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19th-Century Philosophy

An Introduction

Fichte, Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche

Lecture Notes

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1. Introduction: Why study the philosophy of the 19th century?

1.

Why study the philosophy of the 19th century? Many of the philosophy courses you are likely to encounter seem to get along quite well without paying much attention to it. Indeed why study the history of philosophy at all? This leads to a still more fundamental question: why study philosophy? What does it matter?

Let me begin by proposing a tentative answer to the last question: We study philosophy to learn who we are and where we should be going? It is the same concern that long ago made Socrates a philosopher. Such an inquiry inevitably intertwines with an inquiry into the world in which we find ourselves and of which we are a part. The two questions cannot be disentangled. We study philosophy to learn about ourselves and our place in the world. So understood philosophy is essentially a philosophical anthropology, with an eye both the past and to the future.

We are essentially historical beings. To really understand ourselves we have to understand how we got to where we are now, the history in which we stand, a history that we possess and that possesses us. We are what we are because of our past, which lets us experience and judge the world the way we do. The way we experience the world cannot be disentangled from inherited and for the most part unquestioned prejudices. And how do we learn about this multifaceted and often questionable inheritance? We turn to history, especially to those parts of history that deal most directly with those activities in which our self-understanding finds its clearest expression, such as literature or the arts. Of these disciplines, as the definition proposed above suggests, philosophy gives us perhaps the clearest expressions of our self-understanding. This enables us to answer the second question: we study the history of philosophy? In order to better understand what we have become, i.e. what we now are.

But why study the philosophy of the nineteenth century, and why focus on a few, with a single exception all German thinkers? For one, because the thought of just these thinkers continues to preside, often in unacknowledged ways, over the way we still think today. In important ways the nineteenth century has helped shape our image of man. Most of us are not aware of this, because this heritage has become so ingrained in our ways of thinking, in what we do and do not take for granted, that the matter seems to

require little thought. I do not mean to suggest that this image of man is well circumscribed. It has many different roots and fuzzy and changing edges. We are thus dealing with anything but a strongly unified timeless image of man. What we are dealing with is a patchwork, product of an often painful history.

The Middle Ages, to give just one example that is part of our inheritance, thought of man and his place in a then still God-centered world in very different fashion. Let me unpack this point just a bit. For a medieval peasant — and medieval society was fundamentally still a peasant society, the world had a natural up and down. Men lived here on earth, between heaven and hell. God, man, and the devil all had their place in that order, God at the top, the devil at the bottom. This cosmos was centered in God. One consequence of such a conception is that human reason was sought capable of investigating God as it was capable of investigating the stars or man. Not yet had reason and faith been radically severed. The question: what should an individual do? was answered in part by considering the individual's place in that cosmic order: every individual has been given a part to play, one the part of a king, another the part of a peasant, and a good person would attempt to play that part as best he or she could, guided by God's revealed commandments. The hierarchical social order was sought to mirror the hierarchical order of nature. But the Renaissance shattered the medieval world. For us today, or at least for most of us, large parts of this conception are no longer part of our understanding of ourselves and of our place in the world.

For one, our universe is no longer hierarchical. The stars are no better than the mud down here. The same rejection of hierarchical thinking is reflected in our understanding of the human order. One individual has not been assigned by God or nature a higher place than another. Another difference is that faith and scientific reason have grown ever more distinct. Most of us would dismiss attempts to treat of God in a scientific manner. For physics theology is irrelevant. The question of the existence of God should have no place in physics textbooks.

Another difference is especially important: the world that is discussed by the scientist knows nothing of value. The scientist qua scientist describes what is the case. Qua scientist he does not evaluate. Our age is thus marked by a bifurcation of value and fact, a bifurcation that is essentially a contribution of modern philosophical thinking, and presides over our science and its offspring technology.

I don't want to evaluate here the medieval and the modern conceptions of man and his place in the world. I only want to point out that many different answers can be and have been given to the question: What is man? What is his vocation? By our own life we either implicitly or explicitly give our own answer, an answer however, that for the most part is not really our own in that it has been shaped by our upbringing, our spiritual inheritance. But to live responsibly, must we not have the courage to judge that answer? But to judge that answer responsibly, we must first understand it, must make explicit what is at first only implicit. I hope that this discussion of the philosophy of the 19th century will be of some help in this.

