly: a physical spiritual discipline)

that makes them strong! (*WP*, 981).[10]

Nietzsche also criticizes the improvement of humanity through morality in *Twilight of the Idols*. He considers such a project faulty because there are no moral facts on which to base such improvement (*TI*, VII, 1). In his view, improvement is effectively a "*taming*" or domestication of humanity which weakens the stronger instincts (*TI*, VII, 2). He only supports the improvement of humanity in terms of "*breeding*" particular classes or races of people within society - a project, he claims, that presupposes human beings who are more rational and gentle than Christian morality presupposes (*TI*, VII, 3). Nietzsche repeatedly claims that he does not care about the future of humanity. "Man is something that should be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?" (*Z*, Prologue, 3). Likewise, in *The Will to Power* he states: "Not "mankind" but *overman* is the goal!" (*WP*, 1001). This puts Nietzsche in opposition to other social and political thinkers who focus on emancipation for all humanity. He considers himself as an opponent of the enlightenment as it is represented by Rousseau, Kant, Mill, Marx and others.[11]

---

[10] This passage also suggests that Nietzsche's question of ethics does not necessarily preclude an ethic for those "beyond good and evil" or beyond Christian morality, as I discuss in Chapter 6.

[11] However, Nietzsche's statement of opposition to the enlightenment may be premature since he advocates freedom from superstition and false consciousness as well as social and

1.2.3 Disciple of Dionysus

Chapter 5. Tragedy indicates that Nietzsche maintains an interest in tragedy throughout his philosophy. He calls himself a disciple of Dionysus (*EH*, Preface, 2). In his early work he is concerned with the dynamic between the individuating Apollonian aspect and the unifying Dionysian aspect of art as exhibited by tragedy (*BT*, 1). In his later work he focuses mainly on the Dionysian aspect of tragedy and its function in the affirmation of will to power and eternal recurrence (*WP*, 1041). In this sense tragedy contributes to the overcoming of nihilism and the revaluation of values. Tragedy is thus the site of Nietzsche's central philosophical thinking.

Nietzsche's notion of tragedy also involves the theme of redemption. In his early and later philosophy he considers art, especially when expressed in the grand style of tragedy, to have a justifying and transfiguring capacity. In *The Birth of Tragedy* he states that "existence and the world seem justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon" and he refers to the "metaphysical intention of art to transfigure" (*BT*, 24).

---

spiritual emancipation (though admittedly only for a select few rather than all humanity). The influence of the enlightenment principle of freedom through knowledge - epitomized, for example, by Kant's "Dare to know!" - on Nietzsche's philosophy may be responsible for his retention of an ethic of honesty and truthfulness which I discuss further in Chapter 6.

Related notes concerning tragic art appear in *The Will to Power* (*WP*, 853). In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* he claims that the affirmation of the eternal recurrence redeems us from the spirit of revenge against temporal existence (*Z*, II, "Of Redemption"). However, Nietzsche's notions of tragic redemption also raise questions about the nature and status of his notion of tragedy, as I indicate in the Conclusion.

Generally, there is a continuity and progression in Nietzsche's philosophy concerning his notion of tragedy. His interest in tragedy is constant but his understanding of it changes. His early works express a premature hope with respect to the rebirth of tragedy. He realizes that it is not enough to herald or call for the rebirth of tragedy, we have to be transfigured first. His middle works are our preparation and education, not for our improvement but for our overcoming. They can be seen as his attempt to give himself grounds for hope in a genuine rebirth of tragedy. In his later work he affirms the tragic vision expressed in terms of eternal recurrence, an affirmation which redeems and transfigures humanity and existence.

1.3 Nietzsche's Ambiguous Legacy

Chapter 6. Conclusion reflects on Nietzsche's ambiguous legacy with respect to the question of ethics in contemporary philosophy. I raise questions about the ethical and religious

status of his notion of tragedy. Nietzsche develops an aesthetic ethics of honesty and truthfulness epitomized by tragedy and he seems to accept a pagan religion of Dionysus. This paradox poses difficulties in assessing his contribution to the question of ethics in contemporary philosophy. I appeal to Camus's interpretation of Nietzsche in order to indirectly determine Nietzsche's contribution. Camus, following Nietzsche, explicitly asks and addresses the question of whether or not there can be a way of life beyond the nihilism of absolute values. In this context I consider Camus's notion of the tragic or the absurd and the proper response of artistic creation as well as his ethic of lucidity and integrity toward absurdity. Though the discussion of Camus I suggest that Nietzsche does in fact make a positive contribution to the manner in which we live our lives. Nietzsche develops a notion of ethics as the perpetual questioning and creating of meaning in the face of absurdity, and though he does not offer the security of absolute values, he nonetheless provides us with the basis for a principled way of human life within temporal existence.

CHAPTER 2. SCIENCE

NIETZSCHE'S INQUIRY INTO THE ORIGINS OF MORALITY

2.1 Nietzsche's Attitudes to Art and Science

Why consider Nietzsche as a scientist when he is often considered the artist's philosopher par excellence, not only because of the artistic style of his work but also because of the significance he attributes to art? Indeed, the central claim of this thesis is that throughout his philosophy Nietzsche maintains a focus on art, specifically tragedy, in terms of fostering an aesthetic and anti-moral attitude which affirms the totality of life as becoming. What, then, are we to make of his appeal to science? How does the image of Nietzsche as a scientist relate to his notion of tragedy and its establishment of an aesthetic and anti-moral perspective? How does it help us to understand his question of ethics?

Compared to Nietzsche's "faith" in the metaphysical activity of art in terms of the redeeming and transfiguring capacity of tragedy evidenced in *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Untimely Meditations*, his criticism of art as an error and an illusion in *Human, All Too Human* and *Daybreak* seems to be a contradictory reversal. Yet Michael Tanner indicates that Nietzsche's criticism of art is not so much a criticism of art itself as it is a criticism of the romantic art that fails to combat decadence and nihilism by advocating resignation from

the world (*D*, xv). In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche states, with respect to the "illusions" or "mere appearances" ("*schein*") produced by art, that art is necessarily illusory (*BT*, 1ff). By its very nature art must produce images and representations of things in the world and so it is inherently illusory, deceptive and dissembling.[1] However, in his subsequent philosophy his questioning turns more on the motive force of the production of illusions or appearances and the type of attitude toward life it expresses and enhances. This was already the case in *The Birth of Tragedy*, as indicated by his *Attempt at a Self-Criticism* (*BT*, AS, 5), and it also remains a central theme in *The Will to Power* (*WP*, 845-853). Nietzsche asks whether art comes from an impoverishment of life, as with romanticism and a decadent or nihilistic perspective, or an overfullness of life, as with classicism and a heroic or tragic perspective. He writes: "Is art a consequence of *dissatisfaction with reality*? Or an expression of *gratitude for happiness enjoyed*?" and "In regard to all aesthetic values, I now employ this fundamental distinction: I ask in each individual case "has hunger or superabundance become creative here?"" (*WP*, 845-846).

---

[1] Nietzsche's notion of art's illusory character is similar to Schiller's claim that *schöner Schein* or "beautiful illusion" is the central aesthetic category. I discuss Nietzsche's relationship to Schiller in terms of the conjunction and separation of art and morality briefly in section 5.4.2 of Chapter 5.

Yet even in *Human, All Too Human*, where the criticism of art perhaps is strongest, Nietzsche claims that art has a crucial critical function because it allows us to represent the ideas and feelings characteristic of the stages of the development of humanity in such a way as to enable us to recognize how each stage necessarily develops but also how the overall development can be changed. Concerning the "higher species of painting" Nietzsche writes: "The first result of it is that we comprehend our fellow men as being determined by such systems and representatives of different cultures, that is to say as necessary, but as alterable" (*HH*, 274). Nietzsche looks to art as a symptom of the temper of the times, and in most cases, even with artists he once admired, the report is not positive. However, this is not a condemnation of all art but of the spirit which works through it and the use to which it is put. In any case, the extent to which he considers artists as the spokespersons for an age or a particular configuration of culture, whether for better or worse, speaks of the value he bestows on them.

The difficulty in assessing Nietzsche's attitude to art increases in light of his appeal to science. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche initially criticizes the scientific or theoretical approach to life as it is embodied in the figure of Socrates whose Apollinian drive to logical schematism brings a false optimism in the human ability to control nature

and hinders the Dionysian experience of the tragic unity of life (*BT*, 14-15). However, in *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche calls upon various sciences to help him challenge assumptions about morality and claims that science is valuable not because it increases our knowledge about things but because it furthers our ability to be rigorous and "*to achieve an objective by the appropriate means*" (*HH*, 256). This suggests that Nietzsche gives up his earlier attempt to base his philosophy on aesthetic experience in favour of scientific methods, but in fact this is not the case.

Erich Heller points out that Nietzsche's "science" is not positivism or objectivism (*HH*, xvi). Nor, it must be quickly added, is it a form of relativism or subjectivism. Nietzsche states his position with respect to science in *The Will to Power*:

> Against positivism, which stops at phenomena - "There are only *facts*" - I would say: No, facts is precisely what there are not, only interpretations. We cannot establish any fact "in itself": perhaps it is folly to want to do such a thing.
>
> "Everything is subjective," you say; but even this is interpretation. The "subject" is not something given, it is something added and invented and projected behind what there is...
>
> In so far as the word "knowledge" has any meaning, the world is knowable; but it is *interpretable* otherwise, it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings. - "Perspectivism." (*WP*, 481).

Nietzsche's "perspectivism" claims that the world, the knower, and knowledge are the constellations of many and varied

perspectival interpretations. They are never unified or essential in themselves and whatever provisional form they take must be questioned and challenged. In the context of Nietzsche's "perspectivism" science can never be a matter of discovering and positing objective facts about the world.

In Nietzsche's view, science, like every other human activity, is a vehicle of our values: "It is our needs that interpret the world; our drives and their For and Against" (*WP*, 481). Nietzsche places science under the same interrogation he places art - Does it combat or continue nihilism? Does it affirm or reject this world? He attempts to determine the perspective - For and Against - from which science approaches life. In *On the Genealogy of Morals* he states:

> Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a science "without presuppositions"... a philosophy, a "faith," must always be there first of all, so that science can acquire from it a direction, a meaning, a limit, a method, a *right* to exist (*GM*, III, 24).

Nietzsche claims that the will to truth which underlies all science must be criticized because it turns away from this world towards an otherworldly realm beyond (*GM*, III, 24). In order to clarify his point he quotes from a section in *The Gay Science* titled *How we, too, are still pious*:

> No doubt, those who are truthful in that audacious and ultimate sense that is presupposed by the faith in science *thus affirm another world* than that 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? But you will have gathered what I am driving at, namely, that it is still a *metaphysical faith* upon which our faith in science rests (*GS*, 344).

In *The Gay Science* this passage is preceded by an important question in this matter: "Thus the question "Why science?" leads back to the moral problem: *Why have morality at all* when life, nature, and history are "not moral"?" (*GS*, 344). Science is "moral" in the pejorative sense he reserves for nihilistic morality. According to Nietzsche, science, in seeking to be objective and truthful, posits a world that is objective and truthful, and thus denigrates and denies this world as one that is subjective and false. It does not direct itself to the physical world which it claims to study and it is partially responsible for the negative attitude towards natural life. Nietzsche states: "science rests on the same foundation as the ascetic ideal: a certain *impoverishment of life* is a presupposition of both of them" (*GM*, III, 25). As far as Nietzsche is concerned, science is a modern expression of the ascetic ideal. Therefore, science is not in direct opposition to morality and religion.

Nietzsche reserves for art the opposing position to morality and religion considered as expressions of the ascetic ideal. In the context of his criticism of science he refers to art as a more "honest" human activity, though not in the usual

sense. He states: "art, in which precisely the *lie* is sanctified and the *will to deception* has a good conscience, is much more opposed to the ascetic ideal than is science" (*GM*, III, 25). Art is somehow more honest because it lies with a good conscience. It does not try to pass itself off as truth, it knows that it does not and cannot tell the truth. The statement about the sanctity of the lie in art must be read in the light of the claim that art is necessarily illusory. Nietzsche claims that "we possess *art* lest we *perish of the truth*" and "art is *worth more* than truth" (*WP*, 822, 853).[2]

Nietzsche reintroduces the issue of the relation of art and science when he returns to *The Birth of Tragedy* 14 years after he wrote it in 1872 to add his *Attempt at a Self-Criticism* as a preface to the 1886 edition. He mentions this in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (*GM*, III, 25). He claims that his early work already broaches "the problem of science, science considered for the first time as problematic" (*BT*, AS, 2). According to him, the problem of science cannot be recognized in or through science itself, so it must be presented in the context of art (*BT*, AS, 2). To him, science is not yet critical enough, though it could be, and art is simply of more value. In this sense Nietzsche states the aim

---

[2] The paradoxical honesty and truthfulness of art in terms of its illusory character is discussed in sections 5.1 and 5.2.2 in Chapter 5. Nietzsche's aesthetic ethic of honesty and truthfulness is discussed in the Chapter 6.

of his early work: "the task which this audacious book dared to tackle for the first time: *to look at science in the perspective of the artist, but at art in that of life*" (*BT*, AS, 2). Thus, while the problem of science must be presented in the context of art, both science and art must have recourse to the perspective of life, both must answer for their evaluation of life.

Furthermore, Nietzsche raises two related parallel questions: "And science itself, our science - indeed, what is the significance of all science, viewed as a symptom of life?" and "What, seen in the perspective of *life*, is the significance of morality?" (*BT*, AS, 1, 4). Nietzsche claims that science and morality must be questioned as to their evaluation of life and from the perspective of life. He raises both questions in light of his considerations of the value of tragedy for life. Therefore, for Nietzsche, art remains the primary context in which these questions about the evaluation of life can be asked and addressed.[3]

In the Translator's Introduction to *The Gay Science* Walter Kaufmann writes of Nietzsche's approach to science in the following terms:

> Nietzsche certainly rejected the simplistic

---

[3] Here Nietzsche reinterprets *The Birth of Tragedy* in light of his later consideration of tragedy as establishing an aesthetic and anti-moral interpretation of life. I discuss this further in Chapters 5 and 6.

> alternative of being either "for" science, like some positivists, or "against" science, like some neoromantics... The position to which his intricate dialectic finally led was, in his own words, an "artistic Socrates" - a philosopher with an intellectual conscience *and* with the feeling for art that the historical Socrates lacked. Indeed, not only a *feeling* for art. Nietzsche also spoke of "a Socrates who makes music" - a philosopher who also *is* an artist (*GS*, TI, 3).

Nietzsche's appeal, if *not* to science as such or to scientific facts, then at least to the name of science or to scientific methods, does not signal either an outright rejection of art or a wholesale acceptance of the presuppositions of science. It is an acknowledgement that science, like art, could and should perform a self-critical and critical function with regards to our attitude to life. Science can ask about its evaluation of life, whether it affirms or rejects life in this world, and it can help us ask about our own such evaluations of life. Such science would be self-critical and critical, as opposed to non-critical.

The attempt to assess Nietzsche's attitude to science is complicated even further by the difficulty of determining the manner in which he appeals to science. He uses science more as a metaphor for his critical inquiry in some cases, especially with chemistry and archaeology, though physics and physiology could be included as well. He uses science more as a genuine method of critical inquiry in other cases like psychology and history. Yet in all cases Nietzsche is attracted to what he

considers to be the sceptical attitude of science. However, while we may be attentive to the difference between metaphor and method with respect to Nietzsche's appeal to science, it is nonetheless difficult to entirely distinguish or isolate the metaphorical aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy because metaphor is inherent in it.

2.2 Nietzsche's Critical Sciences and Morality

The order in which Nietzsche's critical sciences are discussed does not follow the order of their appearance in his philosophy and it does not mean to suggest that one necessarily develops from another or that the former are rejected in favour of the latter. Instead, they are ordered in such a way as to advance thematically towards the discussion of Nietzsche's later genealogical method. Since aspects of Nietzsche's critical sciences culminate and coalesce in his genealogy, the discussion of them also serves as an introduction to genealogy. Furthermore, this also reveals certain major themes that appear throughout Nietzsche's work and it is therefore useful as a general overview of his philosophy.

The crucial characteristic of all Nietzsche's critical sciences is their value for the inquiry into the origins of morality. Chemistry analyzes the basic materials that comprise the physical world. Nietzsche applies it to the analysis of

the origins of moral sensations and concepts. The critical inquiry into the origins of morality through physics and physiology becomes apparent in light of the other sciences to which Nietzsche appeals. His emphasis on the earth and the body, as opposed to the metaphysical concern with the beyond and consciousness, indicates his critical orientation towards origins. Psychology investigates the mental and emotional processes which affect our modes of behaviour. Nietzsche uses it throughout his work to investigate the historical motives in morality and to classify morality according to its psychological types and the values it exhibits and enhances. The critical inquiry into the origins of morality is more obvious in the cases of history and archaeology, two human sciences which investigate the significance of historical events and artifacts. Nietzsche does not appeal to these sciences out of idle curiosity about the past origins of morality but out of deep concern for their value for life in the present and the future.

2.2.1 Chemistry

Chemistry of concepts and sensations is the title of the opening section of the first part of *Human, All Too Human*. Nietzsche presents the notion of chemistry in the context of the perennial philosophical question of how something can originate from its opposite. His answer is that there are no

real opposites, such as good and evil, just development which may or may not be a progression or digression (*HH*, 1). He raises this issue of opposites again in *Beyond Good and Evil* when he states: "The fundamental faith of the metaphysicians is *the faith in opposite values*" (*BGE*, 2).[4] Yet, for Nietzsche, the question of opposites is more specific: How could our supposedly virtuous and civilized culture have developed out of evil and violent forces? Through images of bell-founding and the cyclops he suggests that the forces which condition and create our culture are generally considered to be coarse and savage (*HH*, 245-246). These forces are not alien to culture or overcome by our virtues, but essential to culture, the core of our virtues. According to Nietzsche, chemistry reveals that there are no opposites values, just developments which reveal the "immoral" nature of morality.

One common function of chemistry is the fabrication of new compounds, and this is true of Nietzsche's chemistry only in the sense that he creates a new acid to critically test the mettle of culture. Another function of chemistry is the analysis or break-down of previously constituted compounds, and this is the primary function of Nietzsche's chemistry in

---

[4] Nietzsche's identification of metaphysics as the faith in opposite values figures largely in his consideration of what is necessary to overcome metaphysical or nihilistic morality. I return to this issue in Chapter 4.

the sense that he analyzes morality to its original component parts. In both cases Nietzsche's chemistry is like his hammer which sounds out empty idols rather than makes them anew (*TI*, Foreword). The cultural alchemy which tries to make gold from base materials and pass it off as pure and precious is counteracted by the Nietzsche's chemistry which reveals the beastly and frightening things hidden in our golden ideals. Nietzsche writes:

> All we require, and what can be given us only now the individual sciences have attained their present level, is a *chemistry* of the moral, religious and aesthetic conceptions and sensations, likewise of all the agitations we experience within ourselves in cultural and social intercourse, and indeed even when we are alone: what if this chemistry would end up revealing that in this domain too the most glorious colours are derived from base, indeed from despised materials? Will there be many who desire to pursue such researches? (*HH*, 1).

Nietzsche suggests that the answer to his question is negative because it is a difficult and discomforting project: "Mankind likes to put questions of origins and beginnings out of its mind" (*HH*, 1). Indeed, for Nietzsche, the problem with morality is precisely that we have forgotten the origins and beginnings of our moral concepts and sensations, we have forgotten that they have a history, so we consider them to be natural (*HH*, 96).[5] Nietzsche considers chemistry as a metaphor

---

[5] For reference to the role of forgetting in the history of morality see also *On the Genealogy of Morals* (*GM*, I, 2-3; *GM*, II, 1) and the discussion of it in terms of history in section 2.2.4 of this chapter.

for the inquiry into the origins of morality. He locates those origins in what is considered base and despised. Thus he points to the natural world and body, to the sciences of physics and physiology.

2.2.2 Physics

Nietzsche's critical sciences of physics and physiology concern his inquiry into the origin of morality but they also indicate the direction or orientation to which he turns when inquiring into that origin. The Greek word "*physis*" is usually translated to mean nature and it is the etymological root for the term physics (the study of the natural world) and physiology (the study of the natural body). Nietzsche's somewhat metaphorical notions of physics and physiology mutually amplify each other throughout his work. Physics is considered first in this section and physiology is considered immediately after in the following section.

In the second of the *Untimely Meditations* Nietzsche claims that the Greeks were able to develop a culture that was distinctly Greek because they knew how to "*organize the chaos*" that surrounded them (*UM*, II, 10). He refers to this as an exemplary model for the present and future when he states: "This is a parable for each one of us: he must organize the chaos within him by thinking back to his real needs" (*UM*, II, 10). He calls this reshaping of the world and our

understanding of it "the conception of culture as a new and improved *physis*" (*UM*, II, 10). Nietzsche thus sees culture as an improvement of nature (*physis*) and he calls the science which is engaged in that activity physics.

Nietzsche's early notion of physics does not merely involve empirical and theoretical knowledge about the world, though he claims that it helps us to be honest with respect to moral interpretations of the world because it involves the inquiry into the origins of morality. He suggests further that our "moral" honesty and truthfulness should compel us to reject customary moral interpretations and attempt to create new values that suit ourselves and our situation.[6]

Nietzsche's association of physics with the dual roles of inquiring into the origins of morality and of creating new values is clarified in *The Gay Science*. Here he explicitly charges that we cannot properly observe the world because we invest it with grand words like "sin" and "guilt" as well as "salvation of the soul" and "redemption" which artificially colour our perception of it (*GS*, 335). He rejects these interpretations of the world in terms of otherworldly moral values in favour of interpretations which attend to the physical or natural world. This provides the context of Zarathustra's entreaty: "*remain true to the earth*, and do not

---

[6] This is an example of Nietzsche's paradoxical ethic of honesty and truthfulness.

believe those who speak to you of superterrestrial hopes!" (*Z*, Prologue, 3). Physics helps us to see the world as it really is by allowing us to see the origins of erroneous moral interpretations of the world. Physics helps us to create new values in light of our honesty and our particular needs. Nietzsche's early work echoes in his later work:

> Therefore let us *limit* ourselves to the purification of our opinions and valuations and to the *creation of our own new tables of what is good*, and let us stop brooding about the "moral value of our actions"?... We, however, *want to become those who we are* - human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves. To that end we must become the best learners and discoverers of everything that is lawful and necessary in the world: we must become *physicists* in order to be *creators* in this sense - while hitherto all valuations and ideals have been based on *ignorance* of physics or were constructed so as to *contradict* it. Therefore: long live physics! And even more so that which *compels* us to turn to physics - our honesty! (*GS*, 335).[7]

This passage expresses the dual capacity of Nietzsche's physics - the inquiry into the origins of morality and the creation of new values. Here knowledge about the world is linked directly to the capacity to create a new culture. For Nietzsche, knowledge is evaluation and creation. This is the sense in which we can consider all of Nietzsche's sciences critical.

---

[7] Nietzsche's ethic of honesty and truthfulness which underlies his entire project is obvious in this passage.

2.2.3 Physiology

Through physiology Nietzsche seeks to develop a position that recognizes the crucial role of the body and its organic life. He emphasizes the importance of physiology in relation to morality throughout his work. He opens *Human, All Too Human* with comments about the relationship of health and sickness to philosophy and the value of "convalescence" for developing a critical position (*HH*, Preface, 4-6). As Zarathustra speaks against those who despise the earth through their moral interpretations of the world, so also he chastises those who have contempt for the body in favour of esteeming the soul (*Z*, Prologue, 3). Nietzsche repeatedly defines morality as being "anti-nature" because it either spiritualizes or exterminates the passions and all that concerns the body (*TI*, V, 1). In *Ecce Homo* he discusses at length things that pertain to the body: "these small things - nutrition, place, climate, recreation, the whole casuistry of selfishness - are inconceivably more important than everything one has taken to be important so far" (*EH*, II, 10).

The comments he makes about culture as a "new and improved *physis*" can be compared with the following passage from *The Gay Science* about heeding the dictates of our physiology:

> The reason why these individuals have different feelings and tastes is usually to be found in some oddity of their life style, nutrition, or

> digestion, perhaps a deficit or excess of inorganic salts in their blood and brain; in brief in their *physis*. They have the courage to side with their *physis* and to heed its demands down to the subtlest nuances. Their aesthetic and moral judgements are among these "subtlest nuances" of the *physis* (*GS*, 39).

Again there is reference to the Greek notion of *physis*, though focused more on the body through physiology than on the world through physics. We may well question Nietzsche's particular diagnosis, but his basic point that the state of our body affects our outlook and judgement of the world is a tenet of present day health medicine and is often confirmed by our daily experience.

However, according to Nietzsche, our daily experience of our bodies is not reflected in our thought and evaluations. In *The Will to Power* he states: "Through the long succession of millennia, man has not known himself physiologically: he does not know himself even today. To know, e.g., that one has a nervous system (-but no "soul"-) is the privilege of the best informed" (*WP*, 229). The moral, religious, even scientific terminology we use have generally taught us to pay no heed to the body or to denigrate the body. This is either done through explicit moral censure or through implicit moral interpretations and misinterpretations. In this regard Nietzsche writes: The unconscious disguise of physiological needs under the cloaks of the objective, ideal, purely spiritual goes to frightening lengths - and I often have asked

myself whether, taking a large view, philosophy has not been merely an interpretation of the body and a *misunderstanding of the body*" (*GS*, Preface, 2).

As with physics, physiology allows us to see things for what they are without extraneous moral interpretations. Physiology thus raises the question of values, the question of what is valued as much as how it is valued. According to Nietzsche, this holds true for the question of the origin of morality, as he writes in *The Will to Power*:

> All virtues physiological *conditions*: particularly the principle organic functions considered as necessary, as good. All virtues are really refined *passions* and enhanced states (*WP*, 255).
>
> I understand by "morality" a system of evaluations that partially coincides with the conditions of a creature's life (*WP*, 256).

To Nietzsche, our virtues are passions which we have refined or interpreted in a moral sense. Morality in particular is a function of our organic life which we mistakenly suppose to be something other-worldly or divine. The science of physiology, the attention to our body, helps us to see that our morality actually comes from our own physiology or body. Physiology is thus considered as the inquiry into origins of morality but it is also an indication of the particular direction and orientation towards which we must turn to reveal those origins.

However, Nietzsche stresses that the appeal to and use of

physics and physiology should not be uncritical. In *Beyond Good and Evil* he warns that physics is still an interpretation of the world and not an explanation of it and that physiology should be wary of positing superfluous teleological principles (*BGE*, 13-14). He means to say that science is not the realm of objectivity and that the claim to objectivity is itself an erroneous supposition. Science, as well as morality and religion, can also produce false interpretations of the world. The sciences of physics and physiology, if they are to remain critical, must not import any external value into the world and the body and thereby produce false interpretations of them. Nietzsche is convinced that a truly critical physics and physiology will avoid this pitfall.

2.2.4 Psychology

Psychology is probably Nietzsche's most important critical science since he appeals to it most constantly and often refers to his work as psychology and to himself as a psychologist. Nietzsche's psychology is involved with all his other critical sciences, therefore its scope is wide and at times a little vague. However, its focus can be narrowed somewhat when it is considered in terms of the inquiry into the origins of morality. This is the precise context in which Nietzsche appeals to psychology.

Psychology is usually defined as the science which

investigates the hidden motivations that underlie observable behaviour patterns. It traces the unconscious sources and processes of our conscious thoughts and actions. It is also concerned with the origins and history of our sensations and conceptions. This is true of Nietzsche's psychology, though he more specifically addresses it to the origins of morality or moral sensations and concepts. He is concerned with the sources of our contemporary morality. Thus, for Nietzsche, psychology is a historical science.[8]

Nietzsche begins the second part of *Human, All Too Human* with a brief discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of psychology with regard to the investigation of the origins of morality (*HH*, 35-38).[9] Nietzsche's placement of the discussion of psychology at the beginning of one of his most concise and sustained inquiries into the origin of morality speaks volumes for the importance of psychology in his overall project concerning morality. He belongs to a tradition that associates psychology with the investigation of the origins of morality.

---

[8] The psychology-history conjunction appears in *Human, All Too Human* and *On the Genealogy of Morals*, as becomes clearer in this and the next section.

[9] Nietzsche mentions his friend Paul Rée from whom he acquires the title for the second part of *Human, All Too Human* (*HH*, 36-37). In the Preface of *On the Genealogy of Morals* he becomes more critical in his assessment, signalling the movement from historical psychology to genealogy. I maintain a distinction between psychology and genealogy because a change in focus occurs in the shift from the former to the latter, as I clarify in Chapter 3.

Nietzsche writes concerning psychology:

> However the credit and debit balance may stand: at its present state as a specific individual science the awakening of moral observation has become necessary, and mankind can no longer be spared the cruel sight of the moral dissecting table and its knives and forceps. For here there rules that science which asks after the origin and history of so-called moral sensations and which as it progresses has to pose and solve the sociological problems entangled with them: - the older philosophy knows nothing of the latter and has, with paltry evasions, always avoided investigation of the origin and history of the moral sensations (*HH*, 37).

Nietzsche makes it very clear that psychology is a science concerned with the inquiry into the origins of morality and its value, not with disinterested and objective knowledge about mental processes. He credits the science of psychology with a critical role that hitherto, at least in his view, no other philosophy would or could assume.

For Nietzsche, psychology is also the history of moral sensations in the sense that it seeks the origins of our feelings of guilt and conscience. In *Human, All Too Human* he points out that morality requires that we believe we are free and hence responsible for our actions, but he claims that the notions of free will and responsibility are errors. Thus our feeling of guilt based on these errors, is also an error. Nietzsche states: "Thus: it is because man *regards* himself as free, not because he is free, that he feels remorse and pangs of conscience" (*HH*, 39).

Furthermore, Nietzsche states: "the character of *exchange* is the original characteristic of justice" (*HH*, 92). He returns to this theme of justice as exchange *On the Genealogy of Morals* when he claims that free will and responsibility are the sources of the notion of the human being as "an animal *with the right to make promises*" (*GM*, II, 1-2). By focusing on the promissory dimension of justice, he locates its origin in the manner in which we enter into the relationships of creditor and debtor on a personal and a communal level (*GM*, II, 8). The need for punishment arises when a pledge or contract is broken and it must be repaid in order to maintain the balance sheet of justice (*GM*, II, 9). Yet, in Nietzsche's view with respect to morality, punishment is not only a means of punishing because it is also meant to awaken our feelings of guilt and bad conscience in the first instance (*GM*, II, 12-14).

Nietzsche's appeal to psychology in his inquiry into the origins of morality in *On the Genealogy of Morals* also has a further dimension.[10] In these essays he develops a psychological typology with respect to morality, an analysis of the psychological types that require morality. As a

---

[10] Though his criticisms of Paul Rée and the English psychologists in the Preface of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche intimates that psychology (as a history of morality) is to be replaced by genealogy (as a critique of the value of morality). I discuss this further in Chapter 3.

psychologist, Nietzsche concerns himself with the motivation of moral values like "good and evil" (as opposed to good and bad) and moral sensations such as "guilt" and "bad conscience" and he seeks to identify those people who are motivated to create morality for themselves and others. Nietzsche maintains a distinction between the dualisms of good-bad and good-evil, a distinction which he first makes in *Human, All Too Human* and later maintains in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. The powerful consider themselves good and consider the less powerful bad, but not in a moral sense, whereas the less powerful either consider themselves good and the powerful evil, or they condemn all humanity as evil, all in a moral sense (*HH*, 45). This is the basis for Nietzsche's famous distinction of master-morality and slave-morality or the knightly-aristocratic mode of valuation and the priestly mode of valuation (*GM*, I, 7).

According to Nietzsche, moral interpretations of life - good and evil (as opposed to good and bad) and the notions of guilt and bad conscience - come into existence through the "*ressentiment*" of less powerful and slavish people.

> The slave revolt in morality begins when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values: the *ressentiment* of natures that are denied the true reaction, that of deeds, and compensate themselves with imaginary revenge (*GM*, I, 10).

Nietzsche considers "*ressentiment*" or the negative reaction to

the external world which is considered to be hostile as the motivation of morality (*GM*, I, 10). Morality is motivated by a negation of life and it encourages a further negation of life. Nietzsche claims that the moral perspective is thus "*anti-natural*" and "*the enemy of life*" (*TI*, V, 4). For Nietzsche, then, the psychological investigation of morality reveals the implicit evaluations of life that underlie explicit moral values. Psychology brings the question of the evaluation of life to the forefront of the inquiry into the origins of morality. Thus Nietzsche's critical science of psychology begins to raise the question of the value of morality itself, the question that is central to his later method of genealogy.

2.2.5 History

In Nietzsche's philosophy there is a conjunction of psychology and history. Nietzsche's critical science of history, its character and function as a science, requires further determination.[11] For example, in the *Untimely Meditations* he questions the scientific view of history, but in *Human, All Too Human* and *On the Genealogy of Morals* he charges that philosophers do not have enough of a historical sense. This would seem to indicate a contradiction between two

---

[11] See also section 3.2.4 on "Wirkliche Historie" in Chapter 3.

different and divergent positions. However, common to both positions is the notion that the critical science of history is a matter of the value of history and the history of values.

As early as the second of the *Untimely Meditations* titled *On the uses and disadvantages of history for life* Nietzsche shows concern for history, or more precisely, "the value of history" and its role in culture (*UM*, II, Foreword). For Nietzsche, history is not a collection of facts or interpretations about the past and historical knowledge is not instruction in these matters - such history is dead, such historical knowledge breeds lifelessness and inaction. Rather, as the title of the essay suggests, history must be studied in such a way that it "serves life" and enhances our ability to act (*UM*, II, Foreword). Nietzsche expresses the difference in the following manner:

> History become pure, sovereign science would be for mankind a sort of conclusion of life and a settling of accounts with it. The study of history is something salutary and fruitful for the future only as the attendant of a mighty new current of life, of an evolving culture for example, that is to say only when it is dominated and directed by a higher force and does not itself dominate and direct (*UM*, II, 2).

Thus, for Nietzsche, history is not a science in the sense of securing objective knowledge about the past, it is a science driven by and directed towards the force of life. History and historical knowledge have a role in culture conceived as "a new and improved physis" or the reshaping of the world (*UM*,

II, 10). History is most properly a tool: "employ history for the purposes of *life*!" (*UM*, II, 1).

However, Nietzsche indicates that the employment of history for the purpose of life is not a straightforward matter. Not only must we remember things of the past in a certain way at a particular time so as to stimulate ourselves to further activity, we must also forget certain things at a particular time so that we do not become weighted down by the burden of the past and we thus feel more free to act (*UM*, II, 1). Nietzsche states: "This, precisely, is the proposition the reader is invited to meditate upon: *the unhistorical and the historical are necessary in equal measure for the health of an individual, of a people and of a culture*" (*UM*, II, 1). Nietzsche's point is that some amount of forgetfulness, historical blindness, is necessary in order for us to act with decisiveness and to recognize what is essential in our actions. Life must be cured of the "*malady of history*" (*UM*, II, 10). Nonetheless, this raises sticky questions about the totalitarian implications of Nietzsche's notion of history.[12]

What, then, is the attitude and approach which we must bring to history if it is to serve life? Nietzsche

---

[12] In the Introduction to the *Untimely Meditations*, xvi, J.P. Stern indicates the political danger of Nietzsche's notion of forgetfulness. This is witnessed, for example, in the manner it is used by totalitarian regimes to establish "Year One" or a new national history by obliterating the old one in the countries where they come to power.

distinguishes three forms of history which correspond to three aspects of life.

> History pertains to the living man in three respects: it pertains to him as a being who acts and strives, as a being who preserves and reveres, as a being who suffers and seeks deliverance. This threefold relationship corresponds to three species of history - insofar as it is permissible to distinguish between a *monumental*, an *antiquarian* and a *critical* species of history (*UM*, II, 2).

However, before these three forms of history are briefly defined it is important to emphasize the point that Nietzsche is making here. All three activities of the living person are related and all three species of history are necessary to some degree for service to life.

Monumental history, for Nietzsche, exhibits the view that "the great moments in the struggle of the human individual constitute a chain" and it expresses "faith in humanity" (*UM*, II, 2). He claims that the problem with this species of history is that, depending on how the chain is interpreted, the focus on the greatness of the past either leads to a false optimism about the possibility of progress or deems as unnecessary or impossible any further progress (*UM*, II, 2). He himself wants to show there is greatness in the past, but in such a way that it advances the contemporary struggle for a renewed culture, as evidenced by his appeal to Attic tragedy and his call for a return to a tragic age.

Antiquarian history, to Nietzsche, is pious in that it

preserves and reveres the past for future generations. He states of the antiquarian: "By tending with care that which has existed from old, he wants to preserve for those who shall come into existence after him the conditions under which he himself came into existence" (*UM*, II, 3). In his view, this species of history degenerates when it becomes too indiscriminate or too discriminating: either it preserves and reveres everything from the past equally or it rejects everything that is new and evolving which does not fit its view of the past (*UM*, II, 3). Such pious history does not allow for the critique and change of values which Nietzsche advocates.

Critical history, according to Nietzsche, has elements of both the other two species of history but avoids their problems (*UM*, II, 3). Like monumental history, critical history is able to divine the greatness of the past while fostering action for the present and future which is neither naively optimistic nor unduly pessimistic. Like antiquarian history, critical history preserves past forms of life as a guide for the future while recognizing the value of presently emerging forms of life. In this regard Nietzsche writes:

> Here it becomes clear how necessary it is to mankind to have, beside the monumental and antiquarian modes of regarding the past, a *third* mode, the *critical*: and this, too, in the service of life. If he is to live, man must possess and from time to time employ the strength to break up and dissolve a part of the past: he does this by

> bringing it before the tribunal, scrupulously examining it and finally condemning it (*UM*, II, 3).

As the passage above suggests, critical history also has the power of forgetfulness which lifts the burden of too much past. Critical history is selective with regards to what it remembers of the past and how it uses the past. Critical history has an unhistorical element.