Where are we? Where should we stand? Where should we be going? By "we" here I do of course not mean only those in this room, but I mean all of us who belong to a cultural tradition that has one of its roots, especially important for our science, in Greek philosophy, another of its roots, especially important for our ethics, in the Biblical tradition, especially in Christianity. If the Greek root was reaffirmed, the Biblical root was shaken by the Enlightenment's faith in reason. And in an important sense we all remain heirs of the Enlightenment. But the Enlightenment's faith in reason was itself shaken by reason's self-questioning and by a history that includes two World Wars and the holocaust. Today this fractured history embraces not just Americans and Europeans, but the globe.

I said that our by now global modern world has its roots in Greek philosophy and in the Biblical tradition. The latter is especially important for our moral convictions. Again I do not mean to suggest that the majority of people today are necessarily aware of this. I certainly do not claim that a majority today would consider themselves Christians in a robust sense. What I mean rather is this: regardless of whether we believe or do not believe, we cannot escape this inheritance; many of the most fundamental concepts in which we think are derived from it and can ultimately be understood only if this many-faceted origin is kept in mind. Even a phenomenon such as Marxism, including its contemporary transformations, is at bottom a secularization of ideas that are fundamentally Christian. I shall have more to say about this when we turn to the *Communist Manifesto*. The fact that this Christian origin is not recognized by many Marxists does not make it any the less true.

However, having made the point that the tradition in which we find ourselves and in which especially our moral thinking remains embedded, we have to point out also that for many centuries now this tradition has been under attack.

By this I do not mean overt attacks such as those waged by various opposed ideologies. Rather the attack against the Biblical tradition takes place in our midst, within everyone of us, just in so far as we are part of this secular age, heirs of the Enlightenment and its faith in reason. If we draw these two determinations together we can say: modern man is essentially a battlefield between the traditional value system that in many ways still presides over our lives and forces that tend to disrupt it. And perhaps more than other century, it was the nineteenth century that drew the battle lines.

How are we to understand the development that caused the traditional value system to be challenged? What led human beings to no longer take for granted the world in which they once found themselves? This is of course a very long, complicated story. But, oversimplifying, we can say, we meet with an increasing emphasis on the self, as it finds expression in a new awareness of the significance of perspective. The way the world presents itself to me first of all is seen to depend on how I am situated in space and time. We can speak of the rise of subjectivity. What do we mean by this: The realization that what I experience as the world is first of all world for me. With this the emphasis shifts from the world to the subject. We find an expression of this in Descartes who takes the certainty that I, a thinking thing exist, to be the starting point of all philosophic investigation. With this the things of the world come to be thought of as first of all objects for a subject, dependent for their being on the subject. The subject stands before the world as a spectator stands before some picture.

With this the old hierarchical conception of the universe had to collapse. The world comes to be understood as the totality of facts that happen to be whatever they are. In that world there are no values to be found. Nor is there a place in that world for God, for such a god, too, would be an object for a subject and as such dependent on the subject.

The turn towards subjectivity had a further consequence. No longer firmly placed in a taken for granted order, human beings could no longer take themselves for granted. Should not each individual assume responsibility for what he or she is to be? The question: what is man? What is the vocation of man? — the title of the first book we will

be reading¹ — assumed a new urgency. And yet, even as it assumed a new urgency, an increasingly mute world gave no answer. Increasingly human beings found themselves without clear guidelines to assess their behavior. An expression of this is Nietzsche's suggestion that if God is dead, everything is allowed. But if everything is allowed, why does anything matter? Along with an increased sense of freedom goes a depressing sense of the unbearable lightness of all things. The nineteenth century is thus the century of the rise of nihilism. Not that there were not countless opposing voices. As I suggested, the nineteenth century is a battlefield between the traditional value system and nihilism. Throughout this course we shall keep encountering both antagonists. This is true especially of the first thinker we shall be studying, of Fichte. And it will remain equally true of the last philosopher who we will be studying, of Nietzsche.