According to Nietzsche, history serves life, a particular form of life, only if it provides a unified vision of the past which inspires the development of a particular culture or a new and improved physis. In his view, we should not look to create a culture that is free for any and every possibility because a culture with no boundaries is sick. Nietzsche refers to a "*hygiene of life*" which must supervise history (*UM*, II, 10). Yet he is not advocating complete ignorance - forgetting is selective process. He does not urge the destruction of history altogether but the construction of a history which serves our particular form of life.

In this context Nietzsche claims that life must be cured of "*the malady of history*" and that "the antidote to the historical is called - *the unhistorical and the suprahistorical*" (*UM*, II, 10).

> With the word 'the unhistorical' I designate that art and power of *forgetting* and of enclosing oneself within a bounded *horizon*; I call 'suprahistorical' the powers which lead the eye away from becoming towards that which bestows upon existence the character of the eternal and stable,

towards *art* and *religion* (*UM*, II, 10).

Nietzsche contrasts art and religion to science which seeks the historical without a definitive perspective or use and without a sense of what is eternal in it. Scientific (positivist or objectivist) knowledge of history is dead. An interpretation inspired by vested interests is required for history to be employed for the purpose of life. Yet we must also be aware of what those vested interests and their evaluations of life are. The study of history must be carried on with a view to values and the value of history itself. This is critical history.

Nietzsche identifies the touchstone from which all historical interpretations are to be made when he states: "It is not justice which here sits in judgement; it is even less mercy which pronounces the verdict; it is life alone, that dark, driving power that insatiably thirsts for itself" (*UM*, II, 3). Yet the question arises as to who determines what "life" is in any given case and thus what remains and what passes away, to which Nietzsche answers: "To sum up, history is written by the experienced and superior man" (*UM*, II, 6). Thus Nietzsche suggests that critical history is critical precisely because it serves life best and that experienced and superior men determine how it does so. However, neither "life" nor "experience" and "superiority" are definitive enough to ground Nietzsche's claim to a critical science of history. Yet

a lack of ground is essential to Nietzsche's philosophy. This aspect of his critical science of history is problematic.

At first glance, Nietzsche's view in the *Untimely Meditations* that we suffer from too much history appears to directly contradict his view in *Human, All Too Human* that the family failing of all philosophers is their lack of historical sense (*HH*, 2). However, the apparent contradiction can be partially dissolved. Nietzsche's position in the earlier work is not that history itself is a problem - indeed, it is a necessary component of the development of a new culture, but that too much history or not enough of the right kind of history for a particular group of people is detrimental to their ability to recognize themselves for who they are and to use that recognition as the basis for action. When he writes in the later work concerning the need for historical philosophizing he claims that a more modest and particularized sense of history is required so that we can see things as they are (*HH*, 2).

For Nietzsche, the eternal in history is not what is actually eternal but what is valued as eternal by a particular group. He refers to the habit of philosophers to attribute the quality of eternity to things which are still becoming.

> All philosophers have the common failing of starting out from man as he is now and thinking they can reach their goal through an analysis of him. They involuntarily think of `man' as an *aeterna veritas* [*eternal truth*], as something that

> remains constant in the midst of all flux, as a sure measure of things. Everything the philosopher has declared about man is, however, at bottom no more than a testimony as to the man of a very *limited* period of time... But everything has become: there are no eternal facts, just as there are no absolute truths. Consequently, what is needed from now on is historical philosophizing, and with it the virtue of modesty (*HH*, 2).[13]

Later Nietzsche states that there is no essential or necessary human nature but that certain habits established over a brief time have been taken as essential and necessary and he suggests that if we could see humanity over a longer period we would see many alterable human qualities (*HH*, 41). The eternal is not a fact, but an interpretation. It is not a thing in and of itself or an actual quality of things, but an evaluation. The historical sense allows us to see our evaluations as just that - our own particular evaluations.

Rather than ruling out the critical aspect of history altogether, Nietzsche suggests that history can play a critical function in the inquiry into the origin of morality. In his view, the problem is that we have forgotten the history of morality, we have forgotten that morality even has a history, so that we eventually and erroneously consider it to

---

[13] Foucault is obviously influenced by this passage when he writes: "As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And perhaps one nearing its end." See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, translation of *Les Mots et les choses*, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1970), 387. I consider Nietzsche's and Foucault's notion of archaeology in the next section.

be natural and eternal. In *Human, All Too Human* and *On the Genealogy of Morals* he explicitly takes up the task of the critical history of morality in order to recall its forgotten origins (*HH*, 96; *GM*, I, 2-3, II, 1). Nietzsche's overall position with regards to the history of morality is that it is "human, all too human" (*HH*, 35). Morality is not something naturally or eternally given by a perfect God but is created and maintained for particular purposes by humanity with all its frailty and failings.

In the second part of *Human, All Too Human* titled *On the History of the Moral Sensations* Nietzsche claims that the history of morality is the "history of an error" (*HH*, 39). He outlines the stages of the history of morality: (1) actions are called good or bad depending on their useful or harmful consequences, (2) actions are deemed inherently "good" and "evil" in themselves, (3) the designations of "good" and "evil" are assigned to the motives of actions, (4) the predicates "good and "evil" are ascribed to human nature.

> Thus one successively makes men accountable for the effects they produce, then for their actions, then for their motives, and finally for their nature (*HH*, 39).

However, as Nietzsche points out, if we recognize that the notions of free will and accountability, without which morality could not exist, are errors which lay at the origin of morality, then we will see the history of morality as the

history of an error.

> One has thereby attained to the knowledge that the history of moral sensations is the history of an error, the error of accountability, which rests on the error of freedom of will (*HH*, 39).

Referring specifically to the feeling of free will, on which the feeling of accountability and guilt, and hence morality, is based, Nietzsche states: "It is a very changeable thing, tied to the evolution of morality and culture and perhaps present only in a relatively brief span of world-history" (*HH*, 39). The historical investigation of morality reveals that morality has a history, a history of an error.

Near the end of the section Nietzsche further outlines the history of morality with respect to the customs of communities. To him, morality is not eternal and immutable but it is linked to particular cultures and it changes in accordance with them. Nietzsche equates morality with the customs and traditions, or habits, of a community. He claims that morality is nothing other than custom mistaken for something natural.

> To be moral, to act in accordance with custom, to be ethical means to practice obedience towards a law or tradition established from of old... He is called "good" who does what is customary as if by nature (*HH*, 96).

In this context he states that what morality values as "good" is what a community values as "good for something" or useful to itself (*HH*, 96). Custom and tradition are the basis of

morality. Directing his comments at Kant, he writes:

> 'Egoistic' and 'unegoistic' is not the fundamental anti-thesis which has led man to make the distinction between 'in accordance with custom' and 'in defiance of custom', between good and evil, but adherence to a tradition, a law, and severance from it. How the tradition has arisen is here a matter of indifference, and has in any event nothing to do with good and evil or any kind of categorical imperative; it is above all directed at the preservation of a *community*, a people (*HH*, 96).[14]

Nietzsche claims that morality does not come to a community from external and eternal sources, but is developed in and by a community to serve its own particular purpose, usually preservation. The history of morality shows that morality is not free from interested parties but is always at the service of some other purpose. It reveals the other evaluations at the heart of moral values.

In *On the Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche moves his historical analysis of morality a step further. He repeats his criticism about philosophers' lack of the historical sense: "As is the hallowed custom with philosophers, the thinking of all of them is by nature unhistorical" (*GM*, I, 2). He recounts the basic position of the historians of morality in a critical manner:

> "Originally" - so they decree- "one approved unegoistic actions and called them good from the

---

[14] Rorty develops a similar notion of morality and community. See Richard Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 58-59; cited hereafter as *CIS*.

> point of view of those to whom they were done, that is to say those to whom they were useful; later one forgot how this approval originated and, simply because unegoistic actions were always habitually praised as good, one also felt them to be good - as if they were something good in themselves" (*GM*, I, 2).

This is more or less the position Nietzsche himself outlines earlier. However, as the passage above suggests, Nietzsche now seeks to emphasize the importance of the perspective from which the history of morality is undertaken. For him, the history of the judgement "good" should not come from those to whom "goodness" was shown, the weak and less powerful, but from the "good" themselves, the strong and powerful, the noble (*GM*, I, 2). Morality is not essentially related to the egoistic-unegoistic dualism or the utility in preserving a community because this relationship only holds from the point of view of one perspective on morality, that of the weak and less powerful (*GM*, I, 2). Therefore, according to Nietzsche, the historical inquiry into the origins of morality must be directed against the weak and less powerful since they are the originators of moral interpretations of life, but it must arise from the perspective of the strong and powerful. The critique and overcoming of morality must come from the noble, since they have a more affirmative attitude towards life.[15]

---

[15] This points to the critical function of Dionysian tragedy and its aesthetic and anti-moral perspective. I discuss this at length in Chapter 5.

2.2.6 Archaeology

With the first line of his Preface to *Daybreak* Nietzsche announces his archaeology through various related metaphors: "In this book you will discover a `subterranean man' at work, one who tunnels and mines and undermines" (*D*, Preface, 1). Attention must be given to the manner in which the word "mines" is extended and amplified by the word "undermines" to indicate the critical character and function of archaeology. Nietzsche gives further indication of the intention of archaeology.

> I descended into the depths, I tunnelled into the foundations, I commenced an investigation and digging out of an ancient faith, one upon which we philosophers have for a couple of millennia been accustomed to build as if upon the firmest foundations - and have continued to do so even though every building hitherto erected on them has fallen down: I commenced to undermine our faith in morality (*D*, Preface, 2).

Nietzsche digs out the buried artifacts and monuments of morality, but not because of theoretical interest about past morality or pious reverence for past morality. Rather, he uncovers them to completely destroy them. He is not interested in clearing away the ruins of moral systems so that he can salvage and refurbish old ones or construct new ones closer to the designs and intentions of their founders. He is not simply pointing out where we have gone wrong in relation to the truth of morality, he wants to put an end altogether to morality as it has been known because it is an error. Nietzsche's avowed

intention is to undermine morality without offering another in its place. The extent of his success is debatable.[16]

Nietzsche wants to undermine not only the foundations of morality but also the faith in morality. He criticizes Kant for trying, given the shortcomings of morality, to ground it securely rather than reject it outright (*D*, Preface, 3). In fact he claims that Kant is actually a pessimist about the efficacy of morality in the face of the immoralism of nature and history which contradicted it, but he did not have the wherewithal to completely reject his faith in morality (*D*, Preface, 3). According to Nietzsche, even if we reject particular moral propositions or moral systems we may still exhibit a "metaphysical need" for morality as such. Despite the fall of every morality that we have erected, our faith in the project of erecting morality persists. Nietzsche makes it his task to undermine that faith.

Nietzsche also provides a formula and goal for his archaeological project: "the *self-sublimation of morality*" or the self-overcoming of morality (*D*, Preface, 4). He states later in *On the Genealogy of Morals*: "All great things bring about their own destruction through an act of self-overcoming" (*GM*, III, 27). The honesty that morality requires of us

---

[16] The question about Nietzsche's position with respect to morality, whether he overcomes it or is inscribed within it, begins to arise more urgently in terms of his relation to nihilism, as emerges in Chapter 4.

actually calls us to do away with morality and our need for morality. Archaeology, as the undermining of the faith in morality, is meant to help bring about the self-overcoming of morality. However, the success of Nietzsche's archaeological endeavour remains under question.[17]

Heidegger points out that the Greek word "*arché*" is the etymological root for archaeology and means "principle" and "to begin" in a manner that suggests standing at the beginning and ruling over all that comes after (*N:II*, 187). He indicates, rightly, especially where Nietzsche is concerned, that reference to *arché* as beginning or ruling principle "will make sense only if we simultaneously determine that of which and for which we are seeking the *arché*" (*N:II*, 187). According to Nietzsche, the question of origins is neither objective nor subjective but perspectival, neither neutral nor benign but interested and value-laden. The origins of morality as well as the question of the origins of morality come from particular attitudes towards life. For him, the archaeological question of the origins of morality involves critically investigating the evaluation of life that informs morality.

In Heidegger's view, the question about the *arché* of being is the essence of a "*fundamental metaphysical position*"

---

[17] Nietzsche's ethic of honesty and truthfulness survives in his philosophy despite his inquiry, critique and overcoming of morality. In fact, in his view this ethic is the very basis of the overcoming of morality, as emerges in Chapter 6.

(*N:II*, 184). For him, the inquiry into the nature of beings starts with physics but always calls forth metaphysics in that our understanding of life summons us to further investigate its origin and ruling principle beyond it (*N:II*, 189). In this context Heidegger claims that Nietzsche's philosophy does not overcome metaphysics but is in fact the culmination of metaphysics. The extent to which this may or may not be the case requires further discussion, but it is important to see how Nietzsche's archaeological concern with origins raises the question about his position in relation to metaphysics.

However, Foucault indicates that Nietzsche's archaeology is a critical science in which the very notion of origin as a pure beginning or essential source is itself under question. Foucault is influenced by Nietzsche with respect to awareness of the historicity of human nature and morality. Foucault's Nietzschean archaeology indicates that archaeology is involved in the critical investigation of the history of cultural forms in a particular sense. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* he claims that his own work focuses on the discontinuity that comprises the supposed continuity in the history and structure of thought. In order to conceive of this discontinuity he uses concepts like rupture, break and mutation, threshold and transformation, displacement and redistribution, and thereby challenges the notion of origin as pure beginning or essential

source.[18] Given the relationship between Nietzsche and Foucault, this demonstrates that archaeology does not search for origins (*arché*) uncritically. To see Nietzsche's work reflected in Foucault's work suggests, against Heidegger, the possibility of considering archaeology in a manner that resists placing it within the tradition of metaphysics. This has further implications for the interpretations of Nietzsche's genealogical method and his project of overcoming metaphysical morality which are discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively.[19]

---

[18] See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1972), 3-17, especially 4-5.

[19] See sections 3.2 and 3.3 for Foucault's and Deleuze's interpretations of Nietzsche's genealogical questioning of origins in a manner that challenges the notion of pure beginning. See also sections 4.3 and 4.4 for the discussion of Nietzsche in terms of his position with regards to metaphysical morality or nihilism.

CHAPTER 3. GENEALOGY

NIETZSCHE'S CRITIQUE OF THE ORIGINS OF MORALITY

3.1 Nietzsche's Genealogy

With Nietzsche's movement from his other critical sciences towards his method of genealogy comes a corresponding shift in his project. In *The Will to Power* he writes:

> The inquiry into the *origin of our evaluations* and tablets of the good is in no way identical with a critique of them, as is so often believed: even though the insight into some *pudenda origo* [*shameful origin*] certainly brings with it a *feeling* of diminution in value of the thing that originated thus and prepares the way to a critical mood and attitude toward it (*WP*, 254).

The previous discussion and the passage above indicate that the inquiry into the origins of morality helps us recognize that those origins are nothing virtuous or glorious in themselves and thus it leads to a critical perspective on them. Nietzsche's sciences have an implicit critical perspective but it is not until he formulates his genealogical method that this critical perspective becomes explicit and essential to his project. However, while the inquiry into the origins of morality and the critique of the origins of morality are not identical, they are not entirely distinct either. They are intimately related in that the former prepares for the latter and the latter presupposes the former. Nietzsche's sciences are a necessary prior stage in the

development of his genealogy.[1]

Nietzsche clarifies the relationship between inquiry and critique in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. He contrasts but nonetheless connects his earlier concern with the origin of morality with his later concern with value of morality, claiming that his concern with origins is preliminary to his concern with value. Referring to *Human, All Too Human* and *Daybreak* in terms of his psychological-historical investigations, he writes:

> Even then my real concern was something much more important than hypothesis-mongering, whether my own or other peoples's, on the origin of morality (or more precisely: the latter concerned me solely for the sake of a goal to which it was only one means among many). What was at stake was the *value* of morality (*GM*, Preface, 5).

In *The Will to Power*, from a note dated 1885-1886, Nietzsche asks" "What are our evaluations and moral tables really worth?" and "What is the meaning of the act of valuation?" (*WP*, 254). In the three essays that comprise *On the Genealogy of Morals*, written later in 1887, he focuses on the meaning of moral evaluations, moral sensations and concepts, and moral ideals. In all three essays his concern is not just with the origins of morality but with the value of morality. He

---

[1] Furthermore, I claim that Nietzsche's genealogy is a part of the larger tasks of his overcoming of morality defined as nihilism and his revaluation of values, which in turn are stages in his preparation for the rebirth of tragedy in an aesthetic and anti-moral realm.

expresses the matter in the following way:

> Let us articulate this *new demand*: we need a *critique* of moral values, *the value of these values themselves must be first called into question* - and for that there is needed a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances in which they grew, under which they evolved and changed (morality as consequence, as symptom, as mask, as tartufferie, as illness, as stimulant, as restraint, as poison), a knowledge of a kind, that has never yet existed or even been desired. One has taken the *value* of these "values" as given, as factual, as beyond all question; one has hitherto never doubted or hesitated in the slightest degree in supposing "the good man" to be of greater value than "the evil man," of greater value in the sense of furthering the advancement and prosperity of man in general (the future of man included). But what if the reverse were true? (*GM*, Preface, 6).[2]

The critique of morality first requires the kind of investigation characteristic of other methods of inquiry, especially psychology and history. The critique of morality also requires that the value of moral values be questioned. Indeed, for Nietzsche, the very nature of his critique is such questioning. We must not take morality and its significance for granted. We must at least entertain the possibility that what we value may not be what is actually valuable for

---

[2] However, in the Editor's Introduction, 4, Walter Kaufmann warns against seeing Nietzsche as simply reversing the terms of morality (i.e. considering what is supposedly "good" as "evil"). Rather, he rightly sees *On the Genealogy of Morals* as a supplement to *Beyond Good and Evil* and a further attempt to get beyond "the faith in opposite values" that characterizes metaphysical morality. Nonetheless, the success of Nietzsche's endeavour in terms of the revaluation of values can be questioned, as I indicate further in section 4.3 and 4.4 of Chapter 4.

humanity. Only when we recognize morality's value or lack of value, or more precisely the type of value it has or advances, can we even hope to overcome morality and move towards a realm that is "beyond good and evil" or beyond all moral evaluations of life.

Nietzsche's genealogy is important to his attempt to overcome metaphysical morality defined as nihilism and revaluate all values in order to offer an aesthetic and anti-moral perspective through tragedy, as becomes clear later. However, Foucault's and Deleuze's interpretation of Nietzsche's genealogy is discussed first in order to clarify its character and function. They both provide valuable insight into his genealogy in terms of the question of origins and the question of values respectively.

3.2 Foucault: The Question of Origins

In *Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth* Alan Sheridan indicates that Nietzsche is a presence in much of Foucault's work. He considers the relation between Nietzsche and Foucault as it pertains to the development from archaeology to genealogy:

> It may be argued that Nietzsche is so all-pervasive in *L'archéologie du savior* [*The Archaeology of Knowledge*], so subterranean, that it requires no sign-posting. Certainly what strikes the reader of 'Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire' ["Nietzsche, Genealogy, History"] is how closely Foucault's description of Nietzschean genealogy applies to his

> own archaeology. Yet there is one element in the genealogy - and it is the most fundamental one - that remains at an implicit level in the archaeology.[3]

Sheridan claims that, for Nietzsche and Foucault, power is the fundamental element which, while implicit in archaeology, becomes explicit in genealogy (*MF*, 115). Foucault denies he was the first to raise the question of power in the analysis of discourse and instead attributes that honour to Nietzsche (*MF*, 115). He sees, through Nietzsche, the significance of power and thus moves from archaeology to genealogy.

> It is now clear why Foucault never again uses the term archaeology, or any other of the 'panoply of terms' so laboriously elaborated in *L'archéologie du savoir* [*The Archaeology of Knowledge*]. This new realization of the role of power in discourse was so important to Foucault that he felt impelled to abandon altogether the terms he had fashioned for himself and to adopt, unashamedly, the Nietzschean term 'genealogy' (*MF*, 116).

According to Sheridan, the movement from archaeology to genealogy occurs when power becomes the central term of analysis. Foucault is quoted as stating that, for him, Nietzschean genealogy is the analysis of power: "Nietzsche is the philosopher of power, but he managed to think power without confining himself within a political theory to do so" (*MF*, 116).

While the notion of power is important in understanding

---

[3] Alan Sheridan, *Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth*, (New York: Routledge, 1980), 115; cited hereafter as *MF*.

the Nietzschean-Foucauldian movement from archaeology to genealogy, the distinctive feature of Foucault's analysis of genealogy is his focus on the notion of origins. Foucault's essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" is a detailed and dense expression of his indebtedness to Nietzsche and his interpretation of Nietzsche's notions of genealogy and history. This essay is Foucault's analysis of genealogy as it pertains to the question of origins. He states:

> Genealogy does not oppose itself to history as the lofty and profound gaze of the philosopher might compare to the molelike perspective of the scholar; on the contrary, it rejects the meta-historical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies. It opposes itself to the search for "origins" (*LCP*, 140).[4]

Genealogy is usually considered as the investigation of origins, even in Nietzsche's case, so Foucault's last statement in the passage above is bound to be baffling. Yet Foucault is indicating that in genealogy it is precisely the notion of origins that is under question. For genealogy, origins, considered as essential and pure beginnings, do not

---

[4] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 140; cited hereafter as *LCP*. For an example of Foucault's own later "genealogical" method, especially with respect to power, see also Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures" in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham and Kate Soper, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1980); cited hereafter as *PK*.

exist, so it cannot ever search for them. Foucault demonstrates that Nietzsche's criticisms of Paul Rée and the English psychologists in *On the Genealogy of Morals* are based on his denial of an unbroken line of historical development with regards to morality, something he himself appreciates in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (*LCP*, 139). Rather, genealogy attempts to preserve the uniqueness of multiple and multifarious origins and histories by avoiding the reduction of their particularity and singularity under a totality or finality. Genealogy does not simply and unproblematically trace back through history to origins because both are is a matter of intricate intersections and interferences.[5]

Foucault clarifies his point about genealogy's approach to origins through an analysis of (mainly) three German words - *Ursprung*, *Herkunft*, *Entstehung* - all of which are loosely translated as "origin" but which also have different particular senses and implications for genealogy. Foucault claims that Nietzsche first uses these terms interchangeably in earlier works like *Human, All Too Human* and *The Gay Science* but later attempts to distinguish them in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (*LCP*, 140-141). *Ursprung* means "origin" or beginning in

---

[5] In this manner Nietzsche can be seen as escaping the kind of metaphysical thinking that Heidegger attributes to him. As with his archaeology, Nietzsche's genealogy is a critical method which challenges the notion of origins (*archê*) as a pure beginning or ruling principle. See section 2.2.6 in Chapter 2.

the strict sense which Nietzsche criticizes, while *Herkunft* means "descent" or heritage and *Entstehung* means "emergence" or arising in the senses with which Nietzsche defines his genealogical critique of origins. Foucault also demonstrates the manner in which genealogy challenges the notions of history by analyzing the opposition between "wirkliche Historie" ("real history" or "true history") and traditional history. Through extended quotations, the precise meaning of each of these terms is discussed in order to reveal the nature, function and implications of Nietzsche's genealogy with respect to the question of origins.

3.2.1 *Ursprung*

Foucault defines *Ursprung* as "origins" negatively in order to demonstrate that Nietzsche's genealogy is not concerned with origins in the way we usually consider them because it places the very notion of origins under question.

> Why does Nietzsche challenge the pursuit of the origins (*Ursprung*), at least on those occasions when he is truly a genealogist? First, because it is an attempt to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities, because this search assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession. This search is directed to "that which is already there," the image of a primordial truth fully adequate to its nature, and it necessitates the removal of every mask to ultimately disclose its identity. However, if the genealogist refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics, if he listens to history, he finds that there is "something

> altogether different" behind things: not a timeless essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms... What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity... History also teaches how to laugh at the solemnities of the origin. The lofty origin is no more than "a metaphysical extension which arises from the belief that things are most precious and essential at the moment of birth" (*LCP*, 142-143).

Two main related points come to the forefront in this passage: (a) origins are not the true and essential sources behind supposedly faulty historical developments, (b) origins are nothing special or precious in themselves compared to historical developments. Foucault points out how the search for origins as *Ursprung* is related to "*the faith in opposite values*" which characterizes metaphysics (*BGE*, 2). Comparatively, the genealogist denies this opposition and refuses to extend faith in metaphysics. Foucault's rejection of the distinction between true identity (origins) and false masks (developments) is similar to Nietzsche's rejection of the distinction between "real world" the "apparent world" in a part of *Twilight of the Idols* titled *How the 'Real World' at last Became a Myth* (*TI*, IV). Nietzsche destroys both real world and apparent world: "We have abolished the real world: what world is left? the apparent world perhaps?... But no! *with the real world we have also abolished the apparent world*" (*TI*, 40-41). He does not simply reverse the order or

significance of dichotomous terms because he rejects the dichotomy itself by denying the dialectical logic of binary opposites. He does not establish a new kind of origin or locate it in a different place because he questions the notion of origins itself. For Nietzsche, origins are not primordial or unitary but multiple and multifarious combinations of other things. As combinations of other things, they are not really origins at all in the usual sense. Nietzsche considers origins as nothing special or precious in themselves because the twisting and intertwining histories of morality are much more important and worthy of interest to him.

Foucault also defines the nature and function of genealogy with respect to the origins of morality:

> A genealogy of values, morality, asceticism, and knowledge will never confuse itself with a quest for their "origins," will never neglect as inaccessible the vicissitudes of history. On the contrary, it will cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning; it will be scrupulously attentive to their petty malice; it will await their emergence, once unmasked, as the face of the other (*LCP*, 144)

Thus, Nietzsche's genealogy provides a critique of morality by rejecting the faith that moral values arise from true and essential origins and only later become faulty through development. He claims that to understand morality and its value one must not look to origins as such but to the factors that comprise its development. He questions the value of the origins of morality and so questions the value of morality

itself. Nietzsche's genealogy, as part of his attempt to overcome metaphysical morality and its faith in opposite values, to get "beyond good and evil" and moral interpretations, can be understood in terms of his rejection of origins as *Ursprung*.

3.2.2 *Herkunft*

Foucault distinguishes *Herkunft* defined as "descent" from *Ursprung* or origins and demonstrates that, for genealogy, the tracing of descent is more adequate than the search for origins. He writes:

> *Herkunft* is the equivalent of stock or *descent*; it is the ancient affiliation to a group, sustained by the bond of blood, tradition, or social class. The analysis of *Herkunft* often involves a consideration of race or social type. But the traits it attempts to identify are not the exclusive generic characteristics of an individual, a sentiment, or an idea which permits us to qualify them as "Greek" or "English"; rather, it seeks the subtle, singular, and subindividual marks that might possibly intersect in them to form a network that is difficult to unravel... Where the soul pretends unification or the self fabricates a coherent unity, the genealogist sets out to study the beginning - numberless beginnings whose faint traces and hints of colour are readily seen by an historical eye. The analysis of descent permits the dissociation of the self, its recognition and displacement as an empty synthesis, in liberating a profusion of lost events... An examination of descent also permits the discovery, under the unique aspect of a trait or a concept, of the myriad events through which - thanks to which, against which - they were formed. Genealogy does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things; its duty is not to

> demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present, that it continues secretly to animate the present, having imposed a predetermined form to all its vicissitudes. Genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the destiny of a people. On the contrary, to follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations - or conversely, the complex reversals - the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us; it is to discover that truth or being do not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but at the exteriority of accidents (*LCP*, 145-146).

According to Foucault, *Herkunft* or descent challenges the notion of *Ursprung* or origins because it is the rejection of unitary and essential beginnings and developments. When Nietzsche's genealogy points out a descent or a family history through the recognition of a trait, it is not that of an unbroken continuity. If a common family trait is recognized at all, it is in order to demonstrate how that trait is dispersed differently throughout family members. This is the case in *On the Genealogy of Morals* with Nietzsche's analysis of the manners in which the trait of the "ascetic ideal" is realized differently in various members of culture - for example, the artist, the saint, the priest, the philosopher, the scientist, etc. (*GM*, III, 1).[6]

---

[6] Wittgenstein's notion of "family resemblance" among language games is helpful here. He points out that similarities in a family may not be distributed similarly: some members may have the same eye colour but not the same hair colour and neither of them may have the same temperament.

A descent takes many twists and turns, new locations and new relationships, like emigration and marriage. A family history suffers many forces which shape and shatter it, like birth and death. Descent and family history affect us whose descent and family history they are. Our self-image often changes and multiplies when we learn something either honourable or vile about our ancestors. We have multiple self-images because we have multiple descents and family histories, our descent and family histories are comprised of multiple factors.

Foucault states that Nietzsche often likens *Herkunft* or descent to *Erbshaft* or heritage. However, he warns that, like descent, heritage is not something decided once and for all nor something we receive fully formed from which we can make and maintain ourselves. Our heritage can also disrupt and disperse our carefully produced and protected self-identities. "Nevertheless, we should not be deceived into thinking that this heritage is an acquisition, a possession that grows and solidifies; rather, it is an unstable assemblage of faults,

---

Thus he attempts to show, in the example of language games, that while all games can be called games, there is nothing common or essential to all games since some use boards and other require balls or some are solitary and other requires two or more players. He also gives the example of a thread: no one fibre runs through the entire length but it is comprised of overlapping fibres of various lengths. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher Ltd., 1958), 65-70.

fissures, and heterogenous layers that threaten the fragile inheritor from within or from underneath" (*LCP*, 146). Genealogy, as the tracing of descent and heritage, questions the notions of origins and history and thereby questions the validity of the present. It challenges our notions of what we are and what we value. It calls us to reconsider how we have become ourselves and how we have come to hold our values. This is why genealogy is such a difficult task.

Foucault also defines *Herkunft* or descent, and thus genealogy, in terms of the body when he writes:

> Finally, descent attaches itself to the body. It inscribes itself in the nervous system, in temperament, in the digestive apparatus; it appears in faulty respiration, in improper diets, in the dehabilitated and prostrate body of those whose ancestors committed errors... The body - and everything that touches it: diet, climate, and soil - is the domain of the *Herkunft*. The body manifests the stigmata of past experience and also gives rise to desires, failings and errors... The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated Self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration. Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body (*LCP*, 147-148).

As noted earlier, in *The Gay Science* and other works Nietzsche is concerned with the body and all that pertains to it. Foucault reveals the relationship Nietzsche maintains between his earlier sciences of physics and physiology and his later method of genealogy: these sciences are never rejected

completely because they are reinterpreted within genealogy. However, Foucault also defines descent in terms of the body because he wishes to avoid the notion of the substantial subject or subjectivity. The body or the individual, as opposed to the subject, is constructed and destructed by its descent or history, the relations of power that make it the body or individual that it is. Genealogy is meant to investigate these processes. This is precisely Foucault's project in his own "genealogical" work. His interpretation of Nietzsche's genealogy in terms of the relationship between descent and the body, while elucidating Nietzsche's genealogy, nonetheless reflects his own growing interest in the body and power.[7]

3.2.3 *Entstehung*

Foucault suggests that the notion of *Entstehung* or "emergence" is not as central to Nietzsche's genealogy as the distinction between *Ursprung* and *Herkunft*. Yet he also indicates that *Entstehung* belongs with *Herkunft* such that both together help define Nietzsche's genealogy as the challenge to the search for origins or *Ursprung*. He writes:

> *Entstehung* designates *emergence*, the moment of

---

[7] Foucault's focus on the body and power reflects his similarity to Deleuze's analysis of genealogy in terms of the relation of forces and the will to power, as becomes clear later in this chapter.

> arising. It stands as the principle and the singular law of an apparition. As it is wrong to search for descent in an uninterrupted continuity, we should avoid thinking of emergence as a final term of an historical development; the eye was not always intended for contemplation, and punishment has had other purposes than setting an example. These developments may appear as a culmination, but they are merely the current episodes in a series of subjugations: the eye initially responded to the requirements of hunting and warfare; and punishment has been subjected, throughout its history, to a variety of needs - revenge, excluding an aggressor, compensating a victim, creating fear. In placing present needs at the origin, the metaphysician would convince us of an obscure purpose that seeks its realization at the moment it arises. Genealogy, however, seeks to reestablish the various systems of subjection: not the anticipatory power of meaning, but the hazardous play of dominations (*LCP*, 148).

Genealogical analysis, specifically of punishment, can be seen in Nietzsche's work, particularly in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (*GM*, II, 4-6, 8-14). Referring to the many uses to which punishment is put, Nietzsche states: "it is clear that punishment is overdetermined" (*GM*, II, 14). Punishment does not have any unitary or essential origin because it emerges in many manners and stages throughout its development. Through Nietzsche's work the same is demonstrated to be the case with other notions in morality: rights, justice, good and evil, good and bad, and so on. Genealogy attempts to tease out the multiple origins and histories of moral sensations and concepts.

After drawing parallels between *Herkunft* and *Entstehung*, Foucault's analysis takes a distinctive turn when he defines

emergence in terms of forces: "Emergence is always produced through a particular stage of forces... Emergence is thus the entry of forces; it is their eruption" (*LCP*, 148-149). The definition of emergence in terms of forces relies on the relationship between descent and the body. This is the sense in which Nietzsche's and Foucault's genealogy can be considered as an analysis of power. This analysis also says as much about Nietzsche as it does about Foucault, and calls up similarities to Deleuze's interpretation of genealogy in terms of the relation of forces and the will to power.[8]

3.2.4 "Wirkliche Historie"

In the last half of his essay Foucault discusses Nietzsche's notion of history from *Untimely Meditations* to *On the Genealogy of Morals*. He demonstrates that Nietzsche defines genealogy in terms of *Herkunft* and *Entstehung* as the critique of origins by analyzing the manner in which "wirkliche Historie" ("real history" or "true history")

---

[8] The Nietzschean-Foucauldian notion of *Entstehung* or emergence defined as "entry" and "eruption" as well as "moment of arising" and "singular law of an apparition" is strikingly similar to Heidegger's notion of *Ereignis* or event variously translated as "happening" and "occurrence" as well as "disclosure of appropriation" and "Appropriation" in his works. See Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1971); cited hereafter as *PLT*. See also Martin Heidegger, "Time and Being" in *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1972); cited hereafter as *TB*.

challenges the traditional notion of history as a continuous development (*LCP*, 152). Foucault writes of the need for this type of historical sensibility in the following manner:

> Historical meaning becomes a dimension of "wirkliche Historie" to the extent that it places within a process of development everything considered immortal in man. We believe that feelings are immutable, but every sentiment, particularly the noblest and most disinterested, has a history (*LCP*, 153).

This is similar to Nietzsche's position in *Human, All Too Human* with respect his call for historical and modest philosophizing and the rejection of an essential and eternal human nature (*HH*, 2, 41, 274).

However, when applied to Nietzsche, the term "wirkliche Historie" or real history seems to be problematic. Nietzsche rejects the notions of "real world" and "apparent world" throughout his philosophy, and we would expect him to reject the notions of real or true history and false or apparent history in this sense too. Yet this is precisely the case with "wirkliche Historie" for Nietzsche. It is not real or true history in the sense of being objective and factual or claiming to know the past better than any other history. At the same time, it is not false or apparent history either since it is genuinely historical. It is more precisely "effective" history in the sense of being the only form of history worthy of the name history at all. Foucault points out that "wirkliche Historie" does not suppose itself to hold a

position outside of history - unhistorical or suprahistorical - from which it observes the historical process. It calls attention to its own history while investigating the history of other things such as morality. Thus "wirkliche Historie" is "effective" because it recognizes and reveals its own historicity as well as the historicity of morality, thus transcending the dichotomy of real and false history.

Foucault discusses how "wirkliche Historie" destroys the very basis of traditional history - by interrupting continuity with discontinuity, imbuing unity with multiplicity, impeding totality with singularity.

> History becomes "effective" to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being - as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself. "Effective" history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending. It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting. From these observations, we can grasp the particular traits of historical meaning as Nietzsche understood it - the sense which opposes "wirkliche Historie" to traditional history. The former transposes the relationship ordinarily established between the eruption of an event and necessary continuity. An entire historical tradition (theological or rationalistic) aims at dissolving the singular event into an ideal continuity - as a teleological movement or a natural process. "Effective" history, however, deals with events in terms of their most unique characteristics, their most acute manifestations

(*LCP*, 154).[9]

This passage also serves as a concise a statement of Foucault's own project concerning history in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. As a historical sensibility, "wirkliche Historie" corresponds to Nietzsche's critical history and a healthy historical, or in his case, unhistorical, attitude (*UM*, II, 10). It is simultaneously historical and unhistorical because the histories it reveals are never continuous, unitary, or total, but always dispersed, diverse, and partial. It is effective because it selects and cuts up history and thus reveals the discontinuity in the continuity, the multiplicities in unity, the unique singularity of events in the totality of all events. Nietzsche's notion of "wirkliche History" questions the very notion of traditional history itself.

Foucault indicates that "wirkliche Historie" is a matter of overcoming metaphysics. Traditional history is at the mercy of metaphysics which takes an objective perspective on history and imposes continuity and totality on unique events in history. "On the other hand, the historical sense can evade metaphysics and become a privileged instrument of genealogy if it refuses the certainty of absolutes" (*LCP*, 152-153). Only "wirkliche Historie" avoids unities and essences and hence

---

[9] Heidegger also considers history in terms of epochal ruptures to emphasize the uniqueness of historical events.

avoids metaphysics. Only in terms of "wirkliche Historie" can the historical sense question the notion of history itself.

Foucault claims that genealogy is the historical sense become "wirkliche Historie" because it does not deal in continuities, unities or totalities. Genealogy does not seek objective facts concerning historical origins and development because it realizes there are no such objective facts. "The final trait of effective history is its affirmation of knowledge as perspective" (*LCP*, 156). Genealogy exemplifies Nietzsche's perspectivism. It stresses that, like all other knowledge, it too comes from a particular perspective when it offers a critique. It is aware that it does not originate or develop from a unified and essential source or beginning in the traditional sense. When genealogy reveals the discontinuous and multiplicitous origins of morality it reveals its *own* discontinuous and multiplicitous origins as well. Genealogy demonstrates its own genealogy and in this manner it rejects the metaphysical faith in opposite values.

3.3 Deleuze: The Question of Values

Deleuze's *Nietzsche and Philosophy* is generally recognized as being responsible for the French Nietzsche-Renaissance in the early 1960's. Deleuze provides an analysis of active forces and reactive forces as well as their ambivalent relationship, a critique of dialectical thinking,

and an high-spirited advocation of the affirmative figure of Dionysus. However, the main concern here is with the first two chapters in which Deleuze interprets Nietzsche's notion of genealogy in terms of the relation of forces and the will to power.[10]

In the Preface to the English Translation of *Nietzsche and Philosophy* Deleuze identifies the general character of Nietzsche's philosophy when he writes:

> Nietzsche's philosophy is organised along two great axes. The first is concerned with force, with forces, and forms of general semiology. Phenomena, things, organisms, societies, consciousness and spirits are signs, or rather symptoms, and themselves reflect states of forces. This is the origin of the conception of the philosopher as "physiologist and physician"... The second axis is concerned with power and forms an ethics and an ontology... If it is true that all things reflect a state of forces then power designates the element, or rather the differential relationship, of forces which directly confront one another.[11]

However, while Deleuze focuses on forces and power, he also indicates that these are actually a matter of values for Nietzsche. He writes: "Nietzsche snatches thought from the

---

[10] Deleuze's interpretation of Nietzsche's genealogy is especially intriguing, at least in the context of this thesis, because he places it under the rubric of Dionysian tragedy. For Deleuze, the role of Nietzsche's genealogy as the critique of morality is central to the overcoming of nihilism through the revaluation of values and the establishment of an aesthetic and anti-moral perspective of Dionysian tragedy.

[11] Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), x-xi; cited hereafter as *NP*.

element of truth and falsity. He turns it into an interpretation and an evaluation, interpretation of forces, evaluation of power (*NP*, xiii). In fact, for both philosophers, forces and power are interpretations and evaluations, the sources and means for interpretations and evaluations.

In *The Will to Power* Nietzsche discusses the relationship between interpretation, evaluation and the will to power. He states:

> One may not ask: "who then interprets?" for the interpretation itself is a form of the will to power, exists (but not as a "being" but as a process, a becoming) as an effect (*WP*, 556).
>
> The will to power *interprets* (-it is a question of interpretation when an organ is constructed): it defines limits, determines degrees, variations of power (*WP*, 643).

Value, as interpretation and evaluation, is a function of the relation of forces and the will to power, an expression of the relation of forces and the will to power. Nietzsche writes:

> The standpoint of "value" is the standpoint of conditions of preservation and enhancement for complex forms of relative life-duration within the flux of becoming.
>
> There are no durable ultimate units, no atoms, no monads: here, too, "beings" are only introduced by us (from perspective grounds of practicality and utility)" (*WP*, 715).

There is nothing essential or unitary about values nor about the one who values. They are both interpretations and evaluations from various perspectives, arising out of the

relation of forces and the will to power. Morality is only one such value. Humanity is but one evaluator. This recalls Nietzsche's statement: "I understand by "morality" a system of evaluations that partially coincides with the conditions of a creature's life" (*WP*, 256).

Morality thus involves the physiology of the body. In this respect a discussion of the relation of forces in terms of the body prefaces the analysis of the will to power. The two of these - the relation of forces and the will to power - belong together. They help clarify Deleuze's notion of Nietzschean genealogy. In all cases the question of value, of interpreting and evaluating, arises.

3.3.1 The Relation of Forces

Already with Foucault it was seen how genealogy, as an analysis of descent and emergence, concerns itself with the body and the relation of forces. Foucault claims that the body is imprinted and destructed by history and it is the task of genealogy to expose that imprinting and destruction (*LCP*, 147-148). This seems to assume that the body is something which can accept or resist imprinting and destruction, a "medium" through which the effects of imprinting and destruction can be expressed and exhibited. For Foucault, to some extent, this is true. Yet In *The Birth of the Clinic, Discipline and Punish,* the three volumes of The History of Sexuality and other later

essays and interviews Foucault attempts to point out that the body is not so much there before it is imprinted and destructed as it is actually "constructed" by this imprinting and destruction. The body only exists and is experienced in the matrix of power-knowledge relations. In an essay titled "Two Lectures" in *Power/Knowledge* Foucault writes about individuals and power in the following manner:

> The individual is not to be conceived as a sort of elementary nucleus, a primitive atom, a multiple and inert material on which power comes to fasten or against which it happens to strike, and in so doing subdues or crushes individuals. In fact, it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals. The individual, that is, is not the *vis-à-vis* of power; it is, I believe, one of its prime effects. The individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle (PK, 98).[12]

This later statement about the constitution of individuals in and by power seems to bring Foucault closer to Deleuze than his earlier statement about the body being imprinted and destructed by history.

Deleuze expresses his view of the body defined by and as the relation of forces in this manner:

> What is the body? We do not define it by saying that it is a field of forces, a nutrient medium fought over by a plurality of forces. For in fact

---

[12] See also Michel Foucault, "Body/Power" in *PK*, 55-62.

> there is no "medium", no field of forces or battle. There is no quantity of reality, all reality is already quantity of force. There are nothing but quantities of force in mutual "relations of tension". Every force is related to others and either it obeys or commands. What defines a body is this relationship between dominant and dominated forces. Every relationship of force constitutes a body - whether it is chemical, biological, social or political. Any two forces, being unequal, constitute a body as soon as they enter into a relationship (*NP*, 39-40).

Deleuze claims that there is no body as such. The body is the relation of forces which composes it. It is not *in* the site or location of forces, it *is* the site and location. It is not a "medium" *through* which forces operate, it *is* those forces. Forces, simply in relating to each other, create a vehicle for themselves - the body. When the relation of forces ceases to hold that body ceases to exist. The body is not a substance or an essence because it is always constituted as the relation of forces. Rather, it is a virtual construction - real but not primarily material, ideal but not simply formal or logical.[13]

Deleuze also demonstrates that, for Nietzsche, considering bodies as the relation of forces is a matter of recognizing the pluralism and multiplicity of force.

> Up to now we have presented things as if different forces struggled over and took successive possession of an almost inert object. But the object itself is force, expression of a force. That is why there is more or less affinity between the object and the force which takes possession of it.

---

[13] The notion of virtuality is clarified in the discussion of the will to power that follows in the next section.

> There is no object (phenomenon) which is not already possessed since in itself it is not an appearance but the apparition of a force. Every force is thus essentially related to another force. The being of force is plural, it would be absolutely absurd to think about force in the singular (*NP*, 6).

According to Deleuze, Nietzsche's notion of force is a principle of his critique of atomism and his pluralistic philosophy of nature (*NP*, 6). There are no singular atoms, only plural relations. Force is not something unitary of which various relations in bodies are expressions. Force itself is multiple, as is its existence as bodies. Deleuze states: "Being composed of a plurality of irreducible forces the body is a multiple phenomenon, its unity is that of a multiple phenomenon, a "unity of domination" (*NP*, 40).

Deleuze further defines the nature of forces and bodies by distinguishing between dominant and dominated forces or active and reactive forces: "In a body the superior or dominant forces are known as active and the inferior or dominated forces are known as reactive. Active and reactive are precisely the original qualities which express the relation of force with force" (*NP*, 40). To use Foucault's terminology, bodies become individuals through a particular relation of forces. If the relation is mainly of dominant forces, the body is individuated as active. If the relation is mainly of dominated forces, the body is individuated as reactive. The quantity of a body's forces (dominant or

dominated) determines the quality (active or reactive) of its individuation. According to Deleuze, the task of genealogy is to determine the quantitative relation of forces as well as the qualitative value of the relation of forces.

It is vitally important to recognize here that, according to Deleuze, a body is not just a physical or material body, a body is any relation of forces, including our social and political institutions. For example, because it is a relation of forces (such as *ressentiment*), morality is a body. He is not idealizing the notion of the body by linking it to things like social and political institutions or morality. He is not concretizing them all by linking them to the notion of the body and the relation of forces. Rather he challenges both a pure idealism of values and a brute materialism of values. Yet Deleuze emphasizes the physiological conditions of values and the need for a physiology to inquire into them and critique them. He gives credence to the conception of the philosopher as "physiologist and physician" in the sense that Nietzsche proposes. The significance of Deleuze's interpretation of Nietzsche's genealogy is the manner in which he maintains focus on the conditions of morality with the notion of the body as the relation of forces.

3.3.2 The Will to Power

Deleuze offers a warning about Nietzsche's notion of the will to power and the question of willing in terms of who or what wills:

> Nietzsche is most misunderstood in relation to the question of power. Every time we interpret will to power as "wanting or seeking power" we encounter platitudes that have nothing to do with Nietzsche's thought... Power is not what the will wants, but on the contrary, the one that wants in the will (*NP*, xi).

This statement must be read in the context of Nietzsche's denial of the will and the subject, or the wilful subject. In *The Will to Power* he states: "There exists neither "spirit," nor reason, nor thinking, nor consciousness, nor soul, nor will, nor truth: all are fictions that are of no use" (*WP*, 480). In *Beyond Good and Evil* he also writes: "Willing seems to me to be above all something *complicated*, something that is a unit only as a word" (*BGE*, 19). For Nietzsche, willing is a plurality of sensations and thoughts erroneously considered as a single whole. In this regard Deleuze writes about Nietzsche's pluralism:

> Nietzsche denounces the soul, the "ego" and egoism as the last refuges of atomism. Psychic atomism is more valid than physical atomism: "In all will it is absolutely a question of commanding and obeying, on the basis of a social structure composed of many 'souls'" (BGE, 19) (*NP*, 7).

Deleuze points out that Nietzsche's pluralism is instrumental in his denial of the will such that it acts as his critique of

Schopenhauer's pessimism of the will wherein the only way to end the suffering caused by the will is to negate the will (*NP*, 7). In Nietzsche's view, we cannot be considered wilful in the first instance because there is no unitary soul from which to will or with which to will. The "soul" is a plurality of various souls, the "self" is comprised of many selves. Nietzsche states: "*My hypothesis*: the subject as multiplicity" (*WP*, 490).[14]

Furthermore, Nietzsche's claim that it is power that wills in the will to power means that our willing (in whatever sense we can still be said to will) is but an instance of the will to power. Hence, we do not will at all because willing does not come from us. All that we will, all that we value and therefore will, is a function of the will to power. Deleuze writes, quoting Nietzsche: "This is why Nietzsche always says that the will to power is "the primitive affective form" from which all other feelings derive. Or better still: "The will to power is not a being, not a becoming, but a *pathos*" (VP II 311/WP 635)" (*NP*, 62). Basically, the will to power does not mean we want power, but that power wants itself. Power wills power. The will to power is the feeling of power which wills the further extension of the feeling of power, the increase of

---

[14] For further reference to Nietzsche's pluralism with regards to the subject and the will see *WP*, 470-492 and *BGE*, 16-19.

itself.

At the beginning of the note from *The Will to Power* defining the will to power as pathos Nietzsche also states: "We need "unities" in order to reckon: that does not mean we must suppose that such unities exist" (*WP*, 635). Similarly, he also states: "Everything that enters consciousness as "unity" is already tremendously complex: we always have only a semblance of unity" (*WP*, 489). These statements are related to Nietzsche's pluralism of the will to power. We can use the will to power as a means of thinking about relations of forces, but it is not a unified substance or essence that exists in the manner that we usually understand existence. The will to power is not a substantial or essential thing which we can know and which can unify reality and our knowledge. In his essay titled "The Will to Power" Alphonso Lingis writes:

> The will to power is not just power or force, but Will to Power: always will for more power. It is not an essence; it is neither structure, telos, nor meaning, but continual sublation of all telos, transgression of all ends, production of all concordant and contradictory meanings, interpretations, valuations... Will to Power can function neither as the reason that accounts for the order of essences, nor as the foundation that sustains them in being.[15]

Nietzsche states: "Our "knowing" limits itself to establishing quantities; but we cannot help feeling these differences in

---

[15] Alphonso Lingis, "The Will to Power" in *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, ed. David B. Allison, (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1977), 38.

quantities as qualities. Quality is a perspective truth for us; not an "in-itself"" (*WP*, 563). The will to power is thus a matter of perspectivism. We never know the will to power itself, we only feel the signs and symptoms of it as the relations of forces. We can experience the manifestation of the will to power in a particular relation of forces. In fact, we must experience it, for "experience" (knowing, feeling, willing, etc) is nothing other than the will to power. The body, for example, is a sign or symptom of the will to power. The body, as quantity and quality of forces, is an expression of the particular nuance of the will to power which it embodies and exhibits. It is the task of the genealogist to point out for us the signs and symptoms of the will to power, to show us how the will to power manifests itself and operates in each relation of forces.

In a section of *Nietzsche and Philosophy* titled *What is the Will to Power?* Deleuze attempts to define the specific manner in which will to power is manifested in the relations of forces. He begins: "The will to power is thus ascribed to force, but in a very special way: it is both a complement of force and something internal to it. It is not ascribed to it as a predicate" (*NP*, 49). Deleuze then asks how the will to power can be ascribed to force. He finds the answer in the notion that forces have an essential relation to other forces. "This is what the will to power is: the genealogical element

of force, both differential and genetic. *The will to power is the element from which derive both the quantitative difference of related forces and the quality that devolves into each force on this relation*" (*NP*, 50). He similarly states: "Nietzsche's concept of force is therefore that of a force which is related to another force: in this form it is called will. The will (will to power) is the differential element of force" (*NP*, 7). However, while the will to power and the relations of forces are intimately connected, a distinction must be maintained between them. Deleuze writes:

> The principle of the qualities of force is the will to power... But in order to be the source of the qualities of forces in this way, the will to power must itself have qualities, particularly fluent ones, even more subtle than those of force. "What rules is the entirely momentary quality of the will to power" (VP II 39). These qualities of the will to power which are immediately related to the genetic or genealogical element, these fluent, primordial, and seminal qualitative elements, must not be confused with the qualities of force (*NP*, 53).

In *The Will to Power* Nietzsche writes: "Might not all quantities be signs of qualities?... The reduction of all qualities is nonsense: what appears is that the one accompanies the other" (*WP*, 564). The relation of forces is a function of the will to power. Yet we cannot confuse the will to power with its particular instances and manifestations in relations of forces or reduce the will to power to the relation of forces. For Deleuze, as for Nietzsche, the

simultaneous relation and distinction between the will to power and the relation of force is evident in the terminology used to describe the quality of each: "It is therefore essential to insist on the terms used by Nietzsche; *active* and *reactive* designate the original qualities of force but *affirmative* and *negative* designate the primordial qualities of the will to power" (*NP*, 53-54).

Nonetheless, it is important to mention, as Hugh Tomlinson points out, that "element" means both "environment" and "grounds for existence" in French (*NP*, 1ff). However, it is not altogether clear how element, environment and grounds for existence apply to Deleuze's notion of the will to power. The passage above suggests that the will to power can be an element of forces, a cause of their existence and meaning, the context in which they exist and have meaning, without being something essential and substantial. How can the will to power, as the element from which the quantity and quality of forces derive, not be an essential or substantial ground? How does the will to power "cause" the "effect" of relations of forces? Does it make sense to refer to a relation of forces as a sign or symptom of the will to power when the will to power is nothing in and of itself to be signified or represented? In what manner is the will to power primordial and seminal with respect to forces when it is even more fluent, subtle and momentary than forces?

I suggest that in this regard the will to power is best considered as a virtual entity. The will to power is that "in virtue" of which there are relations of forces such that it is responsible for there being particular relations of forces. However, it is nothing substantial in itself. As virtual, will to power is a central aspect of relations of forces, but it is nonetheless nowhere localizable in any relations of forces. Deleuze's concern with the will to power can be considered as one of his characteristic attempts to develop a notion of "event" and virtuality.[16]

3.3.3 Genealogy

While Deleuze's interpretation of the will to power may leave some unanswered questions, he is certain of one thing: the questions can only be answered in the light of the genealogical perspective. Genealogy is able to reveal the nature and operation of the will to power with respect to the relations of forces because the will to power is itself the

---

[16] The definition of the will to power as a virtual entity can be directed towards Deleuze's notion of "event" and his related notions of multiplicity and singularity, differentiation and individuation in other of his works as well. He uses a Nietzschean framework in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, as opposed to a Stoic, Leibnizian or Bergsonian framework in *The Logic of Sense*, *The Fold* or *Bergsonism*. Similarly, Heidegger's notion of *Ereignis* or "event" as that which makes happenings or occurrences possible is also virtual because it is more primordial and seminal but also more fluent and momentary than any particular happening or occurrence for which it is responsible.

genealogical element or environment of the relations of forces. The will to power, as the genealogical principle, is the mode of the existence and the value of forces. Deleuze writes:

> Nietzsche calls the genealogical element of force the will to power. Genealogical means differential and genetic. The will to power is the differential element of forces, that is to say the element that produces the differences in quantity between two or more forces whose relation is presupposed. The will to power is the genetic element of force, that is to say the element that produces the quality due to each force in the relation (*NP*, 52-53).

The will to power gives the relations of forces their existence and value in a particular manner: "The difference in quantity and the respective qualities of forces in relation to both derive from the will to power as genealogical element. Forces are said to be dominant or dominated depending on their difference in quantity. Forces are said to be active or reactive depending on their difference in quality" (*NP*, 53).

The will to power, as the genealogical element or environment, is simultaneously responsible for the quantitative existence of particular forces (dominant or dominated) as well as their qualitative value (active or reactive) on the basis of its own evaluation (affirmative or negative). With respect to the will to power and the relations of forces, then, to exist is to have value as a quantum of power. Deleuze writes:

> The will to power as genealogical element is that

> from which senses derive their significance and values their value... The signification of a sense consists in the quality of the force which is expressed in a thing: is this force active or reactive and of what nuance? The value of a value consists in the quality of the will to power expressed in the corresponding thing: is the will to power affirmative or negative and of what nuance?... But a value always has a genealogy on which the nobility or baseness of what it invites us to believe, feel and think depends. Only a genealogist is able to discover what sort of baseness can find its expression in one value, what sort of nobility in another, because only he knows how to handle the differential element: he is the master of the critique of values (*NP*, 54-55).

This is why genealogy is crucial. The question of the will to power as the existence and value of forces can only be entertained by the genealogist because existence and value are genealogical matters. For Nietzsche and Deleuze, genealogy is not just the critique of values in terms of the will to power and the relations of forces, it is also the critique of the value of the will to power and the relations of forces themselves. Genealogy is the name for the existence of values in and through the will to power as the relations of forces. Genealogy is able to criticize values because it operates on the same basis as the values it criticizes - the differential of the will to power as the relations of forces. Genealogy, as the will to power expressed in a particular relation of forces, has value itself. It is an evaluation.

To refer to the will to power and the relations of forces that constitute something is to refer to what gives it its

value and the value itself. This raises the need for genealogy: "This is the problem of interpretation: to estimate the quality of force that gives meaning to a given phenomenon, or event, and from that to measure the relation of the forces which are present" (*NP*, 53). This is what we mean when we talk about things having a cultural force or influence in society. This is the manner in which Nietzsche investigates moral evaluations such as *ressentiment*, bad conscience, guilt and the ascetic ideal. They are all expressions of the will to power. They all want an increase of their will to power, an increase of themselves. The problem is to determine the value and strength of their expression of the will to power. What kind of will to power is operating here? Is it affirming or negating life? These are questions of value. How is it operating? How strong is it? What is needed to overcome it? These are questions of force. According to Nietzsche, these types of question needs to be asked and answered and the genealogist is best suited to this difficult task.

However, these questions must be asked in a particular manner and with a particular orientation in genealogy. Deleuze points out that for Nietzsche this means asking about the senses or meanings of a thing by way of the forces that it is and that work in it.

> We will never find the sense of something (of a human, a biological or even physical phenomenon) if we do not know the force which appropriates the

> thing, which exploits it, which takes possession of it or is expressed in it. A phenomenon is not an *appearance or even an apparition* but a sign, a symptom which find its meaning in an existing force (*NP*, 3).

Force gives sense, force is expressed in sense. In genealogy the determination of force is the interpretation of sense. Yet it must be emphasized that neither force nor sense is singular, even with regards to the same thing. Deleuze writes:

> The history of a thing, in general, is the succession of forces which take possession of it and the co-existence of the forces which struggle for possession. The same object, the same phenomenon, changes sense depending on the force which appropriates it... Sense is therefore a complex notion; there is always a plurality of senses, a constellation, a complex of successions but also of coexistences which make interpretation an art (*NP*, 3-4).

The same thing can be comprised of many forces at various times or the same time and thus it can have many senses or meanings through its development or at once. This was already seen with regards to Nietzsche's analysis of the many uses of punishment and the multiple manifestations of the ascetic ideal in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, but it is also true of his analysis of morality, religion, science and art throughout his philosophy. Science, for example, can be the means of investigating the origins of morality and religion when it is appropriated by critical and creative forces. It can also be a modern expression of the ascetic ideal when it is appropriated by a life-negating and vengeful force similar to

that of morality and religion. The case is the same for art as well. Therefore determining force and interpreting sense or meaning is never a matter of finding the essential nature of a thing. The genealogy of morality, then, is never a matter of finding the one true origin of morality but of the many origins that comprise its multiple and multifarious histories. Deleuze states: "Nietzsche's philosophy cannot be understood without taking his essential pluralism into account... There is no event, no phenomenon, word or thought which does not have a multiple sense" (*NP*, 4). This pluralism is what makes genealogy so difficult.

According to Deleuze, Nietzsche's concern with the multiplicity of force and sense and the pluralism of origins and histories makes his genealogy a critical philosophy of values. Deleuze refers to Nietzsche's critical philosophy in terms of the crucial intersection of origins and values such that we recognize that values have origins and origins have values.

> Critical philosophy has two inseparable moments: the referring back of all things and any kind of origin to values, but also the referring back of these values to something which is, as it were, their origin and determines their value (*NP*, 2).

Genealogy is not only concerned with values, it is itself value-laden. It seeks to avoid indifference or disinterest, to make a difference in values and provoke interest in values. With respect to the critical aspect of the genealogical

critique of values, Deleuze briefly mentions Nietzsche's criticisms of Kant and the utilitarians in *Beyond Good and Evil*. Kant is criticized because he only criticizes values on the basis of other established values and so he does not fully engage in critique while the utilitarians are criticized because when they criticize, if they criticize at all, they base their criticism on "objective facts" and the calculus of pleasure and pain (*NP*, 2).

> Nietzsche attacks both the "high" idea of foundation which leaves values indifferent to their own origin and the idea of a simple causal derivation or smooth beginning which suggests an indifferent origin for values. Nietzsche creates the new concept of genealogy. The philosopher is a genealogist rather than a Kantian tribunal judge or a utilitarian mechanic... Nietzsche substitutes the pathos of difference or distance (the differential element) for both the Kantian principle of universality and the principle of resemblance dear to the utilitarians (*NP*, 2).

Kant and the utilitarians presuppose a singular stable origin and a continuous development of moral values without ever elucidating them. They have little to say about the historical origin and development of moral values because theirs is a more logical or formal, rather than historical, project.

Nietzsche, as well as Foucault and Deleuze after him, challenges the indifferent and disinterested notions of origins and values.

> Genealogy means both the value of origin and the origin of values. Genealogy is as opposed to absolute values as it is to relative or utilitarian ones. Genealogy signifies the differential element

> of values from which their value itself derives. Genealogy thus means origin of birth, but also difference and distance in the origin (*NP*, 2).

This relates to Foucault's notion of descent and emergence as well as Deleuze's notion of the multiplicity of force and sense. Values never have a singular origin or a continuous development. They all exist at different distances from an unstable origin, they all have different relationships to it, they all have different histories. Genealogy, as critical philosophy, is a matter of recognizing pluralism. Thus genealogy is the critique of origins and values in a special sense: the questioning of the very notions of origin and value themselves through the questioning of the origin of values and the value of origins.

Values are symptoms or signs of evaluations. Genealogy helps us to recognize that values are created, not eternal or immutable, by focusing on the more basic evaluations from which values spring. It demonstrates that values are expressions of "human, all too human" evaluations of life. However, this focus on the human dimension does not suggest that morality is a product of a substantial subject; rather, the notions of morality and subjectivity are both functions of the will to power. Genealogy points out that all values and those who value are created by and as particular instances of will to power or forms of life. Deleuze writes:

> The problem of critique is that of the value of

> values, of the evaluation from which their value arises, thus the problem of their *creation*. Evaluation is defined as the differential element of corresponding values, an element which is both critical and creative. Evaluations, in essence, are not values but ways of being, modes of existence of those who judge and evaluate, serving as principles for the values on the basis of which they judge. This is why we always have the beliefs, feelings, and thoughts that we deserve given our way of being or our style of life. There are things that can only be said, felt or conceived, values which can only be adhered to, on the condition of "base" evaluation, "base" living and thinking. This is the crucial point; *high* and *low*, *noble* and *base*, are not values but represent the differential element from which the value of values themselves derive (*NP*, 1-2).

According to Nietzsche, evaluations or genealogical elements are responsible for other more obvious values. For example, moral values are expressions of another deeper level of a negative "base" or "low" evaluation of life. Similarly, Christians have feelings of guilt and bad conscience as well as concepts of sin and salvation because they first have a perspective which denies life in which guilt and bad conscience as well as sin and salvation are sensible or meaningful. From another evaluative perspective which affirms life, such as Dionysian tragedy, Christian-moral feelings and concepts would be nonsensical or meaningless.[17]

According to Deleuze's interpretation, Nietzsche's

---

[17] However, this may not be completely accurate because, even with respect to Dionysian tragedy, Nietzsche has recourse to the ethic of honesty and truthfulness as well as the notion of the redemption of existence, both Christian-moral notions. I discuss this in Chapters 5 and 6.

genealogy is critical as well as creative. Through its critique of values it creates values. Genealogy demonstrates how it creates values itself by calling attention to its own evaluations. It demonstrates that all positions, including its own, create values by and as particular instances of will to power. Critique is creative.

> The noble and the vulgar, the high and the low - this is the truly genealogical and critical element. But, understood in this way, critique is at its most positive. The differential element is both a critique of the value of values and the positive element of a creation. This why critique is never conceived by Nietzsche as a *reaction* but as an *action*. Nietzsche contrasts the activity of critique with revenge, grudge or *ressentiment* (*NP*, 2-3).

This aspect of Deleuze's interpretation of Nietzsche's genealogy is significant because it indicates that Nietzsche's genealogical critique of morality is not simply negative or reactive, which would make it a function of the revenge or ressentiment which it challenges. Rather, genealogy is positive and active, a critique which is also creative. Deleuze writes:

> Critique is a not a re-action of *re-sentiment* but the active expression of a way of existence, attack and not revenge, the natural aggression of a way of being... This way of being is that of the philosopher precisely because he intends wield the differential element as critic and creator and therefore as a hammer (*NP*, 3).

Deleuze's reference to philosophizing with a hammer recalls the subtitle of Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols* which is

also opens with a statement of the "*revaluation of values*" (*TI*, *Foreword*). Deleuze's focus on the critical and creative aspect of genealogy also points to Nietzsche's attempt to overcome metaphysical morality defined as nihilism and effect a revaluation of values. Both activities are critical and creative. The following chapter turns to the discussion of the Nietzsche's critical and creative overcoming of metaphysical morality through a revaluation of values.

CHAPTER 4. NIHILISM

NIETZSCHE'S EXPERIENCE AND OVERCOMING OF NIHILISM

4.1 Metaphysical Morality as Nihilism

In Chapters 2 and 3 I discussed Nietzsche's philosophy in terms of the inquiry into the origins of morality (sciences) and the critique of the origins of morality (genealogy). It is clear that these two activities cannot be separated since each implies and involves the other. The first demonstrates that morality does indeed have an origin and history, that it is not eternal or immutable but arises in and through certain evaluations of life. The second questions the very notions of origin and history in such a way as to suggest that the origin and history of morality is manifold, that it is not essential or unified but is constructed from discontinuous elements.

Nietzsche's sciences and genealogy mainly look to the past in terms of origins and history of morality, but they are not without concern for the future of morality either. Both of these are stages in Nietzsche's larger project of the overcoming of nihilism through the revaluation of values. This is indicated by his archaeological formula of "the self-sublimation of morality" as well as his genealogical claim that "all great things bring about their own destruction through an act of self-overcoming" (*D*, Preface, 4; *GM*, III, 27). In Nietzsche's view, morality as nihilism overcomes

itself. Yet he is not satisfied to be a passive spectator watching the slow death agony of his ancient enemy; he actively participates in its dying. With respect to the overcoming of morality, Nietzsche goes beyond the devaluation of values occurring in his time to a revaluation of values emerging in the future. For him, the imperatives of honesty and truthfulness, the only ethical vestiges he retains, calls us to rid ourselves of the very lie and falsity of morality.[1]

Throughout the following discussion I use the rather redundant term "metaphysical morality" in order to refer to Nietzsche's claim that metaphysics is the foundation of morality in western culture. Metaphysical morality is based on "*the faith in opposite values*" such as being-becoming, real-apparent, truth-falsity or good-evil (*BGE*, 2). Nietzsche's phrase "beyond good and evil" refers to his attempt to avoid the opposition of values in order to overcome metaphysical morality, as emerges later.

According to Nietzsche, metaphysical morality and nihilism are synonymous. The very values that metaphysical morality posits and seeks to establish make it nihilistic. It values a "real" world of truth and being over this "apparent"

---

[1] See especially *GS*, 357; *GM, III, 27; EH, IV, 3; WP*, 1, 3. Nietzsche's ethic of honesty and truthfulness raises questions about the nature of his overcoming of nihilism and revaluation of values, as emerges throughout this chapter. For further discussion see Chapter 6.

world of falsity and becoming, a dualism which is appealed to for the validation of the distinction between good and evil. Yet this valuation eventually and necessarily collapses because of its inherent error in supposing two such worlds, and consequently this collapse leaves us with the feeling that there is no value to existence at all. These are the states of nihilism in the most general terms, as is clarified later. Thus the overcoming of metaphysical morality as the supposition of two worlds and the values "good" and "evil" is the overcoming of nihilism. Throughout this discussion the term nihilism designates metaphysical morality as well as metaphysics and morality.

4.2 Nietzsche's Experience of Nihilism

In the Preface to *The Will to Power* Nietzsche states: "What I relate is the history of the next two centuries. I describe what is coming, what can no longer come differently: *the advent of nihilism* (*WP*, Preface, 2). According to Nietzsche, the overcoming of nihilism presupposes nihilism itself as its precondition. He writes:

> For one should make no mistake about the meaning of the title that this gospel of the future wants to bear. "*The Will to Power*: Attempt at a Revaluation of Values" - in this formulation a countermovement finds expression, regarding both principle and task; a movement that in some future will take the place of this perfect nihilism - but presupposes it, logically and psychologically, and certainly can only come after and out of it. For why has the

> advent of nihilism become *necessary*? Because the values we have had hitherto thus draw their final consequence; because nihilism represents the ultimate logical conclusion of our great values and ideals - because we must experience nihilism before we can find out what value these "values" really had. - We require, sometime, *new values* (*WP*, Preface, 4).

Nihilism is caused by the rise and fall of the very values which are considered to be the highest values. We must experience them so that we will know what is to be overcome and how it is to be overcome. That is, we must experience nihilism as valuation and devaluation if we are to overcome nihilism through revaluation. Only because there is an initial valuation and subsequent devaluation of highest values can there necessarily be a revaluation of values on the basis of altogether new types of values. For Nietzsche, morality as nihilism is first required if we are to overcome it. The overcoming of morality as nihilism occurs because the honesty and truthfulness that morality cultivates brings us to overcome it (*GS*, 357; *GM*, III, 27; *EH*, IV, 3; *WP*, 1, 3).

4.2.1 The Nature of Nihilism

What is the nature of nihilism and what is its significance?[2] Nietzsche's philosophy concerning nihilism and

---

[2] Though Nietzsche identifies various forms of nihilism, his attempt to analyze its nature seems to involve him in essentialism. This is especially the case with Heidegger, as emerges later.

his own position with respect to it are ambiguous due to the nature of nihilism itself. Nietzsche has many ways of defining nihilism and it is not always clear which definition he is using at any given time. He states: "What does nihilism mean? *That the highest values devalue themselves.* The aim is lacking; "why?" finds no answer" (*WP*, 2). This is his most succinct definition of nihilism, expressing the meaninglessness that we associate with it, but it is not his most comprehensive nor final definition of nihilism. He also writes: "*Radical nihilism* is the conviction of an absolute untenability of existence when it comes to the highest values one recognizes; plus the realization that we lack the least right to posit a beyond or an in-itself of things that might be "divine" or morality incarnate" (*WP*, 3). It is important to note the "plus" here: it is one thing to say that our highest values have collapsed, it is another to say in addition to this that we should no longer posit any similar values to replace them.

Nietzsche considers nihilism to possess (at least) a dual nature. The nihilism Nietzsche sees around him is one in which people know that Christian-moral values are devalued and they keep replacing them with other values like State or Science, always unsuccessfully. This leads to a weak pessimism and romantic resignation from life. The nihilism Nietzsche heralds is one in which people accept the collapse of Christian-moral

values as a liberation and learn to live without any absolute values while still affirming the value of life. This is an expression of a strong pessimism and a classical or heroic attitude to life. Nietzsche further outlines the distinction between weak and strong pessimism within nihilism with the distinction between passive and active forms of nihilism.

> A. Nihilism as a sign of increased power of the spirit: as *active* nihilism.
> B. Nihilism as decline and recession of the power of the spirit: as *passive* nihilism (*WP*, 22).

Passive nihilism merely reacts to the devaluation of highest values, usually with the stop-gap measure of replacing them with more values of the same sort and to the same effect. Active nihilism goes beyond this devaluation to a revaluation by participating in the destruction of highest values so that it can recreate the values that have been despised by morality. Whereas passive nihilism is a feeling of weakness and loss, active nihilism is a feeling of strength and liberation. In this context Nietzsche writes:

> Nihilism as a *normal* condition.
> It can be a sign of strength: the spirit may have grown so strong that previous goals ("convictions," articles of faith) have become incommensurate (for a faith generally expresses the constraint of conditions of existence, submission to the authority of circumstances under which one flourishes, grows, gains power. Or a sign of the lack of strength to posit for oneself, productively, a goal, a why, a faith (*WP*, 23).

Nietzsche also cites pessimism as "a preliminary form of nihilism" but also distinguishes between "pessimism as

strength" and "pessimism as decline" (*WP*, 9-10).

Nietzsche's characterization of nihilism is based on the distinctions between strength and weakness, active and reactive, negative and affirmative, as well as the distinctions between romantic and classical, incomplete and complete, devaluation and revaluation, as emerges throughout this discussion. For him, the movement from weak or passive nihilism to strong and active nihilism is a matter of being able to provide one's own values. To overcome nihilism, Nietzsche takes it further than he finds it so that incomplete and romantic nihilism becomes complete and classical nihilism. He does not confront or counter nihilism with something other than nihilism, he pushes it to its limit or conclusion in order to overcome it. The movement from devaluation to revaluation is a matter of positing a new principle of valuation and new values which affirm life. This is in accordance with what he states in *Twilight of the Idols*: "Formula of my happiness: a Yes, a No, a straight line, a *goal*..." (*TI*, I, 44).

4.2.2 The Stages of Nihilism

In order to understand the nature of nihilism and determine how nihilism is to be overcome (if indeed it can be overcome), we must ask a few more questions. What causes nihilism? How does it develop? Why does it develop at all? In

a passage I quote at length, as does Heidegger (*N:IV*, 24-26), Nietzsche identifies three psychological states of nihilism:

> Nihilism as a psychological state will have to be reached, *first*, when we have sought a "meaning" in all events that is not there: so the seeker eventually becomes discouraged. Nihilism, then, is the recognition of the long *waste* of strength, the agony of the "in vain," insecurity, the lack of any opportunity to recover and to regain composure - being ashamed in front of oneself, as if one had *deceived* oneself all too long. - This meaning could have been: the "fulfillment" of some highest ethical canon in all events, the moral world order; or the growth of love and harmony in the intercourse of beings; or the gradual approximation of a state of universal happiness; or even the development towards a state of universal annihilation - any goal at least constitutes some meaning. What all these notions have in common is that something is to be *achieved* through the process - and now one realizes that becoming aims at *nothing* and achieves *nothing*. - Thus, disappointment regarding an alleged aim of becoming as a cause of nihilism: whether regarding a specific aim or, universalized, the realization that all previous hypotheses about aims that concern the whole "evolution" are inadequate (man no longer the collaborator, let alone the center, of becoming).
>
> Nihilism as a psychological state is reached, *secondly*, when one has posited a totality, a systematization, indeed any organization in all events, and underneath all events, and a soul that longs to admire and revere has wallowed in the idea of some supreme form of domination and administration (-if the soul be that of a logician, complete consistency and real dialectic are quite sufficient to reconcile it to everything). Some sort of unity, some form of "monism": this faith suffices to give man a deep feeling of standing in the context of, and being dependent on, some whole that is infinitely superior to him, and sees himself as a mode of the deity. - "The well-being of the universal demands the devolution of the individual" - but behold, there is no such universal. At bottom, man has lost the faith in his own value when no infinitely valuable whole works

through him; i.e., he conceived such a whole in order *to be able to believe in his own value.*

Nihilism as psychological state has yet a *third* and *last* form. Given these two insights, that becoming has no goal and that underneath all becoming there is no grand unity in which the individual could immerse himself completely as in an element of supreme value, an escape remains: to pass sentence on this whole world of becoming as a deception and to invent a world beyond it, a *true* world. But as soon as man finds out how that world is fabricated solely from psychological needs, and how he has absolutely no right to it, the last form of nihilism comes into being: it includes disbelief in any metaphysical world and forbids itself any belief in a *true* world. Having reached this standpoint, one grants the reality of becoming as the *only* reality, forbids oneself every kind of clandestine access to afterworlds and false divinities - but *cannot endure this world though one does not want to deny it.*

What has happened, at bottom? The feeling of valuelessness was reached with the realization that the overall character of existence may not be interpreted by means of the concept of "aim," the concept of "unity," or the concept of "truth." Existence has no goal or end; any comprehensive unity in the plurality of events is lacking: the character of existence is not "true," is *false*. One simply lacks any reason for convincing oneself thayt there is a *true* world. *Briefly: the categories "aim," "unity," "being," which we used to project some value into the world - we pull out again; so the world looks valueless* (*WP*, 12A).[3]

According to Nietzsche, nihilism passes through these three psychological states. They appear to follow one after the other and yet they are all interrelated. In this regard Heidegger states: "We can easily see that the three states of

---

[3] Nietzsche's account of nihilism in this note, dated November 1887-March 1888, is similar to *How the 'Real World' at last Became a Myth* in *Twilight of the Idols*, written shortly afterwards in June-September 1888.

nihilism designated sustain an inner relation to one another and together constitute a particular movement; that is to say, *history*" (*N:IV*, 35).[4]

(1) Initially, we posit an "aim" or purpose in the world of becoming in order to give it meaning and value. We later come to recognize that teleologies of becoming are false self-deceptions. Our disappointment also involves our awareness of our modest position in the world of becoming.

(2) Similarly, we posit a "unity" or totality to all events which lies beyond ourselves. This requires the devaluation of ourselves, but acts as the basis for the valuation of ourselves (i.e., we are only valuable to the extent that we are part of a larger whole). Yet we realize that this is also false. In this instance we not only consider the world to be meaningless, we also consider ourselves who depend on the meaningfulness of the world to be meaningless.

(3) Once both of these attempts to give meaning and value to the world of becoming through the concepts of "aim" and "unity" fail, we invent a "true" world of "being" beyond this world. Here the focus shifts as this world is actively devalued in order to place value on a world beyond. However, this too becomes untenable and we no longer believe in any

---

[4] Heidegger's statement is to be read in light of his claim that the entire history of metaphysics and the West itself is the history of nihilism (*N:IV*, 35).

otherworldly values. We therefore accept that becoming is the only reality. It is hard to endure this perspective but it is all we have left if we do not want to deny everything.

Nietzsche's psychological characterization of nihilism is helpful in indicating the basic movement of nihilism and its effects: the rise and fall of absolute and otherworldly values, the belief and disbelief in a true world beyond this sensuous world, the inconclusive search for meaning and the feeling of the valuelessness of existence and ourselves. Nietzsche describes the sickness that gives rise to metaphysics and morality or metaphysical morality defined as nihilism. Nietzsche directs his attack against Platonism and Christianity, against the invention of the dualism between a true or "real world" ("being") and a false or "apparent world" ("becoming"). For him, nihilism begins at this point of initial valuation of highest values. Yet he claims that nihilism must go through the stages of devaluation and revaluation of highest values as well. Significantly, in light of his own philosophy concerning the will to power and the eternal recurrence, he indicates that nihilism leads to the position wherein one affirms the aimless becoming of this sensuous world as the only tenable basis for meaning and value

of existence.[5]

However, Nietzsche's characterization of nihilism is rather unclear in its purely psychological form. While he demonstrates a movement from "aim" to "unity" and finally to truth" as failed attempts to give meaning to existence, the states he identifies all seem to merge with one another. This adds to the already considerable ambiguity surrounding nihilism and hinders a full understanding of the various historical stages of nihilism. Nietzsche may help to clarify the psychological basis of nihilism, but it is also important to understand nihilism as a historical process. Even though Nietzsche singles out Platonism and Christianity as the inauguration of nihilism, Heidegger claims that Nietzsche does not identify any historical forms that correspond to the stages of nihilism in history or as history (*N:IV*, 35). Overall, Nietzsche is not interested in such chronological detail because he is concerned with nihilism as the movement of western history. Yet, to clarify the subtle movements of nihilism, I suggest the following outline of the stages of nihilism, based on Nietzsche's and Heidegger's analysis: (1) Initial Nihilism, (2) Incomplete Nihilism, (3) Complete Nihilism. This outline also has the benefit of leading

---

[5] I discuss the affirmation of the will to power and the eternal recurrence as the means of overcoming of nihilism in Chapter 5.

directly to the question of Nietzsche's position with respect to nihilism, whether or not he overcomes it.

(1) Initial Nihilism. At this stage the highest values are established, inaugurating the reign of absolute and otherworldly values. In Nietzsche's view, this is actually a devaluation of what is really valuable - life, becoming, this sensuous world - but it is considered as the beginning of the highest values. The initial stage of nihilism corresponds to the distinction between "real world" and "apparent world" and the esteeming of the former at the expense of the latter. Platonism and Christianity both helped to initiate a nihilistic mode of evaluation which sought out and found values in an otherworldly realm. Nietzsche claims that nihilism is not caused by a kind of distress like an existential dread or depression, it is rooted in a particular interpretation of life - "the Christian-moral one" (*WP*, 1). His identification of nihilism with Christian morality is central to both *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Anti-Christ* (*TI*, III, 6; *AC*, 6). Thus, for Nietzsche, nihilism does not designate only the peculiar anxiety of the modern age, it is the motive force of the entire history of the West and all other stages are a consequence of this first stage.

(2) Incomplete Nihilism. This is the stage in which the highest values themselves become devalued. It is the form of nihilism Nietzsche describes as existing in the modern age at

the time of his writing. "Incomplete nihilism; its forms: we live in the midst of it. Attempts to escape nihilism without *revaluating* values so far: they produce the opposite, make the problem more acute" (*WP*, 28). The logic and history of nihilism itself brings this movement: since the highest values are false, it is only a matter of time before they are seen as the lies that they are (*WP*, 3). We become disenchanted and lose faith in the highest values. In response to this devaluation people attempt to revise the Christian-moral values which are collapsing or replace them with similar values, always unsuccessfully. Nietzsche criticizes the manner in which Christian-moral values are continually rebuilt and buttressed to increasingly reflect some notion of a true Christian morality. Kant comes to mind (*D*, Preface, 3). Nietzsche also criticizes State and Science as examples of replacement values which are supposedly of this world but are of the same order as absolute and otherworldly values. The untenability of both these attempts leads to the feeling of the meaninglessness of existence.

These are all cases of a passive or reactive nihilism, a pessimism of weakness, in which we become resigned to the meaninglessness of existence. Simply because our values become devalued or the basis of our values becomes devalued, we think there is no meaning at all. This false conclusion is a result of our view that we are the measure of value, that what we

value is inherently valuable and what we do not value is indeed valueless. It is a function of the "*hyperbolic naivete of man*" (*WP*, 12). "Nihilism represents a pathological transitional stage (what is pathological is the tremendous generalization, the inference that there is no meaning at all)" (*WP*, 13).

(3) Complete Nihilism. This is the stage of nihilism Nietzsche heralds, "the advent of nihilism" as complete or consummated nihilism. He states: "Main proposition. How *complete nihilism* is the necessary consequence of the ideals entertained hitherto" (*WP*, 28). In his view, complete nihilism pushes incomplete nihilism to its logical conclusion. In it people become so nihilistic that they refrain from importing any values into the world at all. This stage of nihilism is similar to the end of the third psychological state outlined earlier in which we accept that the only value this sensuous world has is that of its own becoming. Nietzsche writes: "The most extreme form of nihilism would be the view that every belief, every considering-something-true, is necessarily false because there simply is no *true world*. Thus: a *perspectival appearance* whose origin lies in us (in so far as we continually need a narrower, abbreviated, simplified world). - That it is the measure of strength to what extent we can admit to ourselves, without perishing, the merely *apparent*

character, the necessity of lies" (*WP*, 15).[6]

Complete nihilism marks the transition from passive or reactive nihilism to active nihilism. It does not wait for highest values to be devalued, it seeks them out and devalues them itself. "Nihilism does not only contemplate the "in vain!" nor is it the belief that everything deserves to perish: one helps to destroy" (*WP*, 24). At this stage nihilism is both negative and positive. Complete nihilism is a pessimism of strength because it considers all values hitherto as valueless but it is not resigned to meaninglessness, it embraces and encourages the lack of meaning in order to establish a new principle from which it can create altogether new meaning. Complete nihilism is actively destructive and creative. With respect to the revaluation of values, complete nihilism encompasses destructive No-saying and looks towards creative Yes-saying.

Thus complete nihilism is integral to Nietzsche's overall project of the overcoming of nihilism through the revaluation of values. Complete nihilism is a counter-nihilism with respect to the nihilism of previously established values. It is the stage in which what is truly valuable - life, becoming,

---

[6] Here it can be seen how art, "in which precisely the *lie* is sanctified and the *will to deception* has a good conscience" (*GM*, III, 25), is the countermovement to nihilism because its illusory character shows the world itself to be a realm of illusions. This role of is the focus of Chapter 5.

this sensuous world - becomes valued again in terms of the will to power. It points to the need for every person to establish their own values which are not absolute and otherworldly values but particular values which reflect their particular perspectives or conditions (*WP*, 715).

4.3 Heidegger: The Question of Overcoming Nihilism

Before the revaluation of values can be considered, however, the questions arise most urgently as to whether Nietzsche successfully overcomes nihilism and whether his approach even allows for the possibility of overcoming nihilism. Nietzsche calls himself "the first perfect nihilist of Europe" and claims that he has "lived through the whole of nihilism, to the end, leaving it behind, outside himself" (*WP*, Preface, 3). Has he lived nihilism to the end, left it behind and outside himself? Has he overcome nihilism or is he implicated somewhere in its logic and history? Nietzsche suggests that we must experience nihilism before we can overcome it. Yet what is not clear is how the experience of valuation and devaluation can give us a foothold to turn the tide towards revaluation. How does the inexorable logic and history of nihilism actually bring about the possibility of its own overcoming? Does it not also hold out the possibility that it could get more difficult to overcome? Nietzsche is aware that, as an illness, nihilism could very well kill the

patient, in this case western culture. These are the very questions Heidegger asks and addresses: "*In Nietzsche's metaphysics, which for the first time experiences and thinks nihilism as such, is nihilism overcome or is it not?*" (*N:IV*, 200).

According to Heidegger, Nietzsche's envisioning and enacting of his overcoming of nihilism is still a movement of nihilism itself. To him, Nietzsche's project of overcoming nihilism occurs within the parameters of nihilism and is in fact the "ultimate entanglement in nihilism" and "fulfillment of nihilism proper" (*N:IV*, 203-204). He claims that Nietzsche's focus on value and the will to power means that he attempts to overcome nihilism as a nihilist (*N:IV*, 203-204). Furthermore, in his view, Nietzsche does not experience the genuine or authentic essence of nihilism so he cannot overcome nihilism. In light of Heidegger's analysis and critique of Nietzsche, we must consider Nietzsche's position with regards to nihilism.

Yet Heidegger's analysis and critique is itself fraught with difficulties, specifically with regards to his definition of nihilistic metaphysics as the neglect and withdrawal of Being and his definition of the will to power as a subjective principle. Given his definitions, it seems as if neither he himself nor anyone can overcome nihilism. While his insightful analysis must nevertheless be taken seriously, his critique

does not completely undermine or discredit Nietzsche's project. Therefore, for purposes of the following discussion, I use his analysis to help clarify Nietzsche's notion of nihilism but I do not stand with his critique of Nietzsche's own nihilism.

4.3.1 Metaphysics and Nihilism

Particularly in Volume IV of *Nietzsche*, simply titled *Nihilism*, and in the essay titled "The Word of Nietzsche: "God Is Dead"" Heidegger raises the question of Nietzsche's relation to nihilism. More precisely, in light of Heidegger's peculiar manner of stating philosophical problems, he "attempts to point the way towards the place from which it may be possible someday ask the question concerning the essence of nihilism."[7] Thus, at the outset, he implies that Nietzsche does not pose the question of the essence of nihilism properly. In this light he claims outright that Nietzsche has a fundamental position in metaphysics such that he corresponds to its final stage and its greatest "inessentiality" (*QT*, 53).

---

[7] Martin Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche: "God is Dead"" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1977), 53; cited hereafter as *QT*. This essay is similar to his analysis of Nietzsche's relation to nihilism in Volume IV of *Nietzsche*, especially Part Two. However, Heidegger's manner of stating the problem here suggests that, even as an avowed anti-essentialist, he lapses into essentialist language. Throughout the following discussion his appeal to essentialism should be noted.

This is his way of saying that Nietzsche represents the culmination of metaphysics defined as nihilism.

Heidegger centres his essay around the phrase "God is dead" as spoken by the madman in *The Gay Science* (*GS*, 125). According to him, this phrase is Nietzsche's interpretation of nihilism (*QT*, 57). This is correct only insofar as nihilism is defined as the devaluation of highest values. He outlines Nietzsche's position with respect to nihilism in terms of the countermovement to metaphysics and the opposition to Platonism, but he also claims immediately thereafter that Nietzsche's position with respect to nihilism involves an entanglement in metaphysics rather than an overcoming of metaphysics. He writes:

> The pronouncement "God is dead" means: The supersensory world is without effective power. It bestows no life. Metaphysics, i.e., for Nietzsche Western philosophy understood as Platonism, is at an end. Nietzsche understands his own philosophy as the countermovement to metaphysics, and that means for him a movement in opposition to Platonism.
>
> Nevertheless, as a mere countermovement it necessarily remains, as does everything "anti," held fast in the essence of that over against which it moves. Nietzsche's countermovement against metaphysics is, as the mere turning upside down of metaphysics, an inextricable entanglement in metaphysics, in such a way, indeed, that metaphysics is cut off from its essence and, as metaphysics, is never able to think its own essence. Therefore, what actually happens in metaphysics and as metaphysics itself remains hidden by metaphysics and for metaphysics (*QT*, 61).

In *Nietzsche* Heidegger also writes:

> *Metaphysics as metaphysics is nihilism proper.* The

> essence of nihilism is historically as metaphysics, and the metaphysics of Plato is no less nihilistic than that of Nietzsche. In the former, the essence of nihilism is merely concealed; in the latter, it comes completely to appearance. Nonetheless, it never shows its true face, either on the basis of or within metaphysics (*N:IV*, 205).

Heidegger's identification of nihilism as metaphysics and its inevitable collapse, specifically in terms of the establishment of the distinction between the sensory and supersensory worlds and the subsequent collapse of this distinction (i.e., the rise and fall of Platonism), is helpful in clarifying Nietzsche's interpretation of nihilism. Yet Heidegger's indication that such a view of nihilism renders impossible the overcoming of nihilism because it depends on the structures of metaphysics suggests that Nietzsche's position with respect to nihilism may be unclear.

For Nietzsche and Heidegger, the historical movement of nihilism from initial to incomplete to complete nihilism is defined as the inauguration and end of metaphysics. Heidegger writes: "The end of metaphysics discloses itself as the collapse of the reign of the transcendent and the "ideal" that sprang from it. But the end of metaphysics does not mean the cessation of history. It is the *beginning* of a serious concern with that "event": "God is dead."" (*N:IV*, 5). Both Nietzsche and Heidegger claim that nihilism is not simply an intellectual attitude towards life which we can or cannot adopt. Nihilism is the very force of history which bears all

of us along.

> Nihilism is a historical movement, and not just any view or doctrine advocated by someone or other. Nihilism moves history after the manner of a fundamental ongoing event that is scarcely recognized in the destining of the Western peoples. Hence nihilism is also not simply one intellectual current that, along with others, with Christendom, with humanism, and with the Enlightenment - also comes to the fore within Western history. Nihilism, thought in its essence, is, rather, the fundamental movement of the history of the West (*QT*, 62).[8]

However, while Nietzsche and Heidegger share this fundamental insight about nihilism and metaphysics, Nietzsche sees himself as overcoming nihilism through the revaluation of values and Heidegger sees him as still caught up in the historical movement of nihilism because the revaluation of values is its culmination (*N:IV*, 6). Indeed, Heidegger claims that Nietzsche still thinks nihilistically and metaphysically so he can never overcome them, only bring them to their conclusion. "We have said, however, that Nietzsche's metaphysics is nihilism proper. This implies not only that Nietzsche's nihilism does not overcome nihilism but also that it can never overcome it" (*N:IV*, 203). The physician is also sick with the illness so any diagnosis he offers mistakenly increases the illness.[9]

---

[8] See also "Nihilism as History" (*N:IV*, 52-57).

[9] We could very well ask about Heidegger's own position with respect to nihilism and metaphysics since it is not clear where he himself stands in their historical movement. If nihilistic metaphysics is the fundamental movement of western philosophy, then how can he, as a western philosopher, be sure that he has gone beyond it? Heidegger writes, perhaps

We can better understand Heidegger's consideration of Nietzsche's position within nihilism and metaphysics when we determine his own notion of nihilistic metaphysics. Heidegger begins his essay concerning Nietzsche and nihilistic metaphysics with a standard definition of metaphysics: "In what follows, metaphysics is thought as the truth of what *is* as such in its entirety, and not as the doctrine of any particular thinker" (*QT*, 54). Metaphysics thinks in terms of wholes and totalities or the fundamental characteristic of reality. The metaphysics of any particular time also defines the characteristic of that time and offers it the opportunity to know itself. Heidegger writes: "The truth of being as a whole has long been called *metaphysics*. Every era, every human epoch, is sustained by some metaphysics and is placed thereby in a definite relation to being as whole and also to itself: (*N:IV*, 5).[10]

However, in Heidegger's case, the definition of metaphysics must be made even more specific. For him,

---

petulantly: "To think Being without beings means: to think Being without regard to metaphysics. Yet a regard for metaphysics still prevails even in the intention to overcome metaphysics. Therefore, our task is to cease all overcoming, and leave metaphysics to itself" (*TB*, 24). Is Heidegger abandoning the difficult task of overcoming metaphysics? Can he simply leave metaphysics to itself and expect to be done with it?

[10] This suggests, despite Heidegger's claim that he goes beyond metaphysics, that he involves himself in a metaphysical totality.

metaphysics is thinking Being in terms of the presence of beings (*TB*, 2, 24). It forgets Being itself in favour of particular beings. He states: "Unmindful of Being and its own truth, Western thinking has since its beginning continually been thinking what is in being as such" (*QT*, 104). In Heidegger's view, metaphysics in its present form is a misguided manner of thinking because it asks the wrong kinds of questions. He proposes a new kind of thinking guided by new kinds of questions. "What is? We do not ask concerning this or that particular being, but rather we ask concerning the Being of whatever is. More especially we are asking what is happening to Being" (*QT*, 102). According to Heidegger, we must ask questions in such a way as to make new problems arise or make things appear problematic for the first time.

Heidegger suggests that by redirecting our questions about nihilism we may recognize the genuine or authentic essence of nihilism and we may even put ourselves in a position from which we can overcome nihilism. He claims, specifically with respect to nihilism, that we mistake its appearances or consequences for its essence and thus we push ourselves further into it (*QT*, 65). Echoing Nietzsche's initial definition of nihilism as the devaluation of the highest values, Heidegger first states: ""Nihilism" is the increasingly dominant truth that all prior aims of being have become superfluous" (*N:IV*, 5). However, he also raises the

question of the essence of nihilism, which is also the question of the essence of metaphysics, in the light of Being. "What is happening to Being? *Nothing* is happening to Being" (*QT*, 104).

> The word "nihilism" indicates that *nihil* (Nothing) *is*, and is essentially, that which it names. Nihilism means: Nothing is befalling everything and in every respect... Hence nihilism means that Nothing is befalling whatever is as such, in its entirety. But whatever is, is what it is and how it is from out of Being. Assuming that every "is" lies in Being, the essence of nihilism consists in the fact that Nothing is befalling Being itself (*QT*, 110-111).

According to Heidegger, nothing happens to Being or nothing befalls Being because we do not ask the questions that put us into contact with Being. Metaphysics is nihilistic because Being remains unthought in it (*QT*, 110). In other words, metaphysics thinks nothing of Being, does not consider Being worthy of thinking about. This neglect of and withdrawal from Being is what Heidegger means by the genuine or authentic essence of nihilism which is at the heart of metaphysics as opposed to its mere appearances or consequences in various metaphysical doctrines. The different forms of nihilistic metaphysics spring from its essential nihilistic neglect of and withdrawal from Being.

According to Heidegger, metaphysics and the overcoming of metaphysics are inherently nihilistic because in neither case is Being itself considered. In the first instance, metaphysics

mistakenly assumes that it thinks the Being of Being when it only thinks about the Being of beings and so it falsely assumes that it answers all questions about the Being of Being. Yet any sight it may catch of Being is accidental and aberrant. Metaphysics neglects and withdraws from Being and metaphysics does not even realize that this has occurred. Such is the genuine and authentic essence of nihilism in metaphysics. In the second instance, the overcoming of metaphysics is the silencing of any further questions about the Beings of beings whatsoever such that questions about the Being of Being cannot even be asked. It leaves nothing to think about Being and leaves no chance to catch sight of Being, even by accident or aberration. The overcoming of metaphysics is genuinely and authentically nihilistic.

4.2.2 Nietzsche and Nihilism

How does Heidegger's notion of nihilistic metaphysics relate to Nietzsche specifically? It may be obvious that Heidegger would claim Nietzsche does not think Being as such, but why and how he considers this to occur may remain unclear. Heidegger focuses on Nietzsche's notion of the will to power as it is articulated in his work as value or "point-of-view" and he sees this as the basis of Nietzsche's metaphysics. He states: "The grounding principle of the metaphysics of the will to power is a value-principle" (*QT*, 86). For Heidegger,

given that metaphysics thinks in terms of the whole and totality of beings, this metaphysics affects the notion of Being such that "Being has been transformed into a value" (*QT*, 102). Nietzsche considers the revaluation of values through the will to power as the means to the overcoming of nihilism. However, Heidegger claims that the emphasis on value, particularly in terms of the will to power, is actually an expression of the height of nihilism because it completes the neglect of and withdrawal from Being as Being. He writes:

> If, however, value does not let Being be Being, does not let it be what it is as Being itself, then this supposed overcoming is above all the consummation of nihilism. For now nihilism not only does not think Being itself, but this not-thinking of being clothes itself in the illusion that it does think Being in the most exalted manner, in that it esteems Being as value, so that all questions concerning being become and remain superfluous (*QT*, 104-105).

Similarly, in *Nietzsche* he writes:

> Consequently, Nietzsche's metaphysics is not an overcoming of nihilism. It is the ultimate entanglement in nihilism. Through value thinking in terms of will to power, it of course continues to acknowledge beings as such. But, by tying itself to an interpretation of Being as value it simultaneously binds itself to the impossibility of even casting an inquiring glance at Being as Being (*N:IV*, 203).

Thus, for Heidegger, Nietzsche represents the height of nihilistic metaphysics because he does not only avoid asking questions about the Being of Being but he also rules out the possibility of even asking any such questions at all.

Basically, Heidegger's critique of Nietzsche is that he thinks Being in terms of beings, specifically as values and the will to power, but not Being as such. Therefore, in his view, Nietzsche follows an already nihilistic metaphysics further down its misdirected path to its final end. For Heidegger, valuative thought is the logical conclusion of metaphysics, the essence of metaphysics. "Valuative thought played this part in Nietzsche's thought because Nietzsche thought *metaphysically*, on the path of the history of metaphysics" (*N:IV*, 22-23).

> Nietzsche knew and experienced nihilism because he himself thought nihilistically. Nietzsche's own concept of nihilism is itself nihilistic. Consequently, in spite of all his insights, he could not recognize the hidden essence of nihilism, because right from the outset, *solely* on the basis of valuative thought, he conceived of nihilism as the devaluation of the uppermost values. Nietzsche had to conceive of nihilism that way because in remaining on the path and within the realm of Western metaphysics, he thought it to its conclusion (*N:IV*, 22).

Heidegger's critique has serious repercussions for Nietzsche's avowed attempt to overcome nihilism and metaphysics. To him, Nietzsche thinks nihilistically and metaphysically so he can never overcome them. Like Nietzsche, he is aware that nihilism must be experienced if it is to be overcome. Against Nietzsche, he claims that the consideration of nihilism only in terms of values (valuation, devaluation and revaluation) is not the experience of nihilism, at least not its genuine and

authentic essence, so he cannot possibly overcome it. Heidegger refers to this matter of nihilism in terms of Being.

> But if the essence of nihilism is the history in which there is nothing to Being itself, then neither can the essence of nihilism be experienced and thought as long as in thinking and for thinking there is indeed nothing to Being itself (*N:IV*, 203).

According to Heidegger, Nietzsche's own position within nihilism, the neglect and withdrawal of Being, means that he cannot experience or overcome it properly.

Heidegger's critique of Nietzsche's position in nihilism with regards to valuative thought and will to power has yet another dimension. For him, Nietzsche's nihilism which puts emphasis on valuation through the will to power and thereby emphasizes human subjectivity. He claims that Nietzsche makes "man" the standard of experience.

> When he thinks the material, lifeless world on the basis of man and according to human drives, then he is really giving a "human" interpretation of the living and historical world. We begin to suspect how decisively *valuative thinking*, as the reckoning of all beings according to the basic value of will to power, already has at its essential foundation *this* fact, that in general the being as such is interpreted *after the fashion of* human Being, and not only that the interpretation is fulfilled "through" man (*N:IV*, 85).

Heidegger demonstrates that this mode of interpretation has a long history in metaphysics: Protagoras says "Man is the measure of all things" while Descartes states "I think, therefore I am" but both take the subject as the foundation of

truth (*N:IV*, 86). Nietzsche continues and completes the history of metaphysics by emphasizing subjectivity as willing. "In the subjectness of the subject, will comes to appearance as the essence of subjectness. Modern metaphysics, as the metaphysics of subjectness, thinks the Being of that which is in the sense of will" (*QT*, 88). For Heidegger, metaphysics asks the question of Being not only in terms of beings, which is bad enough, but particularly in terms of human beings, which is worse still. Heidegger sees Nietzsche as the culmination of the history of metaphysics which gives priority to the perspective of humanity by emphasizing willing. For him, Nietzsche's "anthropomorphism" is highest expression of the principle of nihilistic metaphysics (*N:IV*, 87).

However, in Heidegger's view, the subjectivity and willing that is the culmination of anthropomorphism or nihilistic metaphysics is not just any subjectivity and willing, it is specifically the will to power. Heidegger claims that Nietzsche's anthropomorphism is of a special quality because of its focus on the will to power. He writes:

> In order to grasp Nietzsche's philosophy as metaphysics and to circumscribe its place in the history of metaphysics, it is not enough to explain historiologically a few of his fundamental concepts as being "metaphysical." *We must grasp Nietzsche's philosophy as the metaphysics of subjectivity.* What was said concerning the expression "metaphysics of will to power" is also valid for the phrase "metaphysics of subjectivity" (*N:IV*, 147).

Heidegger then combines these two expressions or phrases

concerning subjectivity and the will to power and states:

> Nietzsche's metaphysics, and with it the essential ground of "classical nihilism," may now be more clearly delineated as *a metaphysics of the absolute subjectivity of will to power* (*N:IV*, 147).

The subjectivity of will to power is the core of Nietzsche's metaphysical anthropomorphism and classical or complete nihilism. It is represented by the figure of the overman. The overman expresses itself by valuation through the will to power. Heidegger writes: ""Overman" is man who *is* man from out of the reality determined through the will to power, and for that reality. Man whose essence is that essence which is willing, i.e., ready, from out of the will to power is overman" (*QT*, 96). Thus, for Heidegger, the overman is the culmination of nihilistic metaphysics.

In Heidegger's view, nihilistic metaphysics detrimentally affects our relationship to the earth and to Being itself. To him, it leads to a scientific-technological attitude of the subject's domination over the objectified earth that further widens the distance between human beings and the truth of Being. Heidegger gives an account of the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity in nihilistic metaphysics.

> All consciousness of things and of beings as a whole is referred back to the self-consciousness of the human subject as the unshakable ground of all certainty. The reality of the real is defined in later terms as objectivity, as something that is conceived by and for the subject that is thrown and stands over and against it. The reality of the real is representedness through and for the representing

subject (*N:IV*, 86).

For Heidegger, metaphysics is inherently representational (*TB*, 56). He calls attention to the double operation of the subject's representing: "It belongs to subjectness, as the primary determination of its essence, that the representing subject makes itself sure of itself - and that means makes itself sure continually also of what it represents - as a particular something" (*QT*, 88). However, to him, the subject's representing of itself and its world through knowledge is a matter of securing certainty and correctness rather than properly situating itself in the truth of Being. He writes:

> Correctness consists now in the arranging of everything that is to be represented, according to the standard that is posited in the claim to knowledge of the representing *res cogitans sive mens* [*thinking thing*]. This claim moves toward the secureness that consists in this, that everything to be represented and representing itself are driven together into the clarity and lucidity of the mathematical *idea* and there assembled (*TB*, 89).

He also states: "The operational and model character of representational-calculative thinking becomes dominant" (*TB*, 58-59). The human subject, in order to be certain about the world, dominates the world. For Heidegger, this marks the "end of philosophy" or, to use terms that have been used all along, the culmination of nihilistic metaphysics (*TB*, 55-56).

> Philosophy is ending in the present age. It has found its place in the scientific attitude of socially active humanity. But the fundamental characteristic of this scientific attitude is its

> cybernetic, that is, technological character... The end of philosophy proves to be the triumph of the manipulable arrangement of a scientific-technological world and of the social order proper to this world (*TB*, 59).

It is not the "end" such that philosophy is over or no longer what it was. It is the "end" such that philosophy reaches its final state and its real motivation becomes apparent. Heidegger recognizes the culmination of nihilistic metaphysics in the empirical science of anthropology which makes even humanity the object of a science (*TB*, 57). Heidegger also claims that "the triumph of the manipulable arrangement of a scientific-technological world" is the essence of metaphysics (*TB*, 59).[11]

Heidegger makes his critique more specific with respect to Nietzsche's anthropomorphism or nihilistic metaphysics. He claims that with Nietzsche the world appears as an assaulted object of technology through human willing.

> Man enters into insurrection. The world changes

---

[11] Heidegger's essay on Nietzsche's metaphysical nihilism and its detrimental effect on the relationship between humanity and Being appears in *The Question Concerning Technology* among others such as the title essay, "The Age of the World Picture" and "Science and Reflection" in which he analyzes the shortcomings of science and technology with respect to Being. Furthermore, in the essays "The Origin of the Work of Art" and "The Thing" in *Poetry, Language, Thought* Heidegger considers the manners in which propositional thinking in terms of subjects and predicates and conceptual thinking in terms of unities assault "the thingly element of things" as well as the manner in which science, in light of the atom bomb, conceals and forgets "the thingness of a thing" (*PLT*, 22-26, 165-171).

> into an object. In this revolutionary objectification of everything that is, the earth, that which first of all must be put at the disposal of representing and setting forth, moves into the midst of human positing and analyzing. The earth itself can show itself only as the object of an assault, an assault that, in human willing, establishes itself as unconditional objectification. Nature appears everywhere - because willed from out of the essence of Being - as the object of technology (*QT*, 100).

According to Heidegger, by representing and willing the earth, humans put themselves over and against the earth. For him, willing is a process of objectifying and subjecting, or dominating, what is other. With respect to Nietzsche's nihilistic metaphysics, this domination is a result of the will to power. "The struggle for domination over the earth is in its historical essence already the result of the fact that whatever is as such is appearing in the mode of will to power without yet being recognized or without being understood at all as that will" (QT, 101). Thus, for Heidegger, Nietzsche's will to power is the highest expression of nihilistic metaphysics for two reasons. Firstly, it necessarily leads to a domination of the earth which comes from and continues a distancing from the truth of Being. Secondly, it is unable to see itself as this domination of the earth and this distancing from the truth of Being, so it cannot even change its course.

Heidegger claims that the course of nihilistic metaphysics can only be altered or arrested through the task of thinking. He writes: "Perhaps there is a thinking which is

more sober than the irresistible race of rationalization and the sweeping character of cybernetics. Presumably it is this sweeping quality which is extremely irrational" (*TB*, 72). In the last line of his essay on Nietzsche's nihilism, written some twenty years before his essay on the end of philosophy and the task of thinking, he states: "Thinking begins only when we have come to know that reason, glorified for centuries, is the most stiff-necked adversary of thought" (*QT*, 112). Using Nietzsche to surpass Nietzsche himself, Heidegger calls attention to the madman who still seeks God (*QT*, 111-122). He means to say that only if we still seek Being can we can ask after it and hear its response. For this the rational and scientific thinking that demands demonstrable proof and the domination of the earth must be replaced by a poetic and artistic thinking that puts us in the presence of the truth of Being. For this we need to overcome nihilistic metaphysics and begin "another beginning."[12]

---

[12] Otto Pöggeler, *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking*, trans. Daniel Magurshak and Sigmund Barber, (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1990), 153. Pöggeler offers a clear outline of Heidegger's critique of Nietzsche's nihilistic metaphysics.

4.3.3 A Response to Heidegger

While I consider Heidegger's analysis of nihilism to be extremely insightful for the discussion of Nietzsche's notion of nihilism, I want to respond to his critique of Nietzsche's position with regard to nihilism by indicating two of its weaknesses. First, Heidegger's notion of nihilistic metaphysics as the neglect and withdrawal of Being is rather idiosyncratic and self-serving. Second, Heidegger's portrayal of Nietzsche's philosophy of will to power is in some respects a caricature. I suggest instead that Nietzsche's revaluation of values can be considered as the overcoming of nihilism because it prepares the way for a new thinking beyond nihilism which avoids the domination of subjectivity over the earth and affirms an aesthetic attitude towards the tragic unity of all existence.

For all Heidegger's contribution to contemporary philosophy, particularly in the terms of how we now consider the history of philosophy itself, I think he defines nihilistic metaphysics in an idiosyncratic manner that sets up his own project all too perfectly. He outlines an inexorable logic and history of nihilistic metaphysics such that all philosophers from Plato to Nietzsche are borne along its misdirected path. He seems to save the glorious task of overcoming nihilistic metaphysics and starting "another beginning" of thinking for himself. Yet it is not clear how

Heidegger can escape the logic and history of nihilistic metaphysics. He himself cannot satisfy his own criteria. For example, in "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking" he demonstrates his own unfinished struggle in overcoming nihilistic metaphysics and thinking differently.

It may very well be that Heidegger's project of overcoming nihilistic metaphysics, as he defines it, is impossible. We cannot but think metaphysically or think Being in terms of beings. We cannot but think metaphorically or think something which is otherwise inexpressible in terms of its similarity to something else. To think metaphysically is to think metaphorically. Yet this need not mean we think nihilistically. Metaphysics and metaphors may be our only ways of thinking about Being. We think metaphysically and metaphorically, especially when it comes to the fundamental characteristic of existence. For example, both in religious ceremonies and theological reflections the expressions "God is good" or "God is the Light of the World" are uttered. In both examples a metaphor is expressed that compares God or the Supreme Being to something experienced on the level of beings, such as goodness or light. This notion of the metaphysical-metaphorical nature of human thinking is not so far from the one Heidegger himself presents. He often approaches humanity from an aesthetic perspective with the model of the work of art. He focuses on Hölderlin's phrase "poetically man dwells"

in order to call attention to the poetic nature of language and life.[13]

I agree with Heidegger that the enemy of thinking is rigid rationalism and positivism defined as nihilism, but I disagree with his claim that Nietzsche is such a nihilistic enemy. In Volume IV of *Nietzsche* he neglects the constructive aesthetic dimension of Nietzsche's work in order to formulate a criticism of Nietzsche's position in relation to nihilistic metaphysics, but in Volume I of *Nietzsche* he comes closer to the spirit of Nietzsche's work when he considers art in terms of the will to power and the countermovement to nihilism. Though he ultimately criticizes Nietzsche's aesthetics as being nihilistic, he himself suggests that Nietzsche points the way to a new aesthetic manner of thinking which may possibly lead to the overcoming of nihilism (*N:I*, 161). For Nietzsche, art is the most familiar configuration of the will to power and the countermovement to nihilism, especially when it is expressed in the grand style of Dionysian tragedy (*N:I*, 126). Why does Heidegger abandon this important aspect of

---

[13] See Martin Heidegger, "...Poetically Man Dwells..." in *Poetry, Language, Thought*. See also in the same text "What are Poets For?" for his account of the role of poets in the destitute time of nihilism as well as "Language" and "Building Dwelling Thinking" for his reflections on the manner in which poetry relates us to the world and Being. All these essays give evidence of Heidegger's aesthetic attitude towards existence.

Nietzsche's work in his critique of nihilism?[14]

Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche is certainly one of the most authoritative and exhaustive. However, with respect to the subjectivity of will to power and its role in the scientific-technological attitude, his interpretation approaches caricature. Heidegger claims that the will is inseparable from a willing subject, especially for Nietzsche. He misses the manners in which Nietzsche differs from previous philosophers and their notions of subjectivity because he attempts to place Nietzsche at the end of a long line of philosophers responsible for the fateful articulation of the willing subject. Nietzsche's notion of will is not that of subjectivity as developed by Descartes or Kant since he rejects all notions of a willing subject. Nietzsche is greatly influenced by Schopenhauer who can be seen as developing a notion of the will which is not subject-centered. He eventually objects to what he considers Schopenhauer's resigned pessimism of the will which claims the only way to escape the suffering caused by the will is to stop willing, though he retains Schopenhauer's sense that the primal force of life in the world is will. For Nietzsche, this primal force

---

[14] Given the similarities between Nietzsche's and Heidegger's notions of art and their shared high regard for it, the basis for Heidegger's critique of Nietzsche's aesthetics as nihilistic is still unclear. However, I return to Heidegger in order to introduce Nietzsche's notions of art and tragedy in Chapter 5.

of life is called the will to power. It accounts for the nature of the world as will rather than the nature of willing subject. It is cosmological rather than subjective.

Heidegger sees Nietzsche's philosophy as the culmination of nihilistic metaphysics which posits the domination of human subjectivity over and against an objectified earth. However, Nietzsche's perspectivism, which is essential to his focus on valuation through will to power, expressly rejects the notions of subjectivity and objectivity (*WP*, 481). There is no essential and unitary human "subject" which dominates and there is no objective or objectified earth which is dominated because there are always only the multiple perspectival interpretations of the will to power. Nietzsche criticizes the "*hyperbolic naivete*" which leads humanity to take itself as the primary standard of value (*WP*, 12). By focusing on the perspectival interpretations of will to power, Nietzsche seeks to avoid and arrest the tendency towards subjectivity and objectification in modern philosophy which he criticizes. His notion of the will to power helps us recognize that we have no legitimate metaphysical foundation for imposing our values on others or the earth as if they were absolute.[15]

---

[15] However, for Ofelia Schutte, this touches on a central tension in Nietzsche's work: his attempt to establish an order of rank or a standard of measure for values mitigates his perspectivism. She also charges that he retains the structure of exploitation and domination, most explicitly in his distinction of higher and lower human beings as masters and

For Nietzsche, the will to power does not involve a subject's exploiting others or dominating the earth. The will to power is that which wills and the increase of power is what it wills. To Nietzsche, in this sense the will to power is the fundamental character of growth in terms of the preservation and enhancement of life, which may or may not include humanity as its highest form. Nietzsche's rejection of what he considers a nihilistic two-world hierarchical dualism could lead to an ethos wherein we develop an attitude of stewardship towards the earth, as when he entreats us to "remain true to the earth" (*Z*, Prologue, 3). It could be argued, ignoring for the moment Nietzsche's advocacy of slavery and the order of rank, that the nihilistic spirit of revenge or *ressentiment* against existence which Nietzsche seeks to avoid and overcome is at work in the exploitation of others or the domination of the earth.[16]

---

slaves as well as his advocation of the right of the strong to rule the weak, and condemns him not only for his justification of authoritarian political regimes but also for his nihilism. See Ofelia Schutte, *Beyond Nihilism: Nietzsche without Masks*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984).

[16] The overcoming of *ressentiment* is discussed later in this chapter with respect to the revaluation of values and again in Chapter 5 in terms of the tragic redemption of existence.

4.4 The Revaluation of Values

Heidegger's critique of Nietzsche is not completely countered by my brief response, but my intention is to provide a position from which to consider the revaluation of values as the overcoming of nihilism. Near the end of his life, particularly during his writing of *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Anti-Christ* in 1888, Nietzsche begins to refer to his task as the "revaluation of values" (*TI*, Foreword). Throughout *The Anti-Christ* he sets himself in opposition to Christianity and Christians rather than to Christ. He defines his task specifically in terms of the Renaissance which sought the "*revaluation of Christian values*" so that opposing "*noble* values" could be victorious once again (*AC*, 61). He also mentions the manner in which the time is calculated from the fateful first day of Christianity and he proposes instead that time now be marked from the last day of Christianity, which he designates as the day he finished writing his condemning book (*AC*, 62). Nietzsche names *The Anti-Christ* as the first part of his planned but unfinished four-part series which he titled *The Revaluation of Values* (*EH*, T, 2ff).

One of the best sources for understanding Nietzsche's notion of the revaluation of values is *Ecce Homo*, also written in 1888. He reinterprets his entire philosophical career as the revaluation of values so that almost every book he wrote is recast in those terms. Nietzsche writes:

> *Revaluation of all values:* that is my formula for an act of supreme examination on the part of humanity, become flesh and genius in me. It is my fate that I have to be the first *decent* human being; that I know myself to stand in opposition to the mendaciousness of millennia. - I was the first to *discover* the truth by being the first to experience lies as lies - smelling them out. - My genius is in my nostrils (*EH*, IV, 1).

We should also call attention to Nietzsche's sense of "taste" (with all its duplicitous meanings) as well as his nutrition, diet and digestion of "moraline-free virtue" (*EH*, II, 1). We must not forget Nietzsche's eyes and ears either. In *Twilight of the Idols* he refers to his "'evil eye' for this world" and his 'evil ear' which listens when the hammer blows "*sound out idols*" (*TI*, Foreword). These are the kinds of metaphors Nietzsche uses when he claims that he opposes "the mendaciousness of millennia" or the propensity to falsity in the history of the West. He seeks out the false idols of morality. Already in *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche claims that "the history of the moral sensations is the history of an error" and that "morality is an official lie" (HH, 39, 40). His inquiry and critique of morality is what he means by discovering the truth by experiencing "lies as lies" or experiencing nihilism. Nietzsche overcomes morality as nihilism through the revaluation of values.[17]

---

[17] Nietzsche's attack on "lies as lies" refers to his ethic of honesty and truthfulness in terms of the overcoming of Christian morality as nihilism through the revaluation of values.

Nietzsche's revaluation of values is his critique of idolatry and its effects on evaluations of life. He analyzes humanity's need to create idols which supposedly give this sensuous world its true value and meaning but which actually place value and meaning in an other world to the denigration and denial of this world. In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche returns to *On the Genealogy of Morals* to reinterpret *Human, All Too Human* in terms of the revaluation of values which challenges humanity's "metaphysical need" for morality (*EH*, H, 6). As was noted earlier, this metaphysical need and switch of evaluations is the basis of morality. Nietzsche destroys the dualism of "true world" and "apparent world" and declines to erect any more such metaphysical idols:

> No new idols are erected by me; let the old ones learn what feet of clay mean. *Overthrowing idols* (my word for "ideals") -that comes closer to being part of my craft. One has deprived reality of its value, its meaning, its truthfulness, to precisely the extent to which one has mendaciously invented an ideal world.
>
> The "true world" and the "apparent world" - that means: the mendaciously invented world and reality.
>
> The *lie* of the ideal has so far been the curse on reality; on account of it, mankind itself has become mendacious and false down to its most fundamental instincts - to the point of worshipping the *opposite* values of those which alone would guarantee its health, its future, the lofty *right* to its future (*EH*, Preface, 2).

Nietzsche claims that he does not seek to provide new idols through his revaluation of values. For him, idols operate on the basis of the lie of an ideal world and the revaluation

attempts to overcome this lie by returning the value to those values which have been devalued by morality. They are not new values as such, but values that regain their vitality and power in our culture once morality is overcome. The values Nietzsche proposes instead of idols are the ancient (pre-moral) "immoral" or anti-moral values which affirm this sensuous world.

According to Nietzsche, the revaluation of values signals a deeper change in one's perspective and attitude to life. This is demonstrated in Nietzsche's critique of Christianity in *The Anti-Christ*. He attempts to destroy the nihilistic values established in our culture and re-establish noble values in their place. He opposes Christianity's *ressentiment* morality with his *noble* morality (*AC*, 24). Echoing Schopenhauer to some extent, Nietzsche defines life as the will to power or "the instinct for growth" (*AC*, 6). In his view, "*décadence values*" or nihilistic values, embodied in the figure of the Christian God, are contrary to this instinct for growth and are thus a "*contradiction of life*" (*AC*, 18). Nietzsche considers *décadence* or nihilistic values as those base values that esteem another ideal world beyond this sensuous world with glorious words but mean "*nothingness*" and are "*hostile to life*" (*AC*, 7). They come from a negation of life in this sensuous world and encourage further such negation, therefore they are an expression of weakness and

decline in the will to power, a wish for what is harmful to life (*AC*, 6). By way of contrast, Nietzsche considers *noble* values as an expression of strength and an ascending will to power. They not only reactively preserve life, they also actively enhance it (*AC*, 17). Noble values are an affirmation of all aspects of life.[18]

However, while Nietzsche's critique is certainly vitriolic, it is not supposed to be vengeful. He claims that the *décadence* and nihilistic values of Christian morality come from the instinct of revenge or *ressentiment* against life (*AC*, 24). The revaluation of values, if it is to overcome Christian morality, must therefore avoid *ressentiment* through the spirit of affirmation. The revaluation of values is opposed to established values, but it is not so out of *ressentiment*, because one of the established values it is against is *ressentiment*. Indeed, one of the basic aspects of revaluation is the overcoming of *ressentiment*. The revaluation of values seeks to overcome nihilistic *ressentiment* and its expression through Christian morality in order to lead the way to developing affirmative modes of evaluating which can create affirmative values.

Nietzsche clarifies this point in *Ecce Homo*. He

---

[18] For Nietzsche, noble and affirmative values are tragic values which accept the unity of all aspects of life in terms of the will to power and the eternal recurrence, as becomes clear later in Chapter 5.

criticizes Christian morality's *décadence* and nihilistic values as being motivated by a revenge against life and he intimates the need for a revaluation of this initial Christian-moral valuation or devaluation.

> Indeed, this is *my* insight: the teachers, the leaders of humanity, theologians all of them, were also, all of them, decadents: *hence* the revaluation of all values into hostility to life, *hence* morality -
>
> *Definition of morality:* Morality - the idiosyncrasy of decadents, with the ulterior motive of revenging oneself against life - successfully (*EH*, IV, 7).

Christian morality is the first revaluation of values, which means it is the devaluation of what is truly valuable - "life" in this sensuous world of becoming. Nietzsche's revaluation of values, as seen by him, is the revaluation of a revaluation of values, or the re-revaluation of values.

However, if Nietzsche's revaluation of values is to be a true revaluation, then it must come from other motivations besides *ressentiment* or it remains under the influence of nihilism without overcoming it.[19] Thus, in the same sense that one can question Heidegger's own position in nihilistic metaphysics while he is involved in an on-going critique of it, one can question Nietzsche's own *ressentiment* as he criticizes it. Nietzsche imputes the spirit of revenge to

---

[19] The question concerning Nietzsche's overcoming of nihilism arises here in terms of whether or not Nietzsche overcomes *ressentiment*.

those he attacks and claims exception for himself, but could this not be a tactic of revenge itself? Nietzsche defines *ressentiment* in a particular sense as the vengeful negation of life through the supposition of a two-world hierarchical dualism which considers the world beyond more important than this world. Defined in this manner, he avoids *ressentiment* through his affirmation of life in this sensuous world. Nonetheless, does his definition of *ressentiment* serve his own needs? That is, are there aspects of *ressentiment* that Nietzsche does not point out because he himself is guilty of them? Indication that Nietzsche escapes *ressentiment* may come with further consideration of the affirmative and anti-dialectical nature of the revaluation of values to follow.

The question also arises whether *ressentiment* is an essential and unavoidable aspect of Christian morality. How does Nietzsche establish his claim in light of Christianity's surpassing of the Old Testament ethic of prohibition ("Thou shalt not...") with the New Testament ethic of inclusion and acceptance ("Love thy neighbor...")? Instead he indicates that Christianity is based on pity which fosters the preservation of weakness and thus runs counter to the instinct of life for the enhancement of strength (*AC*, 7). However, Christianity need not involve a vengeful negation of life. Christianity can also be experienced as a joy in life. Thus it may be possible to argue that Nietzsche undermines some aspects of

Christianity such as its claim that the true world beyond this world is more important, but not other aspects such as its focus on love and joy.[20]

Furthermore, if we consider the revaluation of values as a re-revaluation of values, are we not considering it as a dialectic and hence in a manner that Nietzsche intends to avoid? In *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Will to Power* he criticizes dialectical thought for its *décadence* and *ressentiment* (*TI*, II, 5-7; *WP*, 432-433). For him, dialectic involves the metaphysical faith in opposite values and the supposition of a totality under which all individual instances are subsumed. According to Nietzsche, the revaluation of values is not dialectical. In *Ecce Homo* he writes:

> For the task of a *revaluation of values* more capacities may have been needed than have ever dwelt together in a single individual - above all, even contrary capacities that had to be kept from disturbing, destroying each other. An order of rank among these capacities; distance; the art of separating without setting against one another; to mix nothing, to "reconcile" nothing; a tremendous variety that is nevertheless the opposite of chaos - this was the precondition, the long, secret work and artistry of my instinct (*EH*, II, 9).

The main capacity Nietzsche describes here, the one that all others circulate around, is the capacity to resist dialectics. He wants to distinguish between different things without

---

[20] Nietzsche's characterization of his ethic of honesty and truthfulness also suggests that he is not completely beyond the influence of Christian morality. See *GS*, 357; *GM*, III, 27; *EH*, IV, 3, *WP*, 1, 3.

establishing binary oppositions. He wants to demonstrate how things relate without proposing reconciliations which obliterate the particularity and specificity of the things that are related. The revaluation of values is thus meant to be non-dialectical.

Deleuze claims that Nietzsche's philosophy is non-dialectical.[21] This is specifically the case with the revaluation of values. It opposes negation with affirmation. It is not of the same spirit as *ressentiment*. Deleuze points out the distinction between affirmation and negation in order to indicate the distinction between revaluation and dialectic.

> For the speculative element of negation, opposition or contradiction Nietzsche substitutes the practical element of difference, the object of affirmation and enjoyment... Nietzsche's "yes" is opposed to the "dialectical "no"; affirmation to dialectical negation; difference to dialectical contradiction; joy, enjoyment, to dialectical labour; lightness, dance, to dialectical responsibilities... "While every noble morality develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says No to what is 'outside', what is 'different', what is 'not itself' and *this* No is its creative deed" (GM I 10 p. 36). This is why Nietzsche presents the dialectic as the speculation of the pleb, as the way of thinking of the slave: the abstract thought of contradiction then prevails over the concrete feeling of positive difference, reaction over action, revenge and *ressentiment* take the place of

---

[21] Deleuze defines Nietzsche's philosophy (and his own) as primarily anti-Hegelian (*NP*, 8). Deleuze's analysis of Nietzsche's philosophy as affirmative non-dialectical is the subject of the entire last chapter of his book, but for the purposes of this discussion I restrict my references to his initial focus in his first chapter.

aggression (*NP*, 9-10).

The revaluation of values certainly involves the negation of established values, but it is only the secondary result of the primary affirmation of difference. The revaluation of values, rather than being a negation of a negation that produces an affirmation which will be later negated, is a matter of affirmation itself negating negations and thereby putting an end to all negation. The revaluation of values does not follow the dialectical logic of negation. Deleuze writes in terms of forces:

> The negative is not present in the essence as that from which force draws its activity: on the contrary it is a result of activity, of the existence of an active force and the affirmation of its difference. The negative is a product of existence itself: the aggression necessarily linked to an active existence, the aggression of an affirmation (*NP*, 9).

Considered as a force, the revaluation of values is not a reaction to established values but an action against them. The revaluation does not define itself derivatively with respect to established values, it affirms its difference from them and aggressively confronts them on its own terms. Action and affirmation, not reaction and negation, are primary. In Nietzsche's revaluation of values, No-saying and destroying is a part of the larger project of Yes-saying and creating, as emerges later.

However, Nietzsche also describes the revaluation of

values as the ability to "reverse perspectives" (*EH*, I, 1). If we take reversal here to mean an appeal to dialectical thought, it appears to contradict Nietzsche's attempt to escape dialectics. If we attend to Nietzsche's precise words, however, the contradiction is seen as only apparent. For him, perspectives are reversed. Values are not reversed in some sort of dialectical switch, they are revalued, which is another matter. That is, perspectives are reversed, values are revalued. By reversing perspectives, by moving from a base perspective to a noble perspective or from a negating to affirming attitude to life, values can be revalued. The same perspective or attitude that provides values to begin with cannot be the basis of their revaluation. For example, a base perspective condemns us to decadent and weak values while a noble perspective enables us to create heroic and powerful values.

Deleuze's distinction between evaluations which are more primordial and values which are the obvious signs and symptoms of evaluations is helpful in this matter (*NP*, 1-2). Evaluations are another way of speaking about perspectives or attitudes. Evaluations are reversed such that there is a movement from base evaluations to noble evaluations. Values are not reversed such that what is considered good becomes evil and what is considered evil becomes good. The reversal of evaluations leads to the revaluation of values: base

evaluations must be overcome by noble evaluations first so that the moral values of "good and evil" can be replaced with the immoral or anti-moral values of "good and bad" afterwards. Nietzsche knows he cannot simply declare a new set of values without some fundamental change in the mode of evaluation or will to power from which they derive their force. Nietzsche's entire philosophy can be seen as an attempt to reverse nihilistic modes of evaluation or will to power so that a revaluation of values can occur.

Deleuze also indicates that Nietzsche's philosophy is both critical and creative. Nietzsche writes about the creative aspect of the revaluation of values in reference to *Daybreak*:

> "There are so many dawns that have not yet glowed" - this Indian inscription marks the opening of this book. Where does its author seek that new morning, that as yet undiscovered tender red that marks the beginning of another day - ah, a whole series, a whole new world of days? In a *revaluation of values*, in a liberation from all moral values, in saying Yes to and having confidence in all that has hitherto been forbidden, despised, and damned. This Yes-saying book pours out its light, its love, its tenderness upon ever so many wicked things; it gives back to them their "soul," a good conscience, the lofty right and privilege of existence. Morality is not attacked, it is merely no longer in the picture (*EH*, D, 1).

Yet Nietzsche also writes about the critical or negative and destructive part of the revaluation of values in reference to *Beyond Good and Evil*:

> The task for the years that followed now was

> indicated as clearly as possible. After the Yes-saying part of my task had been solved, the turn had come for the No-saying, *No-doing* part: the revaluation of our values so far, the great war - conjuring up a day of decision. This included the slow search for those related to me, those who, prompted by strength, would offer me their hands for *destroying* (*EH*, B, 1).

However, Nietzsche's Yes-saying is never really "solved" or concluded when he begins his No-saying. After No-saying through the critical aspect of revaluation, he again returns to Yes-saying through the creative aspect of revaluation. In fact, the two belong together and operate simultaneously. The No-saying of his critique of morality and the Yes-saying of his attempt to create new "immoral" or anti-moral values are inseparable, they can only be separated arbitrarily and to the detriment of understanding Nietzsche's philosophy. Nietzsche's No-saying and Yes-saying are interrelated, they give meaning to each other. The notion of their interrelationship is supported by his reference to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (*Z*, II, "Of Self-Overcoming") in *Ecce Homo*:

> "And whoever wants to be a creator in good and evil, must first be an annihilator and break values. Thus the highest evil belongs to the greatest goodness: but this is - being creative" (*EH*, IV, 2).

Later Nietzsche states: "negating *and destroying* are conditions of saying Yes" (*EH*, IV, 4). The ability to say Yes and to create carries with it the ability to say No and to destroy, but destruction passes into creation.

However, despite the creative aspect of the revaluation of values, it must be remembered that Nietzsche claims he does not erect any further Christian-moral idols (*EH*, Preface, 2). Rather, he intends to undermine the foundational faith in Christian morality (D, Preface, 2).[22] Nietzsche's revaluation is meant to go "beyond good and evil" and other Christian-moral values. Through revaluation the nihilistic perspective or evaluation of life is negated and with it the condition of possibility for Christian-moral values. Yet the revaluation of values is not the double negation of dialectics. Nietzsche's negation of the negation of life, his overcoming of nihilism and *ressentiment*, comes from an affirmation of life. Ultimately, the revaluation of values seeks to return the value of what has been devalued in Christian morality. It is a movement from *décadence* and nihilistic values to noble and affirmative values. Nietzsche does not actually create values at all. Rather, he recalls classical Greek values that are considered "immoral" or anti-moral so that pre-Christian and pre-moral values become post-Christian and post-moral values. This is the role of the revaluation of values in the overcoming of nihilism.

---

[22] However, Nietzsche proposes an ethic of honesty and truthfulness which is fostered by Christian morality but becomes the foundation for its very overcoming. See *GS*, 357; *GM*, III, 27; *EH*, IV, 3; *WP*, 1, 3. See also Chapter 6 for further discussion of this theme.

CHAPTER 5. TRAGEDY

NIETZSCHE'S AESTHETIC REVALUATION OF VALUES

5.1 Art and the Revaluation of Values

In this chapter I suggest that art, specifically tragedy, is the vehicle of Nietzsche's revaluation of values and his attempt to establish a realm "beyond good and evil" or beyond Christian morality and its nihilistic evaluations of existence. For Nietzsche, the will to power and the eternal recurrence are the principles for the revaluation of values which considers life and the world in terms of unlimited becoming. Art is paradigmatic of the will to power and so it plays a decisive role in the revaluation of values. In particular, tragedy is able to express the tragic thought of the eternal recurrence which contributes to the revaluation of values. In this manner Nietzsche establishes an aesthetic and anti-moral affirmation of existence.

I have already indicated the manner in which Heidegger considers Nietzsche's philosophy to be the consummation of nihilism. However, Heidegger's interpretation in Volumes I and III of *Nietzsche* also can be used to consider Nietzsche's philosophy as the overcoming of nihilism through the revaluation of values centred on art. Heidegger criticizes as nihilistic much of what his analysis reveals about Nietzsche's aesthetics, but I use his analysis at cross purposes to his

criticism. In this chapter I appeal to Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche in order to introduce Nietzsche's notion of art in general before I examine Nietzsche's early and later notions of tragedy specifically. I use this indirect approach because insightful interpreters like Heidegger, no matter how critical they ultimately are, allow us clearer access to Nietzsche's philosophy.

Heidegger claims that the notion of value is essential to Nietzsche's philosophy. For Nietzsche, positing values is a matter of determining the "perspectives" or "conditions" of preservation and enhancement which make life possible (*WP*, 715; *N:III*, 16). In his view, "truth" is merely a valuation such that the "truth" of anything is an expression of the value we invest in it. Nietzsche claims that truth is the "estimation of value" (*WP*, 507; *N:III*, 33). Nietzsche circumvents the opposition of "real world" and "apparent world" or truth and falsity by claiming that they are valuations (*WP*, 507; *N:III*, 62). He states: "Truth is the kind of error without which a certain species of life could not live. The value for life is ultimately decisive" (*WP*, 493). Stated bluntly, truth is falsity. More precisely, "truth" is an illusion necessary for life. As part of his overcoming of nihilism, Nietzsche rejects the opposition of truth and

falsity in favour of value as the primary concern of life.[1]

Heidegger indicates that knowledge is a matter of valuation for Nietzsche. He discusses Nietzsche's notion of knowledge as the schematizing of chaos in light of our practical needs. He refers to Nietzsche's statement in *The Will to Power*: "Not to "know" but to schematize - to impose upon chaos as much regularity and form as our practical needs require" (*WP*, 515; *N:III*, 70). The order and regularity we give to the chaos of the world depends on what we value, our practical needs or our perspectives and conditions of life. This emphasizes the manner in which the estimation of value is required for human life. We need horizons to be able to live at all. Echoing his own phenomenological and hermeneutical thinking, Heidegger writes: "Forming horizons belongs to the inner essence of living beings themselves. Initially, horizon simply means setting limits to the unfolding occurrence of life with a view to stabilizing the onrushing and oppressing torrent" (*N:III*, 86). This notion of knowledge recalls Nietzsche's view about the need to give ourselves and our culture healthy boundaries, particularly as it is presented in the *Untimely Meditations* when he admires the Greeks' ability to "organize the chaos" around them in accordance with their

---

[1] When Deleuze claims that "Nietzsche snatches thought from the element of truth and falsity" he has in mind Nietzsche's focus on valuation (*NP*, xiii).

real needs (*UM*, II, 10).[2]

Heidegger attempts to define Nietzsche's notion of chaos in order to explain Nietzsche's notion of knowledge as schematizing. Heidegger refers to chaos in terms of life as a body and as bodying, the principle and character of everything that lives (*N:III*, 79). That is, chaos is the basis of all that comes into and passes out of finite existence. Chaos is ""the world" as a whole, the inexhaustible, urgent, and unmastered abundance of self-creation and self-destruction" (*N:III*, 82). Heidegger indicates that Nietzsche's notion of chaos is not empiricist or idealist. Chaos is not just a random field of phenomena which receives order only through our senses or mind. It may first appear to us as such but it really has an order of its own. Heidegger writes:

> We may thus gather that for Nietzsche "chaos" speaks as a name that does not signify some arbitrary jumble in the field of sensations, perhaps no jumble at all. Chaos is the name for bodying life, life as bodying writ large. Nor does Nietzsche mean by chaos what is tangled as such in its confusion, the unordered, arising from the removal of all order; rather, chaos is what urges, flows, and is animated, whose order is concealed, whose law we do not descry straightaway. Chaos is the name for a peculiar preliminary projection of the world as a whole and for the governance of that world (*N:III*, 80).

Chaos first appears as the illusion of confusion, then as the

---

[2] See sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.4 of Chapter 2 for a more thorough discussion of this topic in terms of physics and history.

illusion of something known or schematized, or more precisely, as valued. However, it always already has an order or law on which valuations of it are based. For Nietzsche, the will to power is the law of chaos in accordance with which we must estimate the value of chaos. Thus the will to power is both the principle of life and the world and the principle of the valuations ("truth" and "knowledge") of life and the world.

According to Heidegger, to refer to life and the world as chaos is to call attention to the becoming of life and the world. Nietzsche claims that becoming or flux rather than being or fixity is the truth of existence, but truth in the sense of the estimation of highest value. Truth, as an absolute and immobile belief about life and the world, is an illusion because life and the world themselves are becoming or in flux. Yet to claim that life and the world are becoming is not to claim a truth about them. Our "truths" about the becoming of life and the world are always only illusions, albeit necessary illusions, that enable us to exist (*N:III*, 64). Heidegger writes:

> Is it - in truth - a becoming world? Nietzsche indeed affirms this question and says that the world is - "in truth"! - a "becoming" world... Yet he not only affirms the world as a world of "becoming," he also knows that this affirmation, as an interpretation of the world, is a valuation (*N:III*, 65).

To say that life and the world are becoming is not to make a claim about the truth of life and the world, but to estimate

their value from the perspective of becoming itself. For Nietzsche, life and the world are worth more considered as becoming or superabundant creation and destruction than considered as being or stability and stasis.

Heidegger thus maintains that neither "truth" nor "knowledge" are of highest value for Nietzsche. They cannot be the means by which we estimate the value of life and the world as becoming. Instead, that evaluative role is given to art.

> Thus the thinking that as revaluation of all values strives for a new valuation also includes the positing of the highest value. If truth cannot be the highest value, that highest value must be yet above truth, that is, in the sense of the traditional concept of truth; it must be nearer and more in accordance with true beings, that is, with what becomes. The highest value is *art*, in contradistinction from knowledge and truth. It does not copy what is at hand, does not explain matters in terms of beings at hand. But art transfigures life, moves it into higher, as yet unlived, possibilities (*N:III*, 81).

The chaos and becoming that is characteristic of life and the world can only be fully experienced through art and as art: "Thus art is creative experience of what becomes, of life itself" (*N:III*, 82).

> Art, says Nietzsche, is worth more than truth. This means that it comes closer to what is actual, what becomes, to "life," than what is true, what has been fixed and immobilized. Art ventures and wins chaos, the concealed, self-overflowing, unmastered superabundance of life (*N:III*, 82).

By saying "art comes closer to what is actual" Heidegger is not saying that art is a more accurate representation of

reality but that art better embodies the becoming of life and the world. Art is most like life and the world: the overflowing and unmastered superabundance of will to power. Art not only expresses the becoming of the will to power, it is a particular and paradigmatic instance of the becoming of the will to power.[3]

Heidegger turns to *The Will to Power*, specifically Part IV of Book Three: Principles of a New Evaluation titled "The Will to Power as Art" (which is also the title of the Volume I of his *Nietzsche*), to indicate the manner in which art is related to the will to power and is involved in the revaluation of values. Heidegger intends to make clear "*why an interpretation of the nucleus of will to power must begin precisely here, with art*" (*N:I*, 67). At the beginning he outlines, following Nietzsche, the form his reflections take:

> We repeat: the being of an artist is the most perspicuous mode of life. Life is for us the most familiar form of Being. The innermost essence of Being is will to power. In the being of the artist we encounter the most perspicuous and most familiar mode of will to power. Since it is a matter of illuminating the Being of beings, mediation on art has in this regard decisive priority (*N:I*, 70).

If we consider that the will to power is the principle of life

---

[3] In Volumes I and III of *Nietzsche* Heidegger displays an unequalled sensitivity to Nietzsche's notion of art as a configuration of the will to power. This is also shown in the manner in which he develops his own analysis of art as *Ereignis* or event in terms of happening and occurrence. See the essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*.

and the world as becoming and that art is the closest expression and experience of that principle, then we can understand why Heidegger first considers art to be so decisive for the revaluation of values.

Heidegger encapsulates the essence of Nietzsche's conception of art in five statements that he derives mainly from notes 794-797 and others in *The Will to Power*. For Nietzsche, the artist gives us a privileged glimpse into the nature of existence as will to power: "The phenomenon "artist" is still the most transparent: - to see through it to the basic instincts of power, nature, etc.!" (*WP*, 769). Heidegger draws out two related statements about Nietzsche's notion of art from this note: "1. Art is the most perspicuous and familiar configuration of will to power; 2. Art must be grasped in terms of the artist" (*N:I*, 71). Yet Heidegger realizes that this focus on the artist as such does not consider art as a whole. In this regard he considers another of Nietzsche's notes: "The work of art where it appears without an artist, e.g., as body, as organization (Prussian officer corps, Jesuit order). To what extent the artist is only a preliminary stage. The world as a work of art that gives birth to itself" (*WP*, 796). This leads Heidegger to make his third statement. "3. According to the expanded concept of artist, art is the basic occurrence of all beings; to the extent that they are, beings are self-creating, created" (*N:I*,

72). Thus, like Nietzsche, Heidegger expands the notion of artist to include existence itself. For Nietzsche, existence is both artist and art work - it is self-creating and created. The artist is a paradigm of existence as artist and art works serve to show the nature of the existence as art work. Art, as an expression and embodiment of the will to power, reveals the nature of existence as art and the will to power.

Heidegger refers to both *The Birth of Tragedy* and *The Will to Power* to demonstrate that Nietzsche reserves a privileged position for art because of its "*metaphysical* activity" (*N:I*, 72). Yet Nietzsche's notion of the metaphysical activity of art opposes metaphysics considered as nihilism because the will to power which it embodies and expresses is the principle for the revaluation of values. Heidegger writes of art in terms of the will to power the revaluation of values:

> Art, thought in the broadest sense as the creative, constitutes the basic character of beings. Accordingly, art in the narrower sense is that activity in which creation emerges for itself and becomes most perspicuous; it is not merely one configuration of will to power among others but the *supreme* configuration. Will to power becomes genuinely visible in terms of art and as art. But will to power is the ground upon which all valuation in the future is to stand. It is the principle of the new valuation, as opposed to the prior one which was dominated by religion, morality, and philosophy. If will to power therefore finds its supreme configuration in art, the positing of the new relation of will to power must proceed from art. Since the new valuation is a revaluation of the prior one, however, opposition

and upheaval arise from art (*N:I*, 72).

The identification of art with the will to power and the revaluation of values means that art opposes *décadence* and nihilistic values. He states: "Our religion, morality, and philosophy are decadence forms of man. The *countermovement:* art" (*WP*, 794). In this context Heidegger proposes his fourth statement: "4. Art is the distinctive countermovement to nihilism" (*N:I*, 73). By affirming the value of this world of appearance and illusion, art counteracts the nihilism which denies this world any value in favour of another world of truth. The opposition between art and nihilism is cast in terms of the oppositions between sensuous and supersensuous, illusion and truth, becoming and being. Heidegger writes:

> Art is the will to semblance as the sensuous. But concerning such will Nietzsche says (XIV, 369): "The will to *semblance*, to illusion, to deception, to Becoming and change is deeper, more 'metaphysical,' than the will to *truth*, to reality, to Being." The true is meant here in Plato's sense, as being in itself, the Ideas, the supersensuous. The will to the sensuous world and to its richness is for Nietzsche, on the contrary, the will to what "metaphysics" seeks. Hence the will to the sensuous is metaphysical. That metaphysical will is actual in art (*N:I*, 74).

Thus, if art is considered metaphysically at all, it must be considered as a metaphysical activity of the will to power which revalues previous Platonic metaphysics. Rather than a metaphysics of truth and Being which posits a supersensuous world, Nietzsche proposes a metaphysics of illusion and

Becoming or will to power which attends only to the sensuous world. Art is the vehicle of this metaphysics of will to power and the revaluation of values.

One might expect that when Nietzsche claims "art is closer to what is actual" or "more `metaphysical'" he means art is more true. In a sense this is correct, but it is not so if by truth we have in mind supersensuous or otherworldly truth. Art is opposed to this kind of truth because it attends to the sensuous world. Heidegger clarifies this point:

> "Will to truth" here (and with Nietzsche always) means the will to the "true world" in the sense of Plato and Christianity, the will to supersensuous, to being itself. The will to such "true beings" is in truth a no-saying to our present world, precisely the one in which art is at home. Because this world is the genuinely real and only true world, Nietzsche can declare with respect to the relation of art and truth that "art is *worth more* than truth" (WM, 853, section IV). That is to say, the sensuous stands in a higher place and *is* more genuine than the supersensuous. In this regard Nietzsche says, "We have art in order *not to perish from the truth*" (WM, 822) (*N:I*, 74).

In this context Heidegger's fifth statement echoes Nietzsche's estimation of the value of art: "5. Art is worth more than the truth" (*N:I*, 75). Again, for Nietzsche, it is a matter of value rather than truth - art is not more true but more valuable for life than morality, religion and philosophy. He indicates that art opposes decadence and nihilistic values by stating that art saves us from truth. Art, which remains in this sensuous world, makes life possible for us by creating

beautiful illusions through which we can understand the nature of existence as becoming or will to power. Given that life in this sensuous world of becoming or will to power is the principle for the revaluation of values, art is therefore worth more than the truth.

According to Heidegger, what characterizes art in general characterizes "the grand style" of tragedy in particular. The grand style embodies and expresses the lawfulness of chaos and what is eternal in ceaseless becoming. Heidegger quotes Nietzsche's statement: "The grand style consists in contempt for trivial and brief beauty; it is a sense for what is rare and what lasts long (XIV, 145)" (*N:I*, 125). He also quotes from the following passage from *The Will to Power*:

> A sense for and delight in *nuances* (-the real mark of modernity), in that which is *not* general, runs counter to the drive that delights and excels in grasping the *typical*: like the Greek taste of the best period. There is an overpowering of the fullness of life in it; *measure* becomes master; at bottom there is the *calm* of the strong soul that moves slowly and feels repugnance toward what is too lively. The general rule, the law, is *honoured* and *emphasized*: the exception, conversely, is set aside, the nuance obliterated (*WP*, 819).

Art in the grand style expresses through particularized exceptions and nuances of art works the general rule or law of existence, but in doing so art nullifies the exceptions and nuances which give the general rule or law expression. The grand style expresses the essence that underlies all passing phenomena in this sensuous world, but the essence is the

ceaseless change of existence, unlimited becoming, or in other words, the will to power. The grand style expresses the unhistorical or suprahistorical which underlies the historical but is nonetheless historical itself. The grand style seeks that which is responsible for Becoming and history - the will to power. For Nietzsche, the general rule or law of existence is will to power. Art, itself an emblematic embodiment of will to power, expresses the will to power underlying all existence.

Heidegger maintains that the grand style is associated with the classical or tragic style as opposed to the romantic or pessimistic style.

> What Nietzsche calls the grand style is most closely approximated by the rigorous style, the classical style: "The classical style represents essentially such tranquillity, simplification, abbreviation, concentration - in the classical type the *supreme feeling of power* is concentrated. Slow to react: a tremendous consciousness, no feeling of struggle" (WM, 799) (*N:I*, 125).

In other words, the grand style is characterized by the calm mastery of chaos or becoming rather than the trembling weakness before it. The grand style exhibits repose throughout striving and discipline amid abundance.

> Art in the grand style is the simple tranquillity resulting from the protective mastery of the supreme plenitude of life. To it belongs the original liberation of life, but one which is restrained; to it belongs the most terrific opposition, but in the unity of the simple; to it belongs the fullness of growth, but with the long endurance of rare things (*N:I*, 126).

The grand style can maintain these tensions because it arises from a feeling of power and expresses the feeling of power. In this sense it is an expression of measure and general rule, or more precisely, the order of rank. Heidegger writes:

> The grand style is the highest feeling of power. From that it is clear that if art is a configuration of will to power, then "art" here is always grasped in its highest essential nature. The word "art" does not designate the concept of mere eventuality; it is a concept of rank (*N:I*, 125).

The grand style affirms the will to power and by doing so it establishes a measure or standard with which we can evaluate particular perspectives or configurations of the will to power. The grand style, as an embodiment of will to power, provides us with an order of rank for values. The grand style exhibits what is so decisive about art. In terms of his own concerns, Heidegger states: "Art is not just one among a number of items, activities one engages in and enjoys now and then; art places the whole of Dasein in decision and keeps it there" (*N:I*, 125).

Heidegger holds, with Nietzsche, that the establishment of the decisive order of rank through the grand style befits art in its role as the countermovement to nihilism. He writes:

> But art as countermovement to nihilism is to lay the groundwork for establishment of new standards and values; it is therefore to be rank, distinction, and decision. If art has its proper essence in the grand style, this now means that measure and law are confirmed only in the subjugation and containment of chaos and the rapturous. Such is demanded of the grand style as

> the condition of its own possibility. Accordingly, the physiology of art is the basic condition for art's being able to be a creative countermovement (*N:I*, 126).

The grand style shows that the manner in which art is a countermovement to nihilism is through its physiology or its role as the "stimulant of life" (*N:I*, 130). However, in addition to art's characterization in terms of countermovement and physiology, its characteristics of rapture and metaphysics must also be acknowledged.

> Where art is to be grasped in its supreme form, in terms of the grand style, we must reach back into the most original states of embodying life, into physiology. Art as countermovement to nihilism and art as state of rapture, as object of physiology ("physics" in the broadest sense) and as object of metaphysics - these aspects of art include rather than exclude one another (*N:I*, 126).

Even in its rapturous nature, the grand style of art is the countermovement to the nihilism which posits another supersensuous world, because its rapture is a sublime tranquillity amid changing phenomena which does not take us beyond the sensuous world. Even in its metaphysical nature, art remains physiological, because its metaphysics is physiology. Art's physiology also has the quality of a metaphysics. The physiological-metaphysical principle of art is the will to power. Art overcomes nihilism as long as it embodies and expresses the physiology and metaphysics of the will to power which stimulates life. Art overcomes nihilism because its physiological-metaphysical principle of the will

to power overcomes Christian morality which negates life. Since art embodies the physiological-metaphysical principle of the will to power, it overcomes nihilistic Christian-moral values through the revaluation of values.

5.2 Tragedy in Nietzsche's Philosophy

Now that the wider context of Nietzsche's aesthetics is established through Heidegger's interpretation, attention can be turned to Nietzsche's own notion of tragedy and the manner in which it contributes to the expression and experience of the principle for the revaluation of values. So much of Nietzsche's philosophy, especially that which concerns the inquiry into and critique of morality, is a preparation and education for the rebirth of tragedy from an aesthetic and anti-moral perspective. Therefore, it is necessary to outline the manner in which tragedy is an integral part of Nietzsche's overcoming of nihilism and revaluation of values which results from his prior inquiry into and critique of the origins of morality.

Nietzsche maintains an interest in tragedy throughout his philosophy, even though his focus changes at different periods of his work. In *The Birth of Tragedy* and the *Untimely Meditations* he initially expresses great enthusiasm for the rebirth of tragedy and its role in the revitalization and rejuvenation of culture. The first stage of his work (1872-

1876) is the focus of section 5.3 of this chapter. In *Human, All Too Human* and *Daybreak* Nietzsche turns away from tragedy and begins to attend to the inquiry into and critique of the origins of morality because he realizes much preparatory work must be done if there is to be a rebirth of tragedy. The second stage of his work (1878-1882) is considered in Chapters 2-4. In *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche again returns to tragedy as an important theme in his philosophy as it relates to notions of the will to power and the eternal recurrence. *Ecce Homo* and various notes from *The Will to Power* demonstrate that tragedy is never far from his consideration of the overcoming of nihilism through the revaluation of values. The third stage of his work (1882-1888) is the focus of section 5.4 of this chapter.

5.3 Nietzsche's Early Notion of Tragedy

In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche envisions tragedy in terms of the dynamic interrelation between the Greek gods Apollo and Dionysus. He recalls how the Greeks considered in opposition the Apollinian drive to create plastic arts like sculpture and painting and the Dionysian drive associated with nonimagistic arts like music and dance. For him, these two divine drives and their arts are brought together in tragedy (*BT*, 1). Nietzsche discusses the Apollinian and Dionysian aspects of tragedy in regards to various pairs of terms, most

notably, dreams-intoxication and individuation-unity. In *The Birth of Tragedy* as well as other works he uses these distinctions to indicate tragedy's value for life and the manner in which it opposes Christian morality.

5.3.1 Apollo and Dionysus

In order to understand the tension between the Apollinian and Dionysian tendencies Nietzsche introduces the analogy of "the separate art worlds of *dreams* and *intoxication*" (*BT*, 1). Apollo, the god of dreams, is responsible for the plastic arts: "The beautiful illusion of the dream worlds, in the creation of which every man is truly an artist, is the prerequisite of all plastic art" (*BT*, 1). However, Nietzsche goes further to say that, in so far as we are dreamers and artists, that is to say, creators of illusory worlds, Apollo rules over human activity in general. This means that we exist in the realm of illusions or mere appearances. Yet, even as dreamers and artists, we have the sensation that we are experiencing mere appearances (*BT*, 1). This sensation is heightened in certain people.

> Philosophical men even have a presentiment that the reality in which we live and have our being is also mere appearance, and that another, quite different reality lies beneath it. Schopenhauer actually indicates as the criterion of philosophical ability the occasional ability to view men and things as mere phantoms or dream images. Thus the aesthetically sensitive man stands in the same relation to the reality of dreams as the

> philosopher does to the reality of existence; he is a close and willing observer, for these images *afford him an interpretation* of life, and by reflecting on these processes he trains himself for life (BT, 1).

Thus, for Nietzsche, philosophical and aesthetic training allows us to recognize the reality of art and life as illusory or merely apparent. Art, as with dreams, allows the sensitive interpreter access to a further reality beyond the illusions presented. The notion that Apollinian illusions provide insight into the reality of Dionysian unity such that dreams give way to intoxication is central to Nietzsche's notion of tragedy.

In the context of the dream-intoxication distinction, Nietzsche also discusses the opposition of Apollo and Dionysus in terms of individuation and recognition of unity of existence. The Apollinian is concerned with creating individuated illusions or art works: "we might call Apollo himself the glorious divine image of the *principium individuationis*, through whose gestures and eyes all the joy and wisdom of "illusion," together with its beauty, speak to us" (*BT*, 1). Yet this Apollinian principle of individuation is broken by the Dionysian aspect when the sober dreaming of Apollo is disrupted by the intoxicating effects of Dionysus and the illusory art works allow glimpses into the true nature of existence as a unity.

> Under the charm of the Dionysian not only is the

> union between man and man reaffirmed, but nature which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man... Now with the gospel of universal harmony, each one feels himself not only united, reconciled, and fused with his neighbour, but as one with him, as if the veil of *maya* had been torn aside and were now merely fluttering in tatters before the mysterious primordial unity (*BT*, 1).

Thus the Apollinian drive of art produces individuated art works but these allow for Dionysian glimpses into the primordial unity of all life which challenges any attempts at complete individuation. At the same time, the primordial unity of all life needs to find expression in individuated art works if we are to ever glimpse it.

This dynamic interrelationship or tension between individuation and unity is better seen in the figure of the artist. Compared to the Apollinian artist working alone to create works of art outside and other to himself, the Dionysian artist affirms a universal identity and becomes the work of art himself. Nietzsche writes:

> In song and in dance man expresses himself as a member of a higher community; he has forgotten how to walk and speak and is on the way to flying into the air, dancing... He is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art: in these paroxysms of intoxication the artistic power of all nature reveals itself to the highest gratification of the primordial unity (*BT*, 1).

Whereas the Apollinian represents the height of subjectivity, the Dionysian represents the obliteration and overcoming of subjectivity. There is no subjective "I" since it is

surrendered to the primordial unity of life (*BT*, 5). Nietzsche explicitly distances himself from Schopenhauer's use of a subjective-objective criterion in measuring art works, because, in his view, the subject has no primary place in the art of tragedy (*BT*, 5). He states: "Insofar as the subject is the artist however, he has already been released from his individual will, and has become, as it were, the medium through which the one true existent subject celebrates his release in appearance" (*BT*, 5). The dancer and the dance cannot be isolated from each other: the dancer is created by the dance just as there can be no dance without the dancer. In this regard Nietzsche's notion of art, especially tragedy, can be considered as the overcoming of subject-centred philosophy.

For Nietzsche, then, the driving force of tragedy is the tension between the Apollinian tendency towards illusory and subjective individuation and the Dionysian recognition of the true unity which underlies all individuations. This is seen as the tension between the need of music to find expression in particular appearances and the requirement that music express an essence beyond them. It can be identified in the united roles of musician and lyricist and in terms of the functioning and freezing of the will. In Nietzsche's view, to remain art, music must appear as will without actually being will and the lyricist must use emotive images to express the longing of life while existing in a state of calm contemplation (*BT*, 6).

"This is the phenomenon of the lyricist: as Apollinian genius he interprets music through the image of the will, while he himself, completely released from the greed of the will, is the pure, undimmed eye of the sun" (*BT*, 6). The musician-lyricist is both subjective and objective in the sense that he is both part of the striving of life and above the striving of life. Another way of putting this is to say that, paradoxically, tragic art expresses the striving of all life but to do so it expresses itself in individuated beautiful illusions as if it were beyond such striving. Tragedy expresses the teeming nature of life, but each time it expresses life in a particular art work it stills life. Tragedy, like the constancy of the sun, is thus a calm in the face of the horror or absurdity of life.

According to Nietzsche, tragedy has a distinct value for life. Through tragedy we can be aware of the tragic nature of existence but still affirm existence. Tragedy produces beautiful illusions that allow us to glimpse the tragic unity of existence in such a manner that we can contemplate it without being consumed by it. This is its value. Tragedy is necessarily illusory, but this is not to say that it should be rejected as valueless, because it is precisely its illusory character which is its value for life. Nietzsche's notion of art is implied in his statement: "Truth is a kind of error without which a certain species of life could not live. The

value for *life* is ultimately decisive" (*WP*, 493). He writes:

> Here, when the danger to his will is greatest, *art* approaches a saving sorceress, expert at healing. She alone knows how to turn these nauseous thoughts about the horror or absurdity of existence into notions with which one can live: these are the *sublime* as the artistic taming of the horrible, and the *comic* as the artistic discharge of the nausea of absurdity (*BT*, 7).

Here we can begin to understand what Nietzsche means when he claims that "it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world is *eternally justified*" (*BT*, 5).[4]

For Nietzsche, then, the value of tragedy is provided by both artistic deities, each working in tension and tandem with each other to provide the opportunity for philosophically and aesthetically sensitive people to glimpse the tragic unity of existence. He writes:

> I see Apollo as the transfiguring genius of the *principium individuationis* through which alone the redemption in illusion is truly to be obtained; while by the mystical triumphant cry of Dionysus the spell of individuation is broken, and the way lies open to the Mother of Being, to the innermost heart of things (*BT*, 16).

However, Nietzsche claims that, while the Apollinian element is important in enabling us to identify and sympathize with the characters, the Dionysian element is the most central and crucial to tragedy.

---

[4] I discuss this theme in section 5.3.3 through the consideration of tragedy as aesthetic and anti-moral and further in sections 5.4.1 and 5.4.2 through the consideration of tragedy's opposition and overcoming of Christian morality defined as nihilism.

> In the total effect of tragedy, the Dionysian predominates once again. Tragedy closes with a sound which could never come from the realm of Apollinian art. And thus the Apollinian illusion reveals itself as what it really is - the veiling during the performance of the tragedy of the real Dionysian effect; but the latter is so powerful that it ends by forcing the Apollinian drama itself into a sphere where it begins to speak with Dionysian wisdom and even denies itself and its Apollinian visibility. Thus the intricate relation of the Apollinian and the Dionysian in tragedy may really be symbolized by a fraternal union of the two deities: Dionysus speaks the language of Apollo; and Apollo, finally the language of Dionysus; and so the highest goal of tragedy and of all art is attained (*BT*, 21).

Nietzsche states: "The *tragic myth* is to be understood only as a symbolization of Dionysian wisdom through Apollinian artifices" (*BT*, 22). Only the Dionysian can make sense of the annihilation of individuality. In the strictly Apollinian realm, the annihilation of individual phenomena is always terrible, but in the Dionysian realm their annihilation is joyful because it receives its significance from the unity of existence (*BT*, 16). In Apollinian art beauty covers over the horrors of life by glorifying phenomena, but in Dionysian art beauty is the expression of the change of phenomena within the larger law and order of existence (*BT*, 16). Thus Nietzsche writes of the Dionysian element of tragedy:

> Dionysian art, too, wishes to convince us of the eternal joy of existence: only we are to seek this joy not in phenomenon, but behind them. We are to recognize that all that comes into being must be ready for a sorrowful end; we are forced to look into the terrors of the individual existence - yet we are not to become rigid with fear: a

> metaphysical comfort tears us momentarily from the bustle of changing figures. We are really for a *brief moment primordial being* itself, feeling its raging desire for existence and joy in existence; the struggle, the pain, the destruction of phenomena, now appear necessary to us, in view of the excess of countless forms of existence which *force and push one another into life*, in view of the exuberant fertility of the universal will. We are pierced by the maddening sting of these pains just when we have become, as it were, one with the infinite primordial joy in existence, and when we anticipate, *in* Dionysian ecstasy, the indestructibility and eternity of this joy. In spite of fear and pity, we are the happy living beings, not as individuals, but as the *one* living being, with whose creative joy we are united (*BT*, 17).

Nietzsche's analysis of tragedy focuses on joyfulness towards the richness of life which comes and passes away, not fear and pity and the catharsis achieved through them.

5.3.2 Tragedy as Anti-Moral

In Nietzsche's view, we understand nothing of tragedy if we see it as a medium for morality which we devise for our own human enhancement. Rather, in tragedy we must see ourselves as art works or artistic images and projections of existence.

> For to our humiliation *and* exultation, one thing above all must be clear to us. The entire comedy of art is neither performed for our betterment or education nor are we the true authors of this art world. On the contrary, we may assume that we are merely images and artistic projections for the true author, and that we have our highest dignity in our significance as works of art - for it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are *eternally justified*... Thus all our knowledge of art is basically quite illusory, because as knowing beings we are not one and identical with

> that being which, as the sole author and spectator of this comedy of art, prepares a perpetual entertainment for itself. Only insofar as the genius in the act of artistic creation coalesces with this primordial artist of the world, does he know anything of the eternal essence of art (*BT*, 5).

As the orgiastic dance forms the dancer, we are merely the products of the play of existence which does not necessarily serve our purposes. The recognition of the unity of existence that tragedy affords us involves our awareness that we are part of the unity of existence and that we do not ourselves unify existence. Only when we recognize ourselves as art works, created by existence and creating ourselves, will we understand the essence of art most clearly presented by tragedy. In this respect he refers to the transfiguring capacity of tragedy.

> That life is really so tragic would least of all explain the origin of an art form - assuming that art is not merely imitation of the reality of nature but rather a metaphysical supplement of the reality of nature, placed beside it for its overcoming. The tragic myth, too, insofar as it belongs to art at all, participates fully in this metaphysical intention of art to transfigure. But what does it transfigure when it presents the world of appearance in the image of the suffering hero? Least of all the "reality" of this world of appearance, for it says to us: "Look there! Look closely! This is your life, this is the hand on the clock of your existence"
> (*BT*, 24).

For Nietzsche, the unity which tragedy allows us to glimpse aids our ability to place ourselves within the artistry of existence and give ourselves an artistic existence. This is

tragic transfiguration.

Nietzsche emphasizes the aesthetic aspect of tragic transfiguration in order to distance it from Christian-moral interpretations. He suggests that we should seek pleasure from tragedy in the purely aesthetic realm instead of the moral realm (*BT*, 24). He repeats his claim that "existence and the world seem justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon" (*BT*, 24). That is, we must express the nature of existence in art works and see existence as artist and art work because only in this sense will we consider existence to be justified or meaningful and valuable in its own right as creative and created. Tragedy is the basis of Nietzsche's "metaphysics of art" (*BT*, 24). In this sense we can start to understand the manner in which Nietzsche envisions art, specifically tragedy, as the countermovement to nihilistic Christian morality and the principle for the revaluation of values. Nietzsche establishes an aesthetic and anti-moral perspective with regards to existence.

5.4 Nietzsche's Later Notion of Tragedy

In following the movement from Nietzsche's early notion and later notion of tragedy it must be remembered that between them lies much of his philosophy on the question of ethics. There is however, much overlap among the three stages - tragedy_1, overcoming morality, tragedy_2 - in that his notion

of tragedy in his early work orients his overcoming of morality and his notion of tragedy in his later work is prepared by the overcoming of morality. Nietzsche's notion of tragedy remains fairly consistent, though he emphasizes certain aspects of it depending on his aim at the time. However, in general and especially in his later work, he considers tragedy as the opposition to and the overcoming of Christian morality defined as nihilism. He shows this through his sharp distinction between the figures of Dionysus and the "Crucified" Christ.

5.4.1 Dionysus versus the "Crucified"

While in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche considers tragedy as embodying a tension between its Apollinian and Dionysian elements, the Dionysian is primary nonetheless. He sees the Apollinian creation of individual characters with which we can identify and sympathize as necessary to tragedy, but he sees the Dionysian music which gives the tragic myth its force as the basic element of tragedy. In some of Nietzsche's later work the focus on the tension between the Apollinian and the Dionysian remains as before. In a note from *The Will to Power* reminiscent of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche writes:

> *Apollinian-Dionysian.*- There are two conditions in which art appears in man like a force of nature and disposes of him whether he will or no: as the compulsion to have visions and as a compulsion to an orgiastic state. Both conditions

> are rehearsed in ordinary life, too, but weaker; in dreams and intoxication (*WP*, 798).

Here the interplay of Apollinian and Dionysian elements not only characterizes the art of tragedy but also the art of existence. They are the driving force of nature. Nietzsche also retains the definition of tragedy as the competing drives to individuation and to unity. He writes:

> The word "Dionysian" means: an urge to unity, a reaching out beyond personality, the everyday, society, reality, across the abyss of transitoriness: a passionate-painful overflowing into darker, fuller, more floating states; an ecstatic affirmation of the total character of life as that which remains the same, just as powerful, just as blissful, through all change; the great pantheistic sharing of joy and sorrow that sanctifies and calls good even the most terrible and questionable qualities of life; the eternal will to procreation, to fruitfulness, to recurrence; the feeling of the necessary unity of creation and destruction.[5]
>
> The word "Apollinian" means: the urge to perfect self-sufficiency, to the typical "individual," to all that simplifies, distinguishes, makes strong, clear, unambiguous, typical: freedom under the law (*WP*, 1050).

However, in Nietzsche's later work generally the Apollonian begins to disappear and the range of the Dionysian increases to include the characteristics of both. Tragedy becomes almost exclusively the domain of Dionysus. Nietzsche even begins to call himself "a disciple of the philosopher Dionysus" (*EH*,

---

[5] The identification of the Dionysian element of tragedy with the will to life through procreation, the eternal recurrence and the unity of creation and destruction becomes clear later in the discussion of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

Preface, 2; *BT*, AS, 4). For these reasons the following discussion of Nietzsche's later notion of tragedy focuses on Dionysus.

Nietzsche's equation of the aesthetic and the anti-moral, his strict opposition of art and morality, which was initially hinted at throughout *The Birth of Tragedy*, gains an explicit formulation when he returns to it 14 years later to add a new preface to the book.

> Perhaps the depth of this *antimoral* propensity is best inferred from the careful and hostile silence with which Christianity is treated throughout the whole book - Christianity as the most prodigal elaboration of the moral theme to which humanity has ever been subjected. In truth, nothing could be more opposed to the purely aesthetic interpretation and justification of the world which are taught in this book than the Christian teaching, which is, and wants to be, *only* moral and which relegates art, *every* art, to the realm of *lies*; with its absolute standards, beginning with the truthfulness of God, it negates, judges, and damns art. Behind this mode of thought and valuation, which must be hostile to art if it is at all genuine, I never fail to sense a hostility to life - a furious, vengeful antipathy to life itself: for all of life is based on semblance, art, deception, points of view, and the necessity of perspectives and error (*BT*, AS, 5).

In light of Nietzsche's later work, the distance between tragedy and Christian-moral interpretations increases even further. The Apollinian-Dionysian distinction is replaced by the Dionysian-Christian distinction. Nietzsche pits Dionysus against Christ and he considers this opposition as the key to understanding his philosophy and his persona: "Have I been

understood? - *Dionysus versus the Crucified*" (*EH*, IV, 9).

Nietzsche embellishes this opposition in *The Will to Power*.

> Dionysus versus the "Crucified": there you have the antithesis. It is not a difference in regard to their martyrdom - it is a difference in the meaning of it. Life itself, its eternal fruitfulness and recurrence, creates torment, destruction, the will to annihilation. In the other case, suffering - the "Crucified as the innocent one" - counts as an objection to this life, as a formula for its condemnation.- One will see that the problem is that of the meaning of suffering: whether a Christian meaning or a tragic meaning. In the former case, it was supposed to be the path to a holy existence; in the latter case, being is counted as *holy enough* to justify even a monstrous amount of suffering. The tragic man affirms even the harshest suffering: he is sufficiently strong, rich, and capable of deifying to do so. The Christian denies even the happiest lot on earth: he is sufficiently weak, poor, disinherited to suffer from life in whatever form he meets it. The god on the cross is a curse on life, a signpost to seek redemption from; Dionysus cut to pieces is a *promise* of life: it will be eternally reborn and return again from destruction (*WP*, 1052).

Nietzsche's opposition of Dionysus and Christ in terms of the two meanings of suffering makes use of the distinction between the classical or tragic evaluation of existence and the romantic or pessimistic evaluation of existence which he develops throughout his philosophy. The Christian-moral perspective is associated with romanticism while tragedy is associated with classicism. Nietzsche's standard of evaluating art - "Is art a consequence of *dissatisfaction with reality*? Or an expression of *gratitude for happiness enjoyed*?" and "has hunger or superabundance become creative here?" (*WP*, 845-846)

- are taken as standards for evaluating one's perspective on existence.

For Nietzsche, the evaluation of art in terms of one's perspective on existence and the evaluation of one's perspectives on existence in terms of art becomes focused on the question of what is considered beautiful. He considers the various manners in which the term "beautiful" is used in order to determine the type of values they betray. He suggests that different art works will be created and called beautiful and hence different evaluations of existence will be expressed, depending on whether the perspective comes from a feeling of power or weakness.

> *The tragic artist.* - It is a question of *strength* (of an individual or a people), *whether* and *where* the judgement "beautiful" is applied. The feeling of plenitude, of *dammed-up strength* (which permits one to meet with courage and good-humour much that makes the weakling *shudder*) - the feeling of *power* applies the judgement "beautiful" even to things and conditions that the instinct for impotence could only find *hateful* and "ugly." The nose for what we could still barely deal with if it confronted us in the flesh - as danger, problem, temptation - this determines even our aesthetic Yes. ("That is beautiful" is an *affirmation*.)
>
> From this it appears that, broadly speaking, a *preference for questionable and terrifying things* is a symptom of *strength*; while a taste for the *pretty and dainty* belongs to the weak and delicate. *Pleasure* in tragedy characterizes *strong* ages and natures: their *non plus ultra* is perhaps the *divina commedia*. It is the *heroic* spirits who say Yes to themselves in tragic cruelty: they are hard enough to experience suffering as a *pleasure*.
>
> Supposing, on the other hand, that the weak desire to enjoy an art that is not meant for them; what would they do to make tragedy palatable for

themselves? They would interpret *their own value feelings* into it; e.g., the "triumph of the moral world-order" or the doctrine of the "worthlessness of existence" or the invitation to "resignation" (- or half-medicinal, half-moral discharges of affects a la Aristotle). Finally: the *art of the terrifying*, in so far as it excites the nerves, can be esteemed by the weak and exhausted as a stimulus: that, for example, is the reason Wagnerian art is esteemed today. It is a sign of one's *feeling of power and well-being* how far one can acknowledge the terrifying and questionable character of things; and *whether* one needs some sort of "solution" at the end.

This type of *artists' pessimism* is precisely the *opposite of that religio-moral pessimism* that suffers from the "corruption" of man and the riddle of existence - and by all means craves a solution, or at least a hope for a solution. The suffering, desperate, self-mistrustful, in a word the sick, have at all times had the need of entrancing *visions* to endure life (*this* is the origin of the concept "blessedness"). A related case: the artists of decadence, who fundamentally have a *nihilistic* attitude toward life, take *refuge* in the *beauty of form* - in those *select* things in which nature has become perfect, in which she is indifferently *great* and *beautiful* - (- "Love of beauty" can therefore be something other than the *ability* to *see* the beautiful, *create* the beautiful; it can be an expression of the very *inability* to do so.)

Those imposing artists who let a *harmony* sound forth from every conflict are those who bestow upon things their own power and self-redemption: they express their innermost experience in the symbolism of every work of art they produce - their creativity is gratitude for their existence.

The *profundity of the tragic artist* lies in this, that his aesthetic instinct surveys the more remote consequences, that he does not halt shortsightedly at what is closest at hand, that he affirms the *large-scale economy* which justifies the *terrifying*, the *evil*, the *questionable* - and more than merely justifies them (*WP*, 852).

When the term "beautiful" is used in the context of tragedy, it becomes a strong affirmation of the whole of existence,

especially that which is terrifying and questionable. However, when the term "beautiful" is used solely to describe what is delicate or the terrifying and questionable is given a moral interpretation which promotes the resignation from existence, it is a symptom of weakness. These two uses of the aesthetic term "beautiful" are emblematic of the difference between strong or tragic pessimism and weak or Christian-moral pessimism. Moreover, aesthetics becomes the basis of the evaluation of existence and the evaluation of evaluations of existence.

According to Nietzsche, tragedy properly comes from a feeling of power. The tragic artist must have the strength to give all aspects of existence a unity without necessitating a solution beyond existence itself. The justification that tragedy offers, while it expresses the law of becoming and change in the sensuous world (the will to power), is itself of the sensuous world. In this sense tragedy is opposed to weak and nihilistic Christian morality which posits an otherworldly solution and justification beyond this sensuous world.

5.4.2 Tragedy versus Nihilism

Nietzsche considers tragedy as the overcoming of nihilism by opposing the tragic attitude to the Christian-moral attitude. As noted earlier, he defines Christian morality as nihilism. In a later note from *The Will to Power*, similar to

his view in *The Birth of Tragedy*, he distinguishes tragedy from any moral interpretation in order to demonstrate that its stimulation of life opposes the nihilistic denial and decline of life.

> *What is tragic?* - On repeated occasions I have laid my finger on Aristotle's great misunderstanding in believing the tragic affects to be two *depressive* affects, terror and pity. If he were right, tragedy would be an art dangerous to life: one would have to warn against it as notorious and a public danger. Art, in other cases the great stimulant of life, would here, in the service of a declining movement and as it were the handmaid of pessimism, become *harmful to health*... Tragedy would then signify a process of disintegration: the instinct for life destroying itself through the instinct for art. Christianity, nihilism, tragic art, physiological decadence - these would go hand in hand, come into prominence at the same time, assist one another forward - *downward* -Tragedy would be a symptom of decline (*WP*, 851).

In an earlier note Nietzsche also emphasizes that tragedy has nothing to do with Christian-moral interpretations which see tragedy as the basis for resignation from this world. Rather, it is meant to be a stimulant to life in this world. If and when tragedy does become mistakenly associated with Christian morality, then it must be considered as a sign of decline and disintegration.

> I have presented such terrible images to knowledge that any "Epicurean delight" is out of the question. Only Dionysian joy is sufficient: I have been the first to discover the tragic. The Greeks, thanks to their moralistic superficiality, misunderstood it. Even resignation is not a lesson of tragedy, but a misunderstanding of it! Yearning for nothingness is a denial of the tragic wisdom, its opposite! (*WP*, 1029).

Nietzsche also distances himself from Schopenhauer's philosophy of pessimism: "At the same time I grasped that my instinct went into the opposite direction from Schopenhauer's: toward a *justification of life*, even at its most terrible, ambiguous, and mendacious; for this I had the formula *"Dionysian"* (*WP*, 1005).

Nietzsche attempts to make clear that Dionysian tragedy and its aesthetic justification of all aspects of existence is to be distinguished from Christian morality and its nihilistic justification on the basis of another world. For Nietzsche, art is the opposite of any philosophy which posits supersensuous values: "In the main, I agree more with the artists than with any philosopher hitherto: they have not lost the scent of life, they have loved the things of "this world" - they have loved their senses" (*WP*, 820). Against the claim that there is a real world and an apparent world, which is central to Christian morality, Nietzsche claims that the apparent world is the real world such that there is only this sensuous world of illusions. Yet, rather than judge this world false from the standpoint of the truth of another world, as Christian morality does, Nietzsche claims that illusions are the very condition of possibility for life. In this manner he opposes nihilism which brings about resignation from this sensuous world and leaves us with nothing. To Nietzsche, art is the countermovement to nihilism because it remains focused

on this sensuous world of illusions.

With respect to art, Nietzsche focuses on the value of illusions in a particular manner. In a note from *The Will to Power*, considered as an early draft for the Preface to the new edition of *The Birth of Tragedy* (*WP*, 853ff), he writes:

> The conception of the work that one encounters in the background of this book is singularly gloomy and unpleasant: no type of pessimism known hitherto seems to have attained to this degree of malevolence. The antithesis of a real and an apparent world is lacking here: there is only one world, and this is false, cruel, contradictory, seductive, without meaning - A world thus constituted is the real world. We have need of lies in order to live - That lies are necessary in order to live is itself part of the terrifying and questionable character of existence.
>
> Metaphysics, morality, religion, science - in this book these things merit consideration only as various forms of lies: with their help one can have faith in life. "Life ought to inspire confidence": the task thus imposed is tremendous. To solve it, man must be a liar by nature, he must be above all an artist. And he is one: metaphysics, religion, morality, science - all of them only products of his will to art, to lie, to flight from "truth," to negation of "truth." This ability itself, thanks to which he violates reality by means of lies, this artistic ability of man par excellence - he has in common with everything that is. He himself is after all a piece of reality, truth, nature: how should he not also be a piece of genius in lying!
>
> That the character of existence is to be misunderstood -profoundest and supreme secret motive behind all that is virtue, science, piety, artistry. Never to see many things, to see many things falsely, to imagine many things: oh how shrewd one still is in circumstances in which one is furthest from thinking oneself shrewd! Love, enthusiasm, "God" - So many subtleties of ultimate self-deception, so many seductions to life, so much faith in life! In those moments in which man was deceived, in which he duped himself, in which he believes in life: oh how enraptured he feels! What

> delight! What a feeling of power! How much artists' triumph in the feeling of power! - Man has once again become master of "material" - master of truth! - And whenever man rejoices, he is always the same in his rejoicing: he rejoices as an artist, enjoys himself as power, he enjoys the lie as his form of power (*WP*, 853, I).

Art is opposed to metaphysics, morality, religion and science. More precisely, art subsumes all of them under itself as so many aspects of the artistry (deception and illusion) of existence. All human activity is art considered as the will to deception and illusion which makes human life possible. Existence itself is art in this sense. For Nietzsche, the claim that the will to deception and illusion underlies existence is not nihilistic. Rather, the supposition of another true world is nihilistic. Art as the creation of lies in the realm of illusions overcomes nihilism as the misguided search for absolute truth. Referring to *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche writes:

> One will see that in this book pessimism, or to speak more clearly, nihilism, counts as "truth." But truth does not count as the supreme value, even less as the supreme power. The will to appearance, to illusion, to deception, to becoming and change (to objectified deception) here counts as more profound, primeval, "metaphysical" than the will to truth, to reality, to mere appearance: - the last is itself merely a form of the will to illusion (*WP*, 853, III).

Paradoxically, truth is lie and lie is truth. More precisely, lies are more valuable than truth. For Nietzsche, art is a matter of creating lies that are more valuable than what is

thought to be true (metaphysics, morality, religion and science). Yet, a lie can be more or less valuable, depending on whether it stimulates life or negates life. Nietzsche states: "Ultimately the point is to what *end* a lie is told" (*AC*, 56). He does not consider the deceptive and illusory character of existence and human activity as something to be lamented or counteracted. He delights in the "artistic" nature of life as the overcoming of nihilism. He claims that art as the will to illusion opposes nihilism as the will to truth. Referring to *The Birth of Tragedy* again, he states: "In this way the book is even anti-pessimistic: that is, in the sense that it teaches something that is stronger than pessimism, "more divine" than truth: *art*... art is *worth more* than truth" (*WP*, 853, IV).

The emphasis on the value of illusions with respect to art's overcoming of nihilism calls up similarities and differences between Nietzsche and Schiller. Both share the characterization of art as a "beautiful illusion" (*schöner Schein*). In *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* Schiller claims that illusions are necessary for existence in that they foster the growth of ordered minds and a better sense of reality."[6]

---

[6] Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby in Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1885), xiii; cited hereafter as *AE*. All references are from Wilkinson's and Willoughby's extensive introductory commentary.

Nietzsche would agree with this, given his view that illusions are the conditions for life and provide us with glimpses into the nature of reality. However, Schiller claims that illusions are necessary for existence because they offer consolation, refreshment and an excuse for living amid suffering (*AE*, xiii). Here Nietzsche disagrees because, for him, the illusions of tragedy offer only the justification of suffering, which is not the same as consolation, refreshment or excuse. Tragic justification never erases or escapes suffering. Schiller also claims, due to the gratuitous play of art in which illusions are open to use and abuse as well as honesty and dishonesty, that Kant's separation of art and morality must be maintained (*AE*, cxviii). Nietzsche's own opposition between art and morality signals his agreement. However, Schiller claims that aesthetic education is indispensable to but not a substitute for morality, thereby suggesting that art serves morality (*AE*, cxviii). Nietzsche disagrees with this, claiming that art not only opposes but also overcomes morality and indicating that the beautiful illusions of art cannot be the basis for morality. For example, he writes in *Twilight of the Idols*:

> *L'art pour L'art* [*Art for art's sake*]. - The struggle against *purpose* in art is always a struggle against the *moralizing* tendency in art, against the subordination of art to morality. *L'art pour l'art* means: 'the devil take morality!' (*TI*,

IX, 24).[7]

In this regard Nietzsche considers Schiller as a moralist and calls him "the Moral-Trumpeter of Säckingen (*TI*, IX, 1). Nietzsche's similarity and difference to Schiller helps to clarify the manner in which he values illusions and appeals to them in order to overcome Christian morality defined as nihilism.[8]

Tragedy overcomes Christian morality, but it does so not with dour seriousness but with a sense of deep joyfulness and even laughter. In the first section of *The Gay Science* Nietzsche indicates that tragedy shows us that life is worth living in spite of and even because of its terrible and questionable character (*GS*, 1). He claims that the great tragedians must be overwhelmed by "the waves of unaccountable laughter" and through their tragedies reveal the comic nature of existence so that it never makes us despondent or resigned (*GS*, 1). Tragedy becomes associated with laughter and the gay

---

[7] However, Nietzsche continues in this passage to indicate that the attempt to free art from morality is itself "moral" (in his wider sense). He does not want to avoid all purpose in art, but he is concerned with determining its proper purpose. He still wants to use tragic art as the stimulus to life (*TI*, IX, 24). I return to this theme in Chapter 6.

[8] Nietzsche's aesthetic ethic of honesty and truthfulness suggests that he does not completely separate art and morality and that he appeals to art for "moral" reasons. This raises questions about his overcoming of Christian morality. I discuss these issues further in Chapter 6.

science as the necessities for the preservation of human life (*GS*, 1). As an aspect of the gay science, tragedy also opposes Christian morality. Nietzsche suggests that only after joyful frivolity and playful innocence towards existence counters the deadly spirit of gravity which posits weighty ideals can the great seriousness begin which is associated with the beginning of the tragic age (*GS*, 382).

5.4.3 Tragedy and Eternal Recurrence

The most significant aspect of Nietzsche's later notion of tragedy, and what most distinguishes it from his early notion, is the manner in which it is considered in terms of the eternal recurrence. The orgiastic Dionysian element of tragedy is associated with eternal recurrence: "*Eternal* life, the eternal recurrence of life; the future promised in the past; the triumphant Yes to life beyond death and change; *true* life as collective continuation of through procreation, through the mysteries of sexuality" (*TI*, X, 4). In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche already outlines the relationship between Dionysus and sexuality, but in *Twilight of the Idols* he casts the relationship in the context of the eternal recurrence.

> For the eternal joy in creating to exist, for the will to life eternally to affirm itself, the `torment of childbirth' *must* also exist eternally... All this is contained in the word Dionysus: I know of no other exalted symbolism than this *Greek* symbolism, the symbolism of the Dionysian. The profoundest instinct of life, the

> instinct for the future of life, for the eternity of life, is in this word experienced religiously - the actual road to life, procreation, as the *sacred road*... It was only Christianity, with *ressentiment against* life in its foundations, which made of sexuality something impure: it threw *filth* on the beginning, on the prerequisite of our life (*TI*, X, 4).

According to Nietzsche, if the will to life is to exist eternally, then both the suffering and joyful creation of childbirth must exist eternally. The will to life as the affirmation of suffering and joy is explicit in childbirth. If we are to affirm the will to life, we must affirm suffering as well as joy. As the eternal affirmation of the will to life through procreation, human sexuality is the eternal affirmation of suffering and joy. Similarly, tragedy also affirms suffering and joy. The tragic vision allows us to see suffering not as the prevention of joy but as the precondition of joy. The will to life, considered as the affirmation of suffering and joy, is strongest when it is affirmed with a view to eternity. Tragedy affirms the eternal recurrence of the will to life in suffering and joy.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche's first sustained presentation of the eternal recurrence, he elaborates the eternal interrelationship of joy and suffering in terms of creation, also with reference to childbirth.

> Creation - that is the great redemption from suffering, and life's easement. But that the creator may exist, that itself requires suffering and much transformation.

> Yes, there must be much bitter dying in your life, you creators! Thus you are advocates and justifiers of all transitoriness.
>
> For the creator himself to be the child newborn he must also be willing to be the mother and endure the mother's pain (*Z*, II, "On the Blissful Islands").

Nietzsche claims there is a cycle of joy and suffering through creation. Joyful creation redeems suffering, but joyful creation requires suffering. Creation justifies the suffering associated with the transformation and transitoriness of change, it places them in the larger order of existence. In other words, creation necessarily involves destruction which is always only the precondition and promise of more creation. Nietzsche states: "negating *and destroying* are conditions of saying Yes" (*EH*, IV, 4). However, we must never remain with negation and destruction, we must pass into affirmation and creation; No must become Yes (*WP*, 1041). The cycle of creation and destruction, perpetual becoming, is the eternal recurrence.

Nietzsche's characterization of the eternal interrelationship between creation and destruction as eternal recurrence is centred on values. As he enacts it in his own philosophy through the revaluation of values, he claims that old values must be destroyed before new values can be created again.

> And he who has to be a creator in good and evil, truly, has first to be a destroyer and break values.

> Thus the greatest evil lies with the greatest good: this however, is the creative good (*Z*, II, Of Self-Overcoming").

Again, creation is primordial - destruction serves creation, destruction is part of creation. According to Nietzsche, evaluation or creation of values is the basis of human nature and activity as well as existence.

> Man first implanted values into things to maintain himself - he created the meaning of things, a human meaning! Therefore he calls himself: 'Man', that is: the evaluator.
>
> Evaluation is creation: hear it, you creative men! Valuating is itself the value and jewel of all valued things.
>
> Only through evaluation is there value: and without evaluation the nut of existence would be hollow. Hear it, you creative men! (*Z*, 1, "Of the Thousand and One Goals").

The interrelationship between the creation and destruction of values is characteristic of life itself: "And life itself told me this secret: "'Behold,' it said, 'I am that *which must overcome itself again and again...*'" (*Z*, II, "Of Self-Overcoming"). Nietzsche considers life's eternal creation and destruction of itself, its eternal self-overcoming, in terms of the will to power or becoming (*Z*, II, "Of Self-Overcoming"). The eternal recurrence of the will to power means that there is an eternal will to evaluation and the creation of values or the eternal will to life. The eternal recurrence of the will to power is the nature of existence as unlimited becoming.

Heidegger indicates that in *The Will to Power* Nietzsche

distinguishes his notion of the eternal recurrence from the notion of the "eternally unchanging" characteristic of Spinoza or Descartes (*N:II*, 59). For Nietzsche, on the other hand, transitory and momentary change is eternal. The coiling serpent, the living ring of life, expresses the unity of eternity and the "Moment" (*N:II*, 59). The eternal recurrence gives a unity, though not a goal or purpose, to unlimited becoming. Eternal recurrence is the necessity, though not the order, of becoming. The necessity of becoming, that things necessarily eternally become, is a hard thought to bear and makes eternal recurrence the most tragic thought (*N:II*, 96). For Nietzsche, the eternal recurrence is the being of becoming. He states:

> To impose upon becoming the character of being - that is the supreme will to power... That *everything recurs* is the closest *approximation of a world of becoming to a world of being:* - high point of the meditation (*WP*, 617).

Nietzsche provides a manner of thinking such that being is becoming and becoming is being. In other words, he attempts to describe life as eternal self-unfolding and self-overcoming. As such, his is not a metaphysical description in the sense of describing the fixed and immutable essence of existence because the essence of existence is nothing but transitory and momentary change, but his is a metaphysical description in the sense that it accounts for the whole of existence as the will to power through the notion of the eternal recurrence. For

Nietzsche, the being of becoming as will to power can only be thought through reference to the eternal recurrence. Nietzsche can be considered a metaphysical philosopher in this particular sense.

Tragedy is the best mode of expression of the eternal recurrence. Heidegger points out that the introduction of Zarathustra and the thought of the eternal recurrence in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is preceded by the phrase "*incipit tragoedia*" [*the tragedy begins*] at the end of Book Four in *The Gay Science* (*N:II*, 28). He claims that "*the tragic age*" commences with Zarathustra, the teacher of the eternal recurrence (*N:II*, 61). The eternal recurrence is essential to tragedy. The eternal recurrence is the most tragic thought because it is the most burdensome thought of contradiction and uncertainty (*N:II*, 30). In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche's announcement of the beginning of Zarathustra's tragedy and the commencement of the tragic age comes immediately after his first mention of "*the greatest weight*" of the eternal recurrence (*GS*, 341, 342).

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which is itself a sustained tragedy, there is the suggestion that only tragedy with its songs and dances inspired by the Dionysian spirit of music can joyfully affirm the eternal recurrence. Nietzsche considers the art of tragedy to be the creation of beautiful illusions which nonetheless enable us to glimpse the terrifying and

questionable nature of existence. Similarly, Zarathustra warns the animals with whom he converses that music and lyric poetry are fooleries and falsehoods which dance over all things, but nonetheless he believes only those who can dance. As tragedy joyfully confronts the questionable and terrible nature of existence, Zarathustra is aware that a serious matter such as the eternal recurrence must be presented in a light-hearted manner, so he allows the animals with whom he converses to address him.

> `O Zarathustra,' said the animals then, `all things themselves dance for such as think as we: they come and offer their hand and laugh and flee - and return.
>
> `Everything goes, everything returns; the wheel of existence rolls for ever. Everything dies, everything blossoms anew; the year of existence runs on for ever.
>
> `Everything breaks, everything is joined anew; the same house of existence builds itself for ever. Everything departs, everything meets again; the ring of existence is true to itself for ever' (*Z*, III, "The Convalescent").

The animals give voice to Zarathustra's own thought of the eternal recurrence which he cannot yet bear. Yet Zarathustra later comes to joyfully affirm the unbearable thought of the eternal recurrence. The penultimate section titled "The Intoxicated Song" recalls the Dionysian element of tragedy and calls forth the joyful affirmation of the worthiness of living eternally. There Zarathustra tells the Higher Men how he will meet death when it comes: "Was *that* - life?" I will say to death. "Very well! Once more!" (*Z*, IV, "The Intoxicated

Song").

> Did you ever say Yes to one joy? O my friends, then you said Yes to *all* woe as well. All things are chained and entwined together, all things are in love;
>
> if ever you wanted one moment twice, if ever you said: `You please me, happiness, instant, moment!' then you wanted *everything* to return!
>
> you wanted everything anew, everything eternal, everything chained, entwined together, everything in love, O that is how you *loved* the world,
>
> you everlasting men, loved it eternally and for all time: and you even said to woe: `Go, but return!' *For all joy wants - eternity!* (*Z*, IV, "The Intoxicated Song").

For Nietzsche, the eternal recurrence means that everything - joy and suffering - recurs eternally. The fullest joyfulness in existence wills the eternity of joy, even when it is accompanied, as it must be, by the eternity of suffering. If eternal joy is to justify eternal suffering, if eternal joy is to make eternal suffering worthy of living through, then joy must be deeper than suffering. Such eternal and deep joy is tragic. Only the disciple of Dionysus can joyfully affirm the eternal recurrence.

In *The Will to Power* Nietzsche associates the Dionysian affirmation of all existence with the affirmation of the eternal recurrence in the context of the overcoming nihilism. He writes:

> *My new path to a "Yes".* - Philosophy, as I have hitherto understood and lived it, is a voluntary quest for even the most detested and notorious sides of existence... How much truth can a spirit *endure*, how much truth does a spirit *dare*? - this

> became for me the real standard of value. Error is *cowardice* - every achievement of knowledge is a consequence of courage, of severity toward oneself, of cleanliness toward oneself - Such an experimental philosophy as I live anticipates experimentally even the possibilities of the most fundamental nihilism; but this does not mean that it must halt at a negation, a No, a will to negation. It wants rather to cross over to the opposite of this - to a Dionysian affirmation of the world as it is, without subtraction, exception, or selection - it wants the eternal circulation: - the same things, the same logic and illogic of entanglements. The highest state a philosopher can attain: to stand in a Dionysian relationship to existence - my formula for this is *amor fati* [*love of fate*] (*WP*, 1041).

For Nietzsche, truth is directly linked to the questionable and terrifying aspects of life, in this case particularly with the "eternal circulation" of what is the same. His question about how much truth one can endure is specifically about how one can endure the eternal recurrence. His answer indicates that only the Dionysian affirmation of the tragic character of existence - *amor fati* - can endure the eternal recurrence. Nietzsche's concern with enduring the eternal recurrence is a matter of what he considers to be the necessary preconditions for affirming it. He states: "To *endure* the idea of the recurrence one needs: freedom from morality" (*WP*, 1060). In this sense the overcoming of Christian morality is the preparation for the birth of tragedy which is necessary to affirm the eternal recurrence. Christian morality makes the eternal recurrence unbearable because it imports a nihilistic interpretation into it - the eternal recurrence as punishment.

The abolition of Christian morality and the subsequent establishment of tragedy are required if we are to affirm the eternal recurrence beyond nihilism. The aesthetic and anti-moral perspective of tragedy provides the necessary preconditions for the joyful affirmation of the eternal recurrence.

Heidegger maintains Nietzsche's distinction between the aesthetic and anti-moral essence of tragedy and the erroneous moral interpretations of tragedy. Quoting Nietzsche, he writes:

> The tragic has absolutely no original relation to the moral. "Whoever enjoys tragedy *morally* still has a few rungs to climb (XII, 177; from 1881-82). The tragic belongs to the "aesthetic" domain. To clarify this we would have to provide an account of Nietzsche's conception of art. Art is "*the* metaphysical activity" of "life"; it defines the way in which beings as a whole are, insofar as they are. The supreme art is the tragic, hence the tragic is proper to the metaphysical essence of things (*N:II*, 29).

However, Heidegger also holds that any attempt to distinguish the "scientific and "metaphysical" from the "ethical" and "existentiell" aspects of the thought of the eternal recurrence, the most tragic thought, is doomed to result in a one-sided interpretation (N:II, 167). Therefore, despite Nietzsche's disclaimer, we must attend to the ethical tone of his tragic thought. We are called to consider our reaction to this unbearable thought, to consider whether and how we can endure it, to consider the perspective form which we can

affirm it joyfully. Nietzsche's thought of the eternal recurrence has a "scientific" (though not positivistic and objectivistic) and "metaphysical" dimension in that it attempts to account for the nature of existence as a whole. This dimension is addressed by the conjunction of the eternal recurrence and the will to power which posits the being of becoming. Nietzsche's thought of the eternal recurrence also has an "ethical" (though not Christian-moral) and "existentiell" dimension in that it effects a change in the way we value existence and live existence. This dimension is evidenced in the manner in which the conjunction of the eternal recurrence and the will to power calls for the revaluation of values.[9]

Despite Nietzsche's disclaimer that tragedy opposes Christian morality, he nonetheless maintains that the Dionysian affirmation of the unity of the eternal recurrence is accompanied by redemption, a rather Christian-moral notion. Yet he attempts to define tragic redemption in contradistinction to Christian morality. For example, the grand style of tragedy redeems all exceptions through a general rule and its beautiful forms make it possible to bear the sight of the terrifying and questionable nature of

---

[9] I consider the Christian-moral dimension of Nietzsche's notion of tragedy, especially as it relates to the eternal recurrence, more thoroughly in Chapter 6.

existence. Zarathustra also refers to the poetic activity of composing the fragments of humanity together which makes possible human life and redeems it in the face of terrifying and questionable existence. This activity presupposes the eternal recurrence.

> And it is all my art and aim, to compose into one and bring together what is fragment and riddle and dreadful chance.
>
> And how could I endure to be a man, if man were not also poet and reader of riddles and redeemer of chance!
>
> To redeem the past and to transform every 'It was' into an 'I wanted it thus!' - that alone do I call redemption! (*Z*, II, "Of Redemption").

The eternal recurrence gives the fragments of temporal existence a unity and so redeems time. It allows us as temporal beings to escape the unidirectional passage of time. Through the eternal recurrence we can will backwards to our past so that we no longer suffer our past as an inexorable burden placed on us as if from behind or beyond us. The eternal recurrence makes willing backwards to our past possible because within its cyclical structure we have in fact willed our past. Nothing is beyond our will. Through the eternal recurrence we can create our past as we create our future. The eternal recurrence, by unifying time and expanding the range of our creativity to the fullest, thus redeems time and us as temporal beings.

The eternal recurrence redeems us from the spirit of revenge which is directed against time, or more precisely the

passage and the past of time. However, revenge against time is more than nagging regret since it involves a Christian-moral interpretation of temporal existence as guilt and punishment. Revenge is nihilistic because it negates an aspect of existence. Through the figure of Zarathustra Nietzsche writes:

> This, yes, alone is *revenge* itself: the will's antipathy towards time and time's 'It was'...
>
> *The spirit of revenge:* my friends, that, up to now, has been mankind's chief concern; and where there was suffering there was always supposed to be punishment.
>
> 'Punishment' is what revenge calls itself: it feigns a good conscience for itself with a lie...
>
> 'Things are ordered morally according to justice and punishment. Oh, where is redemption from the stream of things and from the punishment "existence"?' Thus madness preached.
>
> 'Can there be redemption when there is eternal justice? Alas, the stone "It was" cannot be rolled away: all punishments, too, must be eternal!' Thus madness preached.
>
> 'No deed can be annihilated: how can a deed be undone through punishment? That existence too must be an eternally recurring deed and guilt, this, this is what is eternal in the punishment "existence"!
>
> 'Except the will at last redeem itself and willing become not-willing -': but you, my brothers, know this fable-song of madness!' (*Z*, II, "Of Redemption").

The Christian-moral interpretation claims that all suffering is a punishment for some deed and guilt that can never be undone or repaid. It claims that the only way to avoid the deed and guilt and hence avoid the punishment is to stop willing. Yet, in Nietzsche's view, if willing is the very basis of existence, then the negation of the will involves the negation of existence. The Christian-moral interpretation

considers existence itself as guilt and punishment. It comes from and calls forth a revenge against existence. Nietzsche opposes the Christian-moral notion of redemption with his tragic notion of redemption through the eternal recurrence.

> I lead you away from these fable-songs when I taught you: 'The will is a creator.'
>
> All 'It was' is a fragment, a riddle, a dreadful chance - until the creative will says to it" 'But I willed it thus!'
>
> Until the creative will says to it: 'But I will it thus! Thus shall I will it!'...
>
> Has the will become its own redeemer and bringer of joy? Has it unlearned the spirit of revenge and all teeth-gnashing? (*Z*, II, "Of Redemption").

The redemption from revenge against time's 'It was' is the redemption from revenge against temporal existence itself. It is redemption from nihilism. Zarathustra's redemption is Dionysian and tragic because it affirms the eternal recurrence of all things, the eternity of all joy and suffering. Zarathustra's Dionysian and tragic redemption, rather than redeeming us from this world as if it were something to be escaped, redeems us into a fuller life in this world of becoming. Dionysian tragedy brings us the glad tidings of redemption and "the blessings of my saying Yes and Amen" (*EH*, Z, 6).[10]

Heidegger is thus correct when he claims that the eternal recurrence and the will to power must be thought together with

---

[10] The Christian-moral dimension of Nietzsche's notion of tragic redemption is discussed further in Chapter 6.

the revaluation of values (*N:II*, 168). The eternal recurrence provides us with a way to think the eternal necessity of the will to power or becoming that nonetheless avoids positing a goal or purpose to its becoming. When Nietzsche claims that the thought of the eternal recurrence imposes the character of being on becoming he means that with it we must consider becoming as the essence of existence. The recognition of this conjunction of eternal recurrence and will to power involves the revaluation of values because we thereby recognize that becoming rather than being is the primary form of existence and this effects a change in the manner in which we value existence.

Heidegger also claims that the eternal recurrence is Nietzsche's fundamental metaphysical position by which he means it is nihilistic (*N:II*, 5). He does not doubt that Nietzsche intends the eternal recurrence to overcome nihilism (*N:II*, 172). Yet he considers that Nietzsche can only think the eternal recurrence on the basis of the experience of nihilism which condemns him to thinking the eternal recurrence nihilistically: Zarathustra knows that the only way the shepherd can free himself from the black snake caught in his throat is to bite off its head (*Z*, II, "Of the Vision and the Riddle"). According to Heidegger, Nietzsche cannot overcome nihilism (*N:II*, 175). However, as I argued earlier, I think Nietzsche does in fact overcome nihilism. The manner in which

the eternal recurrence enables us to clearly envision the nature of existence as unlimited becoming rather than absolute being and thereby effects a change in our evaluation of existence. The tragic thought of eternal recurrence overcomes the Christian-moral interpretation of existence defined as nihilism through the revaluation of values.

5.5 A Brief Summary

Overall, Nietzsche's notion of tragedy is consistent throughout his philosophy, though its formulation and focus changes depending on the stage of his philosophy in which it appears. In *The Birth of Tragedy* he considers tragedy as the affirmation of the unity of all life which aesthetically redeems existence. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* he interprets the tragic vision of the unity of all life in view of the conjunction of the eternal recurrence and the will to power which brings redemption from the revenge against temporal existence or the being of becoming. Yet in all cases he considers tragedy in terms of the revaluation of values which overcomes Christian morality defined as nihilism. Near the end of *Twilight of the Idols* he states:

> And with that I again return to the place from which I set out - *The Birth of Tragedy* was my first revaluation of all values: with that I again plant myself in the soil out of which I draw all that I will and *can* - I, the last disciple of the philosopher Dionysus - I, the teacher of the eternal recurrence (*TI*, X, 5).

Dionysian tragedy requires the affirmation of the unity of life considered as the eternal recurrence and the will to power. It is the fullest affirmation of the eternity of the creation and destruction of life, its constant self-overcoming, its unlimited becoming. By affirming the value of this sensuous world of unlimited becoming without appealing to the absolute value of a supposed supersensuous world, Dionysian tragedy participates in the overcoming of nihilism through the revaluation of values. This is the sense in which Dionysian tragedy redeems existence. Nietzsche states that tragic sensibility is humanity's only salvation: "There is only one hope for and one guarantee for the future of humanity: it consists in his *retention of the sense for the tragic*" (*UM*, IV, 4). However, the extent to which Nietzsche's notion of tragedy and tragic redemption commits him to Christian-moral values and the overall effect this has on his attempt to overcome nihilism through the revaluation of values remains to be seen. This is the focus of Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

THE QUESTION OF ETHICS AND NIETZSCHE'S AMBIGUOUS LEGACY

> I know my fate. One day my name will be associated with the memory of something tremendous - a crisis without equal on earth, the most profound collision of conscience, a decision that was conjured up *against* everything that had been believed, demanded, hallowed so far. I am no man, I am dynamite (*EH*, IV, 1).

6.1 Nietzsche's Ambiguous Legacy

This conclusion gathers the elements of the previous discussions to ask another question, the question of Nietzsche's destiny or fate, the question of whither and for what Nietzsche is destined or fated. Specifically, it is the question about Nietzsche's ambiguous legacy with regards to the question of ethics in contemporary philosophy. Nietzsche's destiny or fate, his legacy, rests with us to a large extent. How do we receive him? What do we make of him? If we are to take his project seriously, then we must ask about the nature and status of it compared to the Christian morality he seeks to overcome. Therefore this conclusion raises the question about the ethical tone and content of Nietzsche's philosophy in order to suggest that Nietzsche's legacy is ambiguous with regards to the question of ethics.

Throughout this thesis I discussed the manner in which Nietzsche overcomes nihilistic Christian morality to establish

a revaluation of values on the basis of art, specifically tragedy. I examined his inquiry into the origins of morality through the appeal to various sciences, his critique of the origins of morality through the genealogical method, and his overcoming of Christian morality considered as nihilism through the revaluation of values. This set the context for the investigation of his establishment of an aesthetic and anti-moral realm of tragedy and the tragic attitude towards existence.

Nietzsche considers the overcoming of nihilism in the form of Christian morality as the preparation and education for the rebirth of tragedy. Tragedy is meant to overcome nihilistic Christian-moral interpretations of existence. With reference to *The Birth of Tragedy*, he states in *Ecce Homo*:

> A tremendous hope speaks out of this essay. In the end I lack all reason to renounce the hope for a Dionysian future of music... I promise a tragic age: the highest art in saying Yes to all life, tragedy, will be reborn when humanity has weathered the consciousness of the hardest but most necessary wars *without suffering from it* (*EH*, BT, 4).

For Nietzsche, "the hardest but most necessary wars" are those against Christian morality. They are hardest but most necessary because Christian morality is so much a part of us that we can never hope to change if we do not overcome it. In his view, it is imperative that Christian morality be overcome. Yet, rather than dread this as our loss to be

suffered, we should welcome this as the beginning of our freedom. The event that Nietzsche's madman heralds - "God is dead" - is the lack of all absolute meaning, the absurdity of existence (*GS*, 125). While the movement away from the sun may be chilling and terrifying, it is also the increasing expansion of our freedom to create new values. We should cheerfully embark on the "open sea" (*GS*, 343).

Thus Nietzsche claims that we must joyfully affirm the tragic vision of existence. Yet the tragic vision of existence is joyful only beyond Christian-moral interpretations of existence. We can only dance and celebrate with child-like innocence if we are relieved from the weighty burden of guilt and punishment. Tragedy directly opposes Christian morality, but it can only be realized fully when Christian morality is overcome. The overcoming of Christian morality does not mean we cannot posit principles of existence, but any such principle that is posited must not import and impose itself as if from beyond this sensuous world and it must redeem this sensuous world without first condemning it as Christian morality does. The notions of will to power and the eternal recurrence are immanent to existence and redeem it into innocence by maintaining that it needs redemption only from Christian-moral condemnation.

However, while Nietzsche considers the overcoming of nihilism in the form of Christian morality as the preparation

and education for the birth of tragedy, it is not altogether clear whether he avoids all ethical manners of thinking concerning tragedy. The discussion in the previous chapter indicates that certain ethical themes remain in Nietzsche's philosophy, especially with regards to tragedy. In order to determine Nietzsche's relationship to ethical thinking, the particular configuration of Christian morality must be distinguished from ethics defined on a wider scale as the human activity of seeking the meaning of existence and establishing a way of life appropriate to that meaning. Nietzsche rejects the former but still remains within the latter.

6.2 The Ethic of Honesty and Truthfulness

Nietzsche considers himself an immoralist (*EH*, IV, 4, 6). However, if there is an ethic, a principled way of life, which survives in Nietzsche's philosophy, then it is the ethic of honesty and truthfulness. Honesty and truthfulness are the motive forces of the self-overcoming of life which is the primordial activity of existence for Nietzsche. This self-overcoming occurs on the level of human activity as well. Only when we are brutally honest and truthful with ourselves we will be able to affirm the tragic vision of existence without the protecting and distorting filter of nihilistic Christian-moral interpretations of it. Christian morality, as well as

metaphysics and science, defined as nihilism, are all overcome on the basis of honesty and truthfulness (*GS*, 357; *GM*, III, 27; *EH*, IV, 3; *WP*, 1, 3).[1]

However, while we may appreciate how Nietzsche's ethic of honesty and truthfulness operates in his philosophy in terms of self-overcoming, it is nonetheless problematic in the context of his philosophy. Nietzsche himself claims "the will to truth requires a critique" and "the value of truth must for once be experimentally *called into question*" (*GM*, III, 24). For Nietzsche, dissimulation and deception are characteristic of existence and human activity. Existence is art, an artist and an art work, in the sense that it creates itself through and as illusion. Human life is only made possible through illusions such as morality, religion, metaphysics, science, and especially art. Only this world of illusions exists. According to Nietzsche, morality, religion, metaphysics and science were previously thought to relate us to truth, but now art recognizes itself and those others as illusions and it is therefore more true than those others which seem to be disguised illusions masquerading as truth. In this context

---

[1] Nietzsche's ethic of honesty and truthfulness parallels the ethic of authenticity which is characteristic of many largely existentialist philosophers like Heidegger, Jaspers and Kierkegaard as well as Camus and Sartre. For an analysis of Heidegger in this regard see Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

Nietzsche criticizes the notion of truth, claiming that truth is a lie because all truths are inherently lies. Thus truth is falsity and falsity is truth, in whatever sense we still can use these terms in his philosophy.

What can Nietzsche's ethic of honesty and truthfulness mean? What does Nietzsche mean when he entreats us to be honest and truthful? Paradoxically, he claims we must create the most honest and truthful illusions we can in order to enhance humanity and existence. The most honest and truthful illusions reveal the nature of existence and human activity as dissimulation and deception. Given Nietzsche's view, can he claim that there is an absolute standard or position from which to judge honesty and truthfulness? Do honesty and truthfulness even make sense without such a standard or position? Nietzsche's perspectivism posits the endless proliferation of perspectives, but he also claims there is an underlying principle of life - the will to power - which generates all perspectives and makes it possible to judge among them. How can Nietzsche maintain this paradox? Is it in fact a paradox?

Nietzsche's ethic of honesty and truthfulness is a paradox only within the context of the categories of truth and falsity. However, this paradox dissipates somewhat if we, as Deleuze suggests Nietzsche does, remove philosophy from the "element of truth and falsity" and place it in the element of

value (*NP*, xiii). We must consider the ethic of honesty and truthfulness as an expression of value, a vehicle for evaluation and evaluating among evaluations. Nietzsche does not oppose the false "truths" of morality, religion, metaphysics and science with the true "lies" of art because all of them are illusory (neither "true" nor "false") products of the will to deception that underlies existence and human activity. Rather, for him, it is a matter of opposing a nihilistic type of evaluation which negates life with a noble and affirmative type of evaluation which stimulates life.

6.2.1 The Nature of Nietzsche's Ethic

Nietzsche's ethic of honesty and truthfulness is characterized by the strength of simplicity. In *The Birth of Tragedy* he is concerned with the Dionysian affirmation of the tragic unity of existence beyond Apollinian individuation (*BT*, 10). In the *Untimely Meditations* he claims that Schopenhauer and Wagner possess the sense of the tragic necessary for the future of humanity. He admires Schopenhauer being "simple and honest in thought and life" and he praises Wagner for being a "simplifier of the world" (*UM*, III, 2; *UM*, IV, 4). Furthermore, he calls for a restriction of unlimited and undirected historical knowledge and advocates instead the study of history only insofar as it serves "life" and gives culture healthy horizons or boundaries (*UM*, II, 1). In all

these cases Nietzsche criticizes the culture of his time for being too complex or for desiring to be so. In his view, complexity or the desire for it, which is as a symptom of a weak and sick character in both individuals and cultures, betrays a tendency towards dishonesty. Rather, he equates simplicity with honesty and he attempts to offer a simplified and honest vision of existence through recourse to tragedy.

Nietzsche's penchant for the strength of simplicity is demonstrated in his later work as well. In *The Will to Power* he states: "Error is *cowardice* - every achievement of knowledge is a consequence of courage, of severity toward oneself, of cleanliness toward oneself" (*WP*, 1041). It requires strength to be honest and truthful with regards to existence. In this respect, for Nietzsche, art is crucial in establishing the order of rank for life by determining whether a value serves and stimulates life or denies and degenerates life. When the aesthetic term "beautiful" comes from enhanced strength it is meant to be an expression of the coordination and harmony of all natural instincts. The grand style is the highest form of such strength and simplicity (*WP*, 800). The grand style of tragedy plays a decisive role in subsuming exceptions and nuances under a general rule (*WP*, 819). Tragedy also involves giving the fragments of temporal existence a unity through the affirmation of the eternal recurrence (*Z*, II, "Of Redemption"). Nietzsche's tragic ethic rests on a

feeling of strength and results in a simplicity that makes it possible for us to live in a fragmented world.

Nietzsche's ethic of honesty and truthfulness involves giving oneself style, of harmonizing one's discordant drives and fashioning a simple style of character. Nietzsche refers to this ethic as "a physical-spiritual discipline" of strength (*WP*, 981). Strength and simplicity of style are related: "We say the strongest things simply, provided only that we are surrounded by people who believe in our strength: such an environment educates one to attain "simplicity of style"" (*GS*, 226). Simplicity of style is a matter of artistry in creating a certain artful character for oneself.

> *One thing is needful.* - To "give style" to one's character - a great and rare art! It is practised by those who survey all the strengths and weakness of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art... In the end, when the work is finished, it becomes evident how the constraint of a single taste governed and formed everything large and small. Whether this taste was good or bad is less important than one might suppose, if only it was a single taste! (*GS*, 290).

Nietzsche claims that we have a lot to learn from artists in terms of being "the poets of our life" (*GS*, 299). Yet as artists and poets we remain in the realm of illusions. For Nietzsche, honesty and truth are not beyond dishonesty and falsity. This dichotomy is no longer an issue. Rather, his ethic is a matter of a strong simplicity of style in which we create the illusion of unity in ourselves. Existence is art,

living is an art. Nietzsche's ethic of honesty and truthfulness is thoroughly aesthetic.[2]

Nietzsche's aesthetic ethic of honesty and truthfulness requires that we judge existence and ourselves honestly and truthfully in terms of aesthetic principles. When we compare illusions and attempt to choose the most honest and truthful

---

[2] The conjunction of aesthetics and ethics in Nietzsche's philosophy greatly influences contemporary theories of aesthetic ethics. As the essays in *Poetry, Language, Thought* indicate, an aesthetic ethics is present in Heidegger's poetics of existence - "poetically man dwells" - and the manner in which he considers poetry in opposition to technology as that which puts us in touch with Being. Like Nietzsche, Foucault defines ethics not so much as a system of rules but as a "practice of the self" or a "cultivation of the self" which is considered the "art of existence" in antiquity. See *The Use of Pleasure, Volume 2 of The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1985), 25-32, and *The Care of the Self, Volume 3 of The History of Sexuality*, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1986) 39-68, especially 44. He also refers to Greco-Roman notions of "aesthetics of existence" and "morality of style" in *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1966-84)*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. John Johnston, (New York: Semiotext(e) Foreign Agent Series, 1989), 309-331. Following Nietzsche, Rorty advocates an ethics of metaphorical self-creation and sees human life as a poem or narrative, collapsing "the distinction between the moral and the "merely" aesthetic" and calling for a poetic culture wherein authors and literary critics are considered moral advisors. See *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, especially 23-35, 69, 80-82. For an analysis of Rorty's aesthetic ethics as indicative of pragmatist postmodernism see also Richard M. Shusterman, "Postmodern Ethics and the Art of Living" in *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*, (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 1992), 236-261. While Martha Nussbaum does not develop what is considered an aesthetic ethics in this case, she nonetheless sees ethics as an aesthetics of existence specifically in light of Greek tragedy. See Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and ethics in Greek tragedy and philosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

one we must ask: "has hunger or superabundance become creative here?" (*WP*, 846). We must determine what is being creative in any evaluation of existence, whether it is weakness or strength, and we must determine the manner in which an evaluation is creative, whether it negates or stimulates life. For Nietzsche, this aesthetic principle is reduced to the question of how and in what cases the term "beautiful" is being used. Is it an expression of the romantic or pessimistic resignation from life or the classical and tragic affirmation of all aspects of life, including and especially the terrifying and questionable aspects?

For Nietzsche, the aesthetic ethic of honesty and truthfulness, which is premised on and promotes strength and simplicity of style, is best evidenced in tragedy. Only in the grand style of tragedy is the term "beautiful" used from the perspective of strength (*WP*, 800). Tragedy cannot use beautiful illusions to cover up the tragic nature of existence because the beautiful illusions themselves express the tragic nature of existence. It allows us to experience the simple but tragic unity of existence in a way that does not crush us. The music and myth of tragedy gives order to the dissonance of humanity without obliterating the dissonance which constitutes our tragic human nature (*BT*, 25). He states: "We possess *art* lest we *perish from the truth*" (*WP*, 822). Similarly, with specific reference to tragedy, Nietzsche writes:

> But the greatness and indispensability of art lie precisely in its being able to produce the *appearance* of a simpler world, a shorter solution to the riddle of life... Art exists *so that the bow shall not break*" (*UM*, IV, 4).

Nietzsche claims that the tragic sensibility is the precondition for the health of humanity (*UM*, IV, 4). According to him, if we have the strength to affirm the tragic nature of existence, then we will be able to live according to the ethic of honesty and truthfulness.

6.2.2 The Status of Nietzsche's Ethic

However, the status of Nietzsche's ethic of honesty and truthfulness, expressed in terms of strength and the simplicity of style epitomized by tragedy, must be assessed with respect to the Christian morality which it seeks to overcome. The relation of Nietzsche's tragic ethic to Christian morality must be determined because the matter is not at all clear. For example, in *On the Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche states: "all honor to the ascetic ideal *insofar as it is honest!* (*GM*, III, 26). He indicates that the ascetic ideal which characterizes Christian morality, among other things, is valuable to him to the extent that it helps him overcome Christian morality. Nietzsche claims that the Christian morality of honesty and truthfulness is the basis of the overcoming of Christian morality itself (*GM*, III, 27). In order to emphsize his point he quotes from *The Gay Science*:

> You see what it was that really triumphed over the Christian God: Christian morality itself, the concept of truthfulness that was understood even more rigorously, the father confessor's refinement of the Christian conscience, translated and sublimated into a scientific conscience, into intellectual cleanliness at any price (*GS*, 357).

In this context Nietzsche refers to "the most fateful act of two thousand years of discipline for truth that in the end forbids itself the lie in faith in God" (GS, 357). He indicates that this "will to truth" is not only the remnant but also the result of Christian piety. In a section titled *How we, too, are still pious* Nietzsche states:

> Consequently, "will to truth" does *not* mean "I will not allow myself to be deceived" but - there is no alternative - "I will not deceive, not even myself"; *and with that we stand on moral ground* (*GS*, 344).

Nietzsche criticizes the will to truth because he claims that life is in fact deception and dissimulation. The "moral" will to truth is in fact a lie with regards to "immoral" illusory existence. Similarly, in *The Will to Power* he writes:

> The end of Christianity - at the hands of its own morality (which cannot be replaced), which turns against the Christian God (the sense of truthfulness, developed highly by Christianity, is nauseated by the falseness and mendaciousness of all Christian interpretations of the world and history; rebound from "God is truth" to the fanatical faith "All is false" (*WP*, 1).

Significantly, Nietzsche here claims that Christian morality cannot be replaced. He is aware that his entire project depends on it, that he requires it even as he rejects it.

Thus, through his ethic of honesty and truthfulness, he has a dual relationship to Christian morality: he appeals to it and yet abolishes it.

Furthermore, in *The Anti-Christ* Nietzsche laments the manner in which Luther's German Reformation hindered Cesare Borgia's Italian Renaissance of Christianity.

> *Cesare Borgia as Pope*... Am I understood... Very well, *that* would have been a victory of the sort *I* desire today - : Christianity would have been *abolished*! - What happened? A German monk, all the vindictive instincts of a failed priest in him, fulminated in Rome against the Renaissance (*AC*, 61).

Nietzsche applauds the attempt to infuse the principle of life into Christianity. Yet he does so because, in his view, this infusion would destroy Christianity which is inimical to life. However, there is a suggestion here that he would accept a religion that is based on noble and affirmative values and stimulates life (*AC*, 61).[3]

However, Nietzsche explicitly and emphatically rejects any association with religion. In the Preface to *Ecce Homo* he writes:

> Here no "prophet" is speaking, none of those gruesome hybrids of sickness and will to power whom people call founders of religions. Above all, one must *hear* aright the tone that comes from this mouth, the halcyon tone, lest one should do wretched injustice to the meaning of its wisdom...

---

[3] I discuss this later in terms of Nietzsche's advocacy of a pagan religion of Dionysus that affirms all aspects of life.

> It is no fanatic that speaks here; this is not "preaching"; no *faith* is demanded here (*EH*, Preface, 4).

Similarly, in the final part of the book titled *Why I am a Destiny* he writes:

> Yet for all that, there is nothing in me of a founder of a religion - religions are affairs of the rabble; I find it necessary to wash my hands after I have come into contact with religious people. - I *want* no "believers"; I think I am too malicious to believe in myself; I never speak to masses. - I have a terrible fear that one day I will be pronounced *holy*: you will guess why I publish this book *before*; it shall prevent people from doing mischief with me (*EH*, IV, 1).

What are we to make of these disclaimers in light of his peculiar relationship to Christianity? Moreover, do these disclaimers preclude his advocacy of a religion other than Christianity? While Nietzsche demands no faith and wants no believers, this does not prevent the possibility that he will garner faith and believers, especially since throughout his philosophy he persuasively appeals to many religious themes to characterize tragedy.

According to Nietzsche, tragedy is not meant to correct existence but it is meant to transfigure existence, and this can be considered a religious notion. Tragedy provides us with an awareness and appreciation of the unity of existence, a function which is often associated with religion. He likens tragedy's intention to unite all existence to nature's forgiveness of the prodigal son of humanity and he calls

tragedy "the gospel of universal harmony" (*BT*, 1). He appeals to the doctrine of the "veil of *maya*" to describe how tragedy tears away the illusion of passing phenomena to reveal the primordial unity of reality (*BT*, 1). Nietzsche's reference to "the sole author and spectator of this comedy of art" and "the primordial artist of the world" is similar to religious ways of referring to God the Creator (*BT*, 5). He claims that the meaning of tragedy is that "the individual must be consecrated to something higher than himself" so that "he may encounter something holy" (*UM*, IV, 4).

Nietzsche also refers to tragedy in the context of religious themes such as sanctification and justification. Tragedy participates in "the great pantheistic sharing of joy and sorrow that sanctifies and calls good even the most terrible and questionable qualities of life" (*WP*, 1050). It considers existence "*holy enough* to justify even a monstrous amount of suffering" (*WP*, 1052). The tragic artist "affirms the large-scale economy which justifies the terrifying, the evil, the questionable - and more than justifies them" (*WP*, 853). Tragedy is not only a justification and apology for existence, it is a joyful affirmation of it. Yet Nietzsche's notion of existence being "*holy enough* to justify even a monstrous amount of suffering" and his affirmation of "the large-scale economy which justifies the terrifying, the evil, the questionable" is not so different from the Christian

notion that God's goodness justifies all the suffering and evil in life. Christian theodicy too is concerned with the justification of existence in these terms.

Most significantly, Nietzsche claims that tragedy redeems existence. This is certainly a religious manner of thinking, but it is religious in a precise and peculiar sense for Nietzsche. It is perhaps in terms of tragic redemption, at Nietzsche's apparent closest proximity to Christianity, that he can be best distinguished from it. Tragedy exemplifies what Nietzsche calls "redemption in illusion" by art (*BT*, 16).

> Art and nothing but art! It is the great means of making life possible, the great seduction to life, the great stimulant of life.
>
> Art as the *only* superior counterforce to all will to denial of life, as that which is anti-Christian, anti-Buddhist, antinihilist *par excellence*.
>
> Art as the *redemption of the man of knowledge* - of those who see the terrifying and questionable character of existence, who want to see it, the men of tragic knowledge.
>
> Art as the *redemption of the man of action* - of those who not only see the terrifying and questionable character of existence but live it, want to live it, the tragic-warlike man, the hero.
>
> Art as the *redemption of the sufferer* - as the way to states in which suffering is willed, transfigured, deified, where suffering is a form of great delight (*WP*, 853, II).

For Nietzsche, art which is the stimulant to life opposes Christianity which is the nihilistic denial of life. However, Nietzsche at times holds a wider definition of religion which includes both the affirmation and negation of life. That is, religion can be configured either as the affirmation or the

negation of life, both possibilities are open to it. As with the distinction between particular moral codes and ethics on the wider scale, Nietzsche distinguishes between particular configurations of religion, which may or may not be nihilistic, and the general essence of religion which is the articulation of the meaning of existence.

> To determine: whether the typical religious man is a form of decadence (the great innovators are one and all morbid and elliptic); but are we not here omitting one type of religious man, the *pagan*? Is the pagan cult not a form of thanksgiving and affirmation of life? Must its highest representative not be an apology for and deification of life? The type of a well-constituted and ecstatically over-flowing spirit that takes into itself and *redeems* the contradictions and questionable aspects of existence!
>
> It is here I set the *Dionysus* of the Greeks: the religious affirmation of life, life whole and not denied or in part (*WP*, 1052).

Here Nietzsche does not appear to be opposed to religion as such, but to Christianity in particular. He evaluates religion by the same standards he uses to evaluate art: whether it is an expression of dissatisfaction or gratitude with regards to existence, whether hunger or superabundance has become creative (*WP*, 845-846). Care must be taken to determine which forms of religion are nihilistic and which forms of religion are not nihilistic. Nietzsche associates Christianity with nihilism, but he considers the religion of Dionysus in opposition to nihilism.

According to Nietzsche, Christianity is a nihilistic

religion because it posits an otherworldly value as the basis of the condemnation of this world. He states: "As soon as we imagine someone who is responsible for our being thus and thus, etc. (God, nature), and therefore attribute to him the intention that we should exist and be happy or wretched, we corrupt for ourselves the *innocence of becoming*" (*WP*, 552). For Nietzsche, to avoid importing responsibility and guilt into existence would be to redeem ourselves and existence, but this need not preclude religion as such. In a note from *The Will to Power* titled "Redemption from all guilt" Nietzsche opposes those who use the notion of God to take revenge against the existence of becoming.

> We others, who desire to restore innocence to becoming, would like to be the missionaries of a cleaner idea: that no one has given man his qualities, neither God, nor society, nor his parents and ancestors, nor he himself - that no one is to *blame* for him.
>
> There is no being that could be held responsible for the fact that anyone exists at all, that anyone is thus and thus, that anyone was born in certain circumstances, in a certain environment. - It is a tremendous restorative that such a being is lacking...
>
> And, to say it again, this is a tremendous restorative; this constitutes the innocence of all existence (WP, 765).

For Nietzsche, there is nothing responsible or guilty for existence, there is only the whole of existence considered as the innocence of becoming. To him, a religion of the innocence of becoming is a pagan religion. Such a pagan religion is not necessarily godless, though its god is not so much the object

of worship as that in whose name existence itself is celebrated: Dionysus. Nietzsche is the disciple and missionary of Dionysus who is the principal representative of the pagan religion of the innocence of becoming.

By reason of Nietzsche's constant invocation of the pagan god Dionysus, his notion of tragedy and tragic redemption can be considered as religious in the expanded sense of articulating the meaning of existence. However, Nietzsche's appeal to religion as such is not adverse to his attempt to overcome nihilism. Religious manners of thinking are acceptable to him, as long as they are stimulants to life like Dionysian religion and not nihilistic like Christianity. The Dionysian religion overcomes nihilism by affirming the tragic totality of life. Nietzsche's retention of a religious sensibility as the celebration of life can be considered as the overcoming of decadent and declining forms of religion considered as the condemnation of life. His claims about the self-overcoming of great things applies to religion and he engages in the self-overcoming of religion so that it may assume a role as the stimulant to a fuller life in this world. In this sense the Dionysian religion, which expresses its vision of existence through the art of tragedy, can contribute to the overcoming of nihilism through revaluation of values.

However, the status of Nietzsche's Dionysian religion, no matter how distinct it is from Christianity, still remains in

question. Nietzsche claims that he does not intend to found a religion and foster believers. Instead, he seeks creator companions who are other than religious believers: "The creator seeks companions, not corpses or herds or believers. The creator seeks fellow-creators, those who inscribe new values on new tables" (*Z*, Prologue, 9). Yet he offers Zarathustra as an exemplar of this creative way of life. He calls us to create our own values, our own goals, our own selves (*Z*, I, "Of the Way of the Creator"). Yet he nonetheless provides vivid examples of what he would have us create. Precisely how does he intend his philosophy of Dionysus? Is it a religion, and if so, in what sense? How does he expect us to respond to it? Are we to become Dionysians?

Even if we accept that Nietzsche, despite his avowed intention to overcome the particular configuration of nihilistic Christian morality and religion, nonetheless retains an ethic of honesty and truthfulness and a religion of Dionysus in order to address the meaning of existence and outline the way of life proper to that meaning, further questions arise. Does Nietzsche make claims on the manner in which we live our lives? If so, does his ethic of honesty and truthfulness, provide us with a positive principle for living? Moreover, does the value of Nietzsche's philosophy only consist in having raised critical questions about previous configurations of Christian morality and religion? Or can

Nietzsche's tragic philosophy also provide a constructive foundation for a new ethic or religion, a new way of life, beyond Christian morality and religion?

6.3 Camus: Assessing Nietzsche's Ethic

Some reference to Camus's writing may be helpful in indicating indirectly that Nietzsche does indeed have a positive contribution to make to the question of ethics in contemporary philosophy. Just as I find it useful to appeal to Foucault, Deleuze and Heidegger as insightful interpreters of Nietzsche, so I intend some reference to Camus, not as an exhaustive inquiry into the issue of Camus's fidelity to Nietzsche, but as a method of assessing whether Nietzsche's paradoxical position with respect to ethics is capable of underpinning a genuine revaluation of values that is beneficial to the manner in which we live our lives. Camus is offered here as an affirmative example of the Nietzschean ethic.

Camus considers the question of whether or not there is an ethic, a way of life, that corresponds to Nietzsche's overcoming of Christianity defined as nihilism? He asks: "Is it possible to find a rule of conduct outside of religion and

its absolute values?"[4] Camus follows Nietzsche in attempting to develop a positive vision of temporal existence that rejects all appeals to absolute and otherworldly values but nonetheless considers life worth living. He claims that even in the absence of eternal values such as God, life is worth living. In Camus's view, which he shares with Nietzsche, "even within the limits of nihilism it is possible to find the means to proceed beyond nihilism.[5]

6.3.1 Absurdity and Creation

For Camus, who is much influenced by Nietzsche's notion of tragedy, the tragic nature of existence consists in the condition of absurdity. Camus defines absurdity in a particular manner: "This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity" (*MS*, 5). That is, absurdity is borne out of the constant tension between human consciousness and the material world. The feeling of absurdity or meaninglessness is aroused and exacerbated because humanity continually asks after the meaning of existence which remains resolutely silent.

---

[4] Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, trans. Anthony Bower, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1954), 21; cited hereafter as *R*. Camus discusses Nietzsche with respect to nihilism (*R*, 65-80).

[5] Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), v; cited hereafter as *MS*.

Absurdity is a function of our temporal existence. We are presented with the choice of directing ourselves toward eternity or living in history - "There is God or time" (*MS*, 64). Absurdity is the tension we feel between our existence in time and the pull towards eternal values of existence, the tension between finite life in the world and our search for meaning in the world. In Camus's view, to be true to existence, we must accept the necessity of absurdity and choose temporal existence over eternal values. All else escapes or eludes existence itself.[6]

In this context Camus claims that the proper response to absurdity is creation. Only in this sense is our temporal and temporary life worth anything. In one of his early notebooks he writes:

> To be worth something or nothing. To create or not to create. In the first case everything is justified. Everything without exception. In the second case, everything is completely absurd.[7]

He later states: "The absurd world is justified only aesthetically."[8] Camus states in the Preface to The Myth of

---

[6] The notion of fidelity to the absurdity of existence is the basis of Camus's absurd ethic of lucidity and integrity, as emerges later.

[7] Albert Camus, *Carnets 1935-1942*, trans. Philip Thody, (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1963), 39; cited hereafter as *C:I*.

[8] Albert Camus, *Carnets 1942-1951*, trans. Philip Thody, (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1966), 30; cited hereafter as *C:II*.

Sisyphus that "it sums itself up for me as a lucid invitation to live and to create, in the very midst of the desert" (*MS*, v). Like Nietzsche, Camus develops a notion of the aesthetic justification of the absurdity of existence through the act of creation.

Camus defines the type of creation that best justifies absurd existence aesthetically: tragic or absurd creation. Camus refers to Nietzsche's statement in *Twilight of the Idols* that the tragic artist is not a pessimist because he says "Yes" to all aspects of existence and thereby justifies them (*TI*, III, 6; *C:I*, 81). He claims that tragic art rather than despairing art is most significant (*C:II*, 73). Furthermore, he distinguishes between weak and strong tragedy on the basis of their mode and extent of justification:

> What makes a tragedy is that each of the opposing forces is equally justified, has the right to live. Hence weak tragedy, which brings unjustified forces into play. Hence strong tragedy, which justifies *everything* (*C:II*, 52).

Repeating Nietzsche, Camus states: "Eternal recurrence presupposes the acceptance of suffering" (*C:II*, 52). Parallel to Zarathustra, Camus refers to the myth in which Sisyphus is condemned to eternally roll a rock up a hill only to have it roll back just as it reaches the top. Zarathustra's "down-going" and Sisyphus's "return" are similar (*Z*, Prologue, 1; *MS*, 90). Zarathustra rises above revenge and pity through disgust and Sisyphus overcomes his terrible fate through scorn

(*Z*, IV, "The Sign"; *MS*, 90). In both cases they are transfigured by their tragic attitude. They approach their task of creation joyfully and happily. Nietzsche and Camus consider tragedy as the deepest joy and highest happiness. We can be truly joyful and happy only beyond hope and consolation. Tragic joy and happiness accept all aspects of life. Considering the tragic and absurd figure, Camus states: "One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (*MS*, 91). He further identifies tragedy with happiness when he writes:

> To increase the happiness of a man's life is to extend the tragic nature of the witness that he bears. A truly tragic work of art (if it does bear witness) will be that of a happy man (*C:I*, 54-55).

Tragic joy and happiness justifies the existence of everything. Tragic art justifies even the absurdity of existence.

According to Camus, only tragic art or absurd art maintains the feeling of absurdity, the tension between humanity and the world that fosters meaninglessness, but it nonetheless considers life worthy of living in spite of and even more so because of the absurdity of existence. The absurdity of existence allows us to create freely and intensely in each moment (*MS*, 48). Camus claims that tragic or absurd art (as well as thought) is characterized by three things: (a) "revolt' or the concrete presence of absurdity without escaping either of the terms - humanity and world -

which are in tension, (b) "freedom" or the awareness that there is no future and hence no eternal values, (c) "diversity" or intensity and quantity of passion in creation (*MS*, 86). A further characteristic of tragic or absurd art is its futility or its awareness that it passes away and amounts to nothing in the larger picture of existence (*MS*, 86). Creation only has value for the moment.

To Camus, tragic or absurd art cannot offer hope or consolation in the form of an eternal meaning for existence (*MS*, 72). to do so would be to escape or elude absurdity. He writes:

> I want to know whether, accepting a life *without appeal*, one can also agree to work and create *without appeal* and what is the way leading to those liberties... But an absurd attitude, if it is to remain so, must be aware of its gratuitousness. So it is with the work of art. If the commandments of the absurd are not respected, if the work does not illustrate divorce and revolt, if it sacrifices to illusions and arouses hope, it ceases to be gratuitous.... In the creation in which the temptation to explain is the strongest, can one overcome that temptation? In the fictional world in which awareness of the real world is keenest, can I remain faithful to the absurd without sacrificing to the desire to judge? (*MS*, 75-76).

Truly absurd art is itself an absurd phenomenon. It is a symptom of absurdity, not a refuge *from* absurdity. It experiences but does not explain absurdity. (*MS*, 70-71). It must struggle to keep the tension of absurdity always present in itself. Camus writes:

> And carrying this absurd logic to its conclusion, I

> must admit that the struggle implies a total absence of hope (which has nothing to do with despair), a continual rejection (which must not be confused with renunciation), and a conscious dissatisfaction (which must not be compared to immature unrest). Everything that destroys, conjures away, or exorcises these requirements (and, to begin with, consent which overthrows divorce) ruins the absurd and devaluates the attitude that may then be proposed (*MS*, 23-24).

The total absence of hope and continual rejection means that we must not accept any eternal consolation or reconciliation between humanity and world which would dissolve the absurd nature of existence. The conscious dissatisfaction means that we must never be satisfied with the way things are at the moment and continually create things over and over. Absurdity has value for our lives if we accept it, not with resigned agreement, but as the necessary and persistent goad that spurs us on to revolt against it through continual creation.

6.3.2 The Ethics of Absurdity

For Camus, the question of ethics, the question of our principles for living, is first a matter of determining whether we need or do not need a solution to justify existence. "Knowing whether or not one can live *without appeal* is all that interests me" (MS, 45). In this regard he writes: "For the absurd man it is not a matter of explaining and solving, but of experiencing and describing. Everything begins with lucid indifference" (*MS*, 70). In this context he also

states: "Tragedy is not a solution" (*C:II*, 72). Thus, according to Camus, we should live tragically and absurdly without solutions. His ethic is one of the perpetual questioning and creating of values without eternal meaning.[9]

For example, Camus claims that Kafka's work begins as tragic or absurd art but ends by offering a universal hope (*MS*, 100). He claims that the same is true of the existential philosophy of Heidegger, Jaspers and Kierkegaard. They all know the irrational separation of temporal man and historical world but eventually posit an eternal or extra-temporal reconciliation of them. He calls this "philosophical suicide" because it is a nihilistic evaluation which escapes and eludes absurdity or life itself (*MS*, 31). To Camus, absurdity without hope is not the basis for the condemnation of life. Rather, to be beyond hope is to affirm that life does not require absolute and otherworldly values, a solution, to make it worth living. Tragedy is an expression of highest happiness beyond hope.

> This particular view will be better understood if I say that truly hopeless thought just happens to be defined by the opposite criteria and that the tragic work might be the work that, after all future hope is exiled, describes the life of a happy man. The more exciting life is, the more absurd is the idea of losing it... *In* this

---

[9] I return to this theme later in terms of the manner in which ethics, as the perpetual questioning after the meaning of existence, is not exhausted or solved by any particular morality or moral code.

> connection, Nietzsche appears to be the only artist to have derived the extreme consequences of an aesthetic of the Absurd, inasmuch as his final message lies in a sterile and conquering lucidity and an obstinate negation of any supernatural consolation (*MS*, 101).

According to Camus, only Nietzsche is truly tragic and absurd. He faces absurdity with cold clarity and offers neither hope nor consolation. Nietzsche lives in accordance with the absurdity of existence.

Camus suggests that living in accordance with the absurdity of everyday life is a type of ethic (*MS*, 48, 98). In his view, it is dishonest and disloyal or "immoral" to escape and elude the absurdity of temporal existence through appeal to the eternal meaning of morality.[10]

> There can be no question of holding forth on ethics. I have seen people behave badly with great morality and I note everyday that integrity has no need of rules. There is but one moral code that the absurd man can accept, the one that is not separate from God; the one that is dictated. But it so happens that he lives outside that God. As for the others (I mean also immoralism), the absurd man sees nothing in them but justifications and he has nothing to justify. I start out here from the principle of his innocence (*MS*, 49).

For Camus, ethics is not something we develop and declare. Existence itself is his "moral code" insofar as existence dictates our ethics. To him, it would be like God, if God existed. Codes of morality and immorality are only

---

[10] The notion of fidelity to existence, already noted in Nietzsche's philosophy, is the basis of Camus's ethic of lucidity and integrity toward absurdity, as emerges later.

justifications for some way of living that is not aligned with existence or goes against its grain. Camus defines innocence as being in tune with existence: "'The innocence of a being lies in its complete suitability to the world in which it lives'... The innocent is the person who explains nothing" (*C:I*, 39) This recalls Nietzsche's notion of the "*innocence of becoming*" or "innocence of all existence" which is redeemed from Christian-moral interpretations of responsibility and guilt (*WP*, 552, 765). Like Nietzsche, Camus claims that morality is based on the idea that our actions have some future consequence that either legitimates or negates them (MS, 50). However, people imbued with a sense of absurdity think there is only responsibility but not guilt. At most, we can use the past to guide ourselves in the future, but we must not use the future to justify or condemn our past actions (*MS*, 50). Camus indicates that there are many forces, especially the church, which tempt anyone whose absurd sensibility convinces them of their innocence to falsely accept that he or she is guilty (*MS*, 39). Camus's early novel *The Outsider* provides a vivid literary example through the manner in which the witnesses, lawyers, judge, jury, and finally the priest try to convince Meursault that he is guilty of his crime.[11]

In *The Fall* Camus describes the condition of absurdity in

---

[11] Albert Camus, *The Outsider*, trans. Stuart Gilbert, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1942).

which there is no absolute law, and hence no guilt, but he does so in light of the manner in which people assume the roles of judges in order to institute laws and consider others guilty.

> He who clings to a law does not fear the judgement that reinstates him in an order he believes in. But the keenest of human torments is to be judged without a law. Yet we are in that torment. Deprived of their natural curb, the judges, loosed at random, are racing through their job. Hence we have to try to go faster than they, don't we? Prophets and quacks multiply; they hasten to get there with a good law or a flawless organization before the world is deserted. Fortunately, *I* arrived! I am the end and the beginning; I announce the law. In short, I am judge-penitent.[12]

The speaker in this instance, under the borrowed name of Jean-Baptiste Clamence, claims that everyone feels at liberty to judge others and yet everyone is guilty. He considers himself as the most extreme exemplar of this absurd contradiction of judge-penitent.

> No excuses ever, for anyone; that's my principle at the outset. I deny the good intention, the respectable mistake, the indiscretion, the extenuating circumstance. With me there is no giving of absolution or blessing... In philosophy as in politics, I am for any theory that refuses to grant man innocence and for any practice that treats him as guilty. You see in me, *très cher*, an enlightened advocate of slavery... Without slavery, as a matter of fact, there is no definitive solution (*F*, 131-132).

Camus is not here rejecting his earlier claim about the

---

[12] Albert Camus, *The Fall*, trans. Justin O'Brien, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), 117-118; cited hereafter as *F*.

innocence of existence. *The Fall* is prefaced with a quote from Lermontov which indicates that he presents Jean-Baptiste as an example of absurdity become immoralism. That is, he himself does not agree with his character's attempt to condemn everyone including himself as guilty. He is critical of this attitude because he believes in innocence. As noted earlier, he therefore does not believe in his character's definitive moral solutions. Camus suggests that the contradictory role of judge-penitent is properly absurd. As absurd temporal human beings we are torn between our attempts to institute moral laws (meaning) and the moral lawlessness (silence) of the world. Yet we become immoral when we consider our moral laws as eternal or absolute and thereby escape and elude or otherwise contravene our absurd temporal human existence. Rather, to be truly "moral" we must maintain the tension and contradiction of our absurd temporal nature through lucidity and integrity toward absurdity.

6.3.3 Lucidity and Integrity

Nietzsche's ethic of honesty and truthfulness in the face of the tragic nature of existence is closely paralleled by Camus's ethic of lucidity and integrity toward absurdity. Camus is here inspired by Nietzsche: "For Nietzsche, real morality cannot be separated from lucidity" (*R*, 67). In Camus's view, we must be conscious of absurdity and remain

loyal and faithful to absurdity by refusing to escape or elude it through hope, consolation or reconciliation. To him, this ethic of lucidity and integrity is more "moral" than any morality that calls us away from temporal existence towards absolute and otherworldly values.

> And now they start to bellow that I am immoral. They must be translated as meaning that I need to give myself a morality. Admit it then, you fool. I do... Another way of looking at it: you must be simple, truthful, not go in for literary declamations - accept and commit yourself (*C:I*, 15).

The only type of morality, or more precisely, ethic, that Camus gives himself is one in which he becomes simple and truthful with respect to absurdity. The role of simplicity and truthfulness in Nietzsche's tragic ethic is already noted. This is another way for Camus to state his ethic of lucidity and integrity. What, however, are the implications of Camus's ethic of lucidity and integrity, of living simply and truthfully toward absurdity? How does such an ethic manifest itself in our lives?

As Nietzsche claims with respect to his imperative of creating a simplicity of style, so too Camus claims that facing absurdity with lucidity and integrity requires that we create a style of character as the foundation for our way of life. Camus claims that to be conscious of absurdity and nonetheless to create is to revolt. "Aesthetic of revolt. Great style and beautiful form, expression of highest revolt"

(*C:II*, 73). To Camus, however, we not only create in terms of art and thought, we also create ourselves. Rather, in creating, through the attitude with which we create, we thereby create ourselves. "To create is likewise to give shape to one's fate" (*MS*, 86). This recalls Nietzsche's claim that we must "give style" to our character by organizing all our diverse aspects under one ruling taste (*GS*, 290). However, Camus is aware of how difficult this creative task can be, especially if we attempt to create a unity with an attitude of lucidity and integrity toward absurdity.

> A man who has reached the absurd and tries to live consistently with his views always discovers that the most difficult thing in the world to maintain is awareness. Circumstances almost always stand in the way. He has to live lucidly in a world where dispersion is the rule.
>
> He thus realizes that the real problem, *even without God*, is the problem of psychological unity (the only problem which living out the absurd really poses is that of the metaphysical unity between the world and the mind) and inner peace. He also realizes that this peace is not possible without a discipline which is difficult to reconcile with the world. *Here lies the problem*, for it must be reconciled with the world. What must be achieved is *living by a Rule in the world* (*C:II*, 5-6).[13]

We might be tempted to add here "living by a Rule of the

---

[13] Camus also writes: "What is it that gives Christianity its superiority *as an example* (the only one it has)? Christ and his saints - the quest for a *style of life*" (*C:II*, 12). Like Nietzsche, he too displays an ambivalent relation to Christianity. He does not follow it as a committed believer, but he finds it valuable as an example of the attempt to give ourselves a style of life.

world" in light of Camus's ethic of lucidity and integrity towards absurdity. The problem Camus outlines is that we must not create a style for ourselves that is not of this world (the absurd tension). Yet we must create a style for ourselves that unifies us and makes living possible. In other words, a style must not be a solution. Moreover, our style, though created by and for ourselves, must be in tune with absurd existence and must be an expression of absurdity. Yet, at the same time, absurdity (dispersion) runs counter to our attempt to lucidly create a style or unity of character that is in tune with absurdity. The attempt to create a style or unified character that expresses our absurd nature is emblematic of absurdity itself as the tension between the human articulation of meaning in the world and the silence of the world.

The matter of giving ourselves the simplicity of style does not answer the question of how the ethic of lucidity and integrity toward absurdity affects our ethos, our way of life. Assuming we have created a style or unified character that does justice to absurdity, what attitude toward our life do we thus maintain? If we believe in absurdity, then how do we comport ourselves toward life? Camus writes:

> If it is true that the absurd has been fulfilled (or, rather, revealed), then it follows that no experience has any value in itself, and that all our actions are equally instructive. The will is nothing. Acceptance everything. On one condition: that, faced with the humblest or the most heart-rending experience, man should always be `present';

> and that he should endure this experience without flinching, with complete lucidity (*C:I*, 80).

How does this imperative of being "present" relate to the ethic of lucidity and integrity? For Camus, being "present" involves being conscious of absurdity at every moment. Since all experience is of equal importance or unimportance because there are no future consequences, we should immerse ourselves with complete commitment in each present moment. Camus opens *The Myth of Sisyphus* with a quote from Pindar: "O my soul, do not aspire to immortal life, but exhaust the limits of the possible" (*MS*, 2). The revolt, freedom and diversity of absurd art also characterizes absurd life.

> This aspect of life being given to me, can I adapt myself to it? Now, faced with this particular concern, belief in the absurd is tantamount to substituting the quantity of experiences for the quality. If I convince myself that this life has no other aspect than that of the absurd, if I feel that its whole equilibrium depends on that perpetual opposition between my conscious revolt and the darkness in which it struggles, if I admit that my freedom has no meaning except in relation to its limited fate, then I must say that what counts is not the best living but the most living. It is not up to me to wonder if this is vulgar or revolting, elegant or deplorable. Once and for all, value judgements are discarded here in favor of factual judgements (*MS*, 45).

Camus here appears to involve himself in a paradox. He claims that quantity not quality, most not best, is the important issue with respect to life experiences. However, his ethic of lucidity and integrity toward absurdity, of living in tune with absurdity, would seem to suggest that quantity is in fact

quality and most is in fact best. Even his claim to substitute value judgements with factual judgements is itself a value judgement because he chooses the latter in view of his ethic of lucidity and integrity toward absurdity. That is, he favours factual judgements, those based on the consciousness of absurdity, for reasons of the ethic of absurdity. It appears as if Camus makes paradoxical ethical claims similar to those Nietzsche makes when he overcomes particular morality on wider ethical grounds. However, this paradox is only apparent, as emerges later.

Camus realizes that his imperative of "the most living" requires further definition. Yet through defining it he indicates both its relation to ethics and the manner in which it itself is an ethic.

> The most living; in the broadest sense, that rule means nothing. It calls for definition. It seems to begin with the fact that the notion of quantity has not been sufficiently explored. For it can account for a large share of human experience. A man's rule of conduct and his scale of values have no meaning except through the quantity and variety of experiences he has been in a position to accumulate... I see, then, that the individual character of a common code of ethics lies not so much in the ideal importance of its basic principles as in the norm of an experience that it is possible to measure... But already many men among the most tragic cause us to foresee that a longer experience changes this table of values. They make us imagine that adventurer of the everyday who through mere quantity of experiences would break all records (I am purposely using this sports expression) and would thus win his own code of ethics... Breaking all the records is first and foremost being faced with the world as often as

> possible. How can that be done without contradiction and without playing on words? For on the one hand the absurd teaches that all experiences are unimportant, and on the other it urges toward the greatest quantity of experiences. How, then, can one fail to do as so many of those men I was speaking of earlier - choose the form of life that brings us the most possible of that human matter, thereby introducing a scale of values that on the other hand one claims to reject? (*MS*, 45-46).

The contradiction Camus indicates here is an aspect of the absurd itself. We may try to develop a principle for living and yet our continual experience destroys it over and over since we must incorporate more and more experience. In his view, to be true to the absurd, we must face the world and experience absurdity as often as possible. His is an ethics of lucidity and integrity toward absurdity which resists any attempt to escape or elude absurdity through the absolute values of morality. This makes ethics a perpetual process. Here Camus's ethics seems to consist in exceeding and surpassing particular configurations of morality and moral codes, a perpetual process fuelled by absurdity itself.

In this context Camus indicates that Nietzsche attacks the morality of Platonism and Christianity (nihilism) with such force because of his particular circumstances even though he does not want to destroy them because he is aware of their positive contributions to culture (*C:II*, 39). Camus claims that we should not hold truck with one-sided absolutist extremes, though he suggests that at certain points it becomes

necessary to forcefully counter things in order to set the balance of existence right. This is the case with Nietzsche's counter-balancing function as he counters nihilistic morality in order to continue ethical questioning. For Camus, as for Nietzsche, it is precisely the tragic or absurd sensibility which allows us to maintain this tenuous balance. "Belief in the meaning of life always implies a scale of values, a choice, our preferences. Belief in the absurd, according to our definitions, teaches the contrary" (*MS*, 44-45). This relates to the view that the tragic or absurd attitude justifies everything in existence. From the ethical but moral-free perspective of tragedy and absurdity, all things are justified and of equal value.

In *The Rebel* Camus also attempts to determine Nietzsche's position with respect to Christianity. He states: "If he attacks Christianity in particular, it is only in so far as it represents morality" (*R*, 68). He explains why Nietzsche despises morality.

> Morality has no faith in the world. For Nietzsche, real morality cannot he separated from lucidity. He is severe on the "calumniators of the world" because he discerns in the calumny a shameful taste for evasion. Traditional morality, for him, is only a special type of immorality (*R*, 67-68).

In light of his equation of lucidity with morality and evasiveness with immorality, Camus continues to indicate the type of ethic that Nietzsche proposes. It is an ethic of

absurdity.

> Nietzsche cries out to man that the only truth is the world, to which he must be faithful and in which he must live and find his salvation. But at the same time he teaches him that to live in a lawless world is impossible because to live explicitly implies a law (*R*, 72).

To Camus, Nietzsche recognizes the absurd contradiction, the contradiction that comprises absurdity, between the lawlessness of the world and our human necessity to live with a law. In his view, Nietzsche is loyal and faithful to existence by affirming the necessity of absurdity - *amor fati* (*R*, 72). Camus claims that Nietzsche refuses to erect absolute idols, moralities or gods, which lead us away from our temporal nature toward eternity. "The rebel who first denies God, finally aspires to replace Him. But Nietzsche's message is that the rebel can only become God by renouncing every form of rebellion, even the type of rebellion that produces gods to chastise humanity" (*R*, 73). The ethic of absurdity requires that we overcome morality because it is "immoral" with respect to absurdity.

6.3.4 Rebellion and Moderation

The discussion of Camus suggests that ethics, considered on a wider scale as the perpetual process of questioning after the meaning of existence and the human action appropriate to that meaning, is not exhausted by any particular morality or

moral code. Morality offers eternal and absolute answers to the questions about the meaning of existence and the code of human action. Ethics, however, is perpetual questioning. An absurd ethics knows that it can never provide the meaning of existence or code of human action, but it continues anyway. It recognizes the absurdity of life, the unbridgeable gap between humanity and the world and the absence of any appeal to eternal and absolute meaning, but it considers the constant creation of meaning valuable even though it is futile from the perspective of eternity. For Camus, this can be considered as metaphysical rebellion. He states: "Metaphysical rebellion is the movement by which man protests against his condition and against the whole of creation. It is metaphysical because it contests the ends of man and of creation" (*R*, 23). This is an absurd rebellion because it is a contradiction: the attempt to go beyond our human condition is central to the human condition.

Camus claims that absurd rebellion is never exhausted by one creation or even by all creation together. Absurd rebellion is the perpetual process of conscious creating. Camus considers art as the paradigm of absurd rebellion. He states: "Art is the activity that exalts and denies simultaneously" (*R*, 253). That is, art requires the world but art never leaves the world the way it is. Art is caught in the absurd tension between the silent world and the drive to give

it unity or meaning. Truly absurd art does not escape or elude this tension, it maintains the median or moderate point within it.

Camus also discusses the absurd tension between temporality and eternity, between the silence of the world and the drive to unity or meaning, in terms of the balance between stability and movement.

> The world is not in a condition of pure stability; nor is it only movement. It is both movement and stability. The historical dialectic, for example, is not in continuous pursuit of an unknown value. It revolves around the limit, which is its prime value. Heraclitus, the discoverer of the constant change of things, nevertheless set a limit to this perpetual process. This limit was symbolized by Nemesis, the goddess of moderation and the implacable enemy of the immoderate. A process of thought which wanted to take into account the contemporary contradictions of rebellion should seek its inspiration from this goddess (*R*, 296).

Camus proposes moderation as the proper foundation for any rebellion because it is loyal and faithful to the contradictions of absurdity. There are no absolutes and yet we must search for meaning. Camus applies his notion of moderate rebellion specifically to ethics.

> As for the moral contradictions, they too begin to become soluble in the light of this conciliatory value. Virtue cannot separate itself from reality without becoming a principle of evil. Nor can it identify itself completely with reality without denying itself (*R*, 296).

Morality is "immoral" when it becomes absolutist. Morality that does not attend to or change anything of the world is no

longer morality either. The ethics of absurdity require us to maintain the position of the rebel by attempting to change the world without the security of absolute values. Camus points out that murder is often committed on the grounds of either absolute rebellion or absolute refusal to rebel.

> Moderation, confronted with this irregularity teaches us that at least one part of realism is necessary to every ethic: pure and unadulterated virtue is homicidal. And one part of ethics is necessary to all realism: cynicism is homicidal (*R*, 297).

In Camus's view, we never possess eternal justification. The establishment of eternal justification and the actions or lack of actions based on it is nihilistic because it negates the absurd nature of existence itself.

According to Camus, then, the ethics of absurdity, lived as absurd rebellion, must remain aware of the absurdity of life, the tension between humanity and the world, and create in a way that does not negate either or both of the terms. Rather, to be ethical we must maintain the contradiction of absurdity through moderation. For Camus, moderation, not extremity, is the rule of absurd existence. The lucidity and integrity of the ethic of absurdity requires that we be moderate because only then are we loyal and faithful to absurd existence. The value of moderation, of thinking at the meridian, thus has particular relevance to the ethics of absurdity. Moderation maintains the perpetual process of

questioning and creating that characterizes the ethics of absurdity. In this context Camus states: "But it is bad to stop, hard to be satisfied with a single way of seeing, to go without contradiction, perhaps the most subtle of all spiritual forces. The preceding merely defines a way of thinking. But the point is to live" (*MS*, 48).

6.4 Nietzsche's Positive Contribution

If we consider Camus as an example of a writer who is genuinely inspired and influenced by Nietzsche, then his writing should tell us much about Nietzsche. The notion of absurdity as the contradiction engendered by the perpetual human articulation of meaning in a silent and meaningless world, the distinction he maintains between ethics on a wider scale and particular morality or moral codes, indirectly indicate Nietzsche's contribution to the question of ethics in contemporary philosophy. Camus shares with Nietzsche an ethic in which absolute morality is overcome on ethical grounds of fidelity to absurd existence. Camus and Nietzsche maintain the value of the perpetual process of creating human meaning even within the absurdity of existence. They both attempt to overcome the nihilism of absolute values through perpetual creation.

However, there seems to be at least one major difference between Nietzsche and Camus with respect to the question of

ethics. On the one hand, Nietzsche distinguishes values in terms of whether they are strong and stimulate life (good) or whether they are weak and negate life (bad), but he cannot give himself a foundation for determining "right" (good) from "wrong" (evil) as traditional Christian-moral categories. For him, one's ethic depends on one's evaluation of existence, and it is therefore vague and indefinite. On the other hand, Camus appears willing to give himself and others an ethic of common decency, which is more traditionally and specifically moral, but is also vague and indefinite because it depends on how far one's sense of commonality extends and on what one takes decency to mean. In his view, nonetheless, we must not kill ourselves or others and we should support the oppressed. Leaving aside the issue of whether Camus is being faithful to Nietzsche, the foundations for his notion of common decency must be considered. How can Camus make this type of ethical claim? This is a subject for further investigation.

Thus, in the absence of any appeal to absolute or eternal values, I claim that Nietzsche's positive contribution to the question of ethics is his inauguration of a radical questioning of ethics. He opens the question of ethics in a manner that has as yet never been closed. For him, ethics is itself the attempt to keep open the question of ethics and resist its closure. Nietzsche's ethics is the overcoming of particular morality and moral codes. Nietzsche states his

ethical imperative in this manner: "Either abolish your reverences or - *yourselves*!" The latter would be nihilism; but would not the former also be - nihilism? This is *our* question mark" (*GS*, 346). The discussion throughout this thesis indicates that, though Nietzsche raises the question of his own nihilism, he is not a nihilist. The abolition of our reverences, our particular configurations of morality and moral codes, rather than the abolition of ourselves and our perpetual articulation of meaning is the overcoming of nihilism. For all that Nietzsche destructively criticizes with respect to morality, his question of ethics also provides the positive preparation for an ethics or way of life beyond nihilism. Nietzsche addresses his philosophy to preparatory human beings: "For believe me: the secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is - to *live dangerously*!" (*GS*, 283). That is, as temporal human beings, we must live without the security of absolute and eternal values.

Perhaps I am doing injustice and mischief to Nietzsche. I would not be the first to do so. Nietzsche's philosophy is open to, indeed invites, multiple and sometimes contradictory interpretations. Nietzsche appeals to Dionysian tragedy to overcome nihilistic Christian morality, but he may be considered as contributing to ethics on a wider scale. Nietzsche's call for the rebirth of tragedy is testament to

his intention to engage in the overcoming of nihilism through the revaluation of values, specifically Christian morality, but the final result of his project remains as yet undecided since he has a paradoxical relation to Christian morality. This is the persistent question of Nietzsche's destiny or fate, his ambiguous legacy. What is crucial in Nietzsche's ambiguous legacy? Nietzsche's contribution to the question of ethics in contemporary philosophy may be difficult to determine because of its paradoxical and preparatory nature. Preparatory thinkers like Nietzsche break new ground but leave behind them newly unearthed stones as well as fertile soil.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources:

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, Inc., 1967.

___. *Untimely Mediations*. Translated by R.J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

___. *Human, All Too Human: A Book For Free Spirits*. Translated by R.J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

___. *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*. Translated by R.J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

___. *The Gay Science, with a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, Inc., 1974.

___. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book For Everyone and No One*. Translated by R.J. Hollingdale. Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1967.

___. *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, Inc., 1966.

___. *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic* in *On the Genealogy of Morals/Ecce Homo*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale. New York: Random House, Inc., 1967.

___. *The Anti-Christ* in *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*. Translated by R.J. Hollingdale. Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1968.

___. *Twilight of the Idols, or How to Philosophize With a Hammer* in *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*. Translated by R.J. Hollingdale. Middlesex: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1968.

___. *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is* in *On the Genealogy of Morals/Ecce Homo*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, Inc., 1967.

___. *The Will to Power*. Edited by Walter Kaufmann. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale. New York: Random House, Inc., 1967.

Secondary Sources:

Camus, Albert. *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*. Translated by Anthony Bower. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1954.

___. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. Translated by Justin O'Brien. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1955.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.

Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Edited by Donald F. Bouchard. Translated by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.

Heidegger, Martin. *Nietzsche*, Volumes I-IV. Edited by David Farrell Krell. Translated by David Farrell Krell et al. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991.

___. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Translated by Albert Hofstadler. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1971.

___. "The Word of Nietzsche: God is Dead"" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Translated by William Lovitt. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1977.

___. *On Time and Being*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1972.

Other Sources Cited or Consulted:

Adorno, Theodor W. *The Jargon of Authenticity*. Translated by Knut Tarnowski and Frederick Will. Northwestern University Press, 1973.

Allison, David B. Editor. *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*. Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1977.

Camus, Albert. *The Outsider*. Translated by Stuart Gilbert. Middlesex: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1942.

___. *The Fall*. Translated by Justin O'Brien. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1956.

Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge* in *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*. Translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith, New York: Random House, Inc., 1972.

___. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. Translation of *Les Mots et les choses*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1970.

___. *Power Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. Edited by Colin Gordon and translated by Colin Gordon et al. New York: Random House, Inc., 1980.

___. *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1966-84)*. Edited by Sylvère Lotinger. Translated by John Johnston. New York: Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series, 1989.

___. *The Use of Pleasure, Volume 2 of The History of Sexuality*. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Random House, Inc., 1985.

___. *The Care of the Self, Volume 3 of The History of Sexuality*. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Random House, Inc., 1986.

Lingis, Alphonso. "The Will to Power" in *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*. Edited by David B. Allison. New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1977.

MacIntyre, Alisdair. *After Virtue: A Study In Moral Theory*, Second Edition. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984.

Nussbaum, Martha C. *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and ethics in Greek tragedy and philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Pfeffer, Rose. *Nietzsche: Disciple of Dionysus*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1974.

Pöggeler, Otto. *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking*. Translated by Daniel Magurshak and Sigmund Barber. Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1989.

Poole, Ross. *Morality and Modernity*. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Rorty, Richard. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Schiller, Friedrich. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Edited and translated by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Shusterman, Richard M. *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 1992.

Schutte, Ofelia. *Beyond Nihilism: Nietzsche without Masks*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Scott, Charles E. *The Language of Difference*. Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1987.

Scott, Charles E. *The Question of Ethics: Nietzsche, Foucault, Heidegger*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Sheridan, Alan. *Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Strong, Tracy B. *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*, Expanded Edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G.E.M. Anscombe. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher, Ltd., 1958.