The nineteenth century seems to confront us then with something like an either/or: either the traditional value system or nihilism. And if our response to this alternative is to be a reasonable one, we need to examine what can be said in support of either position to understand the claims advanced by each side. An easy way out is of course to declare this a fruitless academic discussion, that all of us know what really counts and is valuable, that the value question has already been settled for us by the way we live: do we not all have a reasonably robust sense of what is right and what is wrong, a sense that does not seem to need the input of philosophers? But to give that answer is to refuse to take full responsibility for one's actions: one does what one is expected or told to do, rather than what is right. The two may of course and hopefully do coincide. But history has taught us that this identity can by no means be taken for granted. The question I want to raise in this course is: can we human beings put the values we have come to take more or less for granted in question and return strengthened from such questioning or are our values so feeble that they will be overturned by such questioning and that what is needed is unquestioning acceptance. In other words are skepticism and dogmatism the only two possible responses to the question: what shall we do?

Let me sum up: the nineteenth century had to struggle with the disintegration of a long established world order. The industrial revolution and all it entailed is but one aspect of this. Another is the ever-decreasing significance of the inherited faith. The

¹ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Vocation of Man*, ed. and intro. Roderick M., Chisholm, (New York, Liberal Arts Press, 1956).

nineteenth century saw the rise of nihilism. And whether we like it or not, that specter has remained with us, although we may try to veil this by refusing to question inherited values. A more thoughtful response is needed. But before such a response can be attempted we have to understand better the situation we find ourselves in. A study of the philosophy of the 19th century provides significant guidance.

2. Descartes and Kant

1.

Fichte's *The Vocation of Man* appeared in 1800, already a good reason to begin a course on 19th century philosophy with it. Fichte was then in Berlin, having recently been dismissed from a professorship in Jena for what was perceived to be his atheism. We will have to see how just this charge was.

The cultural excitement generated in this period is difficult for us to understand. The French revolution (1789) had put an end to the old social and political order. In Paris it placed the goddess of reason on the altar of Notre Dame. Freedom was in the air, but shadowed by terror. The thought of Rousseau was seemingly omnipresent. Napoleon, having just been victorious in the battle of Marengo, seemed on the verge of creating a new world order. And there seemed to be genius everywhere. Just think of music. Haydn was still alive (1732-1804), Mozart (1756-1791) had been dead for only a few years, Beethoven (1770-1827) was at the height of his powers, Schubert (1797-1828) a little boy, just to mention the best known. In painting a similar excitement was generated by neo-classicism and the School of Paris, think of David. The culture of the Baroque had disintegrated. And in literature, too, genius seemed to appear everywhere, especially in Germany, not just Goethe and Schiller (1759-1805), who presided over the cultural life of Weimar, but also such writers as Hölderlin, Kleist, Novalis, the Schlegel brothers, to name but a few.

And the same could be said of philosophy. In 1800 Kant (1724-1804) was still alive, but he had already found worthy successors in such philosophers as Fichte (1762-1814), Schelling (1775-1854), and Hegel (1770-1831), who, like the poet Schiller, all taught for a while in the university of Jena, the university of the tiny, but enlightened duchy of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach. In the years around 1800 these two small towns, Weimar and Jena were the uncontested center of German idealism and romanticism. Existentialism, communism, totalitarianism all can be said to have their roots in this ferment.

What generated all that excitement? Most fundamentally it was the falling apart of the old world, the disintegration of the religious, social and political order that, if often shaken, had prevailed for centuries. The rise of rationalism that issued in the

Enlightenment had a great deal to do with that disintegration. As I said, freedom was in the air. Along with it went a new emphasis on the individual and his feelings. No longer assigned his place by the old order, the individual was thrown back unto his own resources. This is an exhilarating, but also a frightening, disorienting experience. That the word nihilism was coined at the time is significant. It was first used by the philosopher Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743–1819). The excessive reliance on reason, he was convinced, could only divest our lives of meaning. Jacobi was thinking especially of Kant and the Kantians, accusing Fichte, for one, of falling into nihilism and atheism. His was indeed an important voice in the atheism controversy that was to cost Fichte his professorship in Jena. *The Vocation of Man* may be read as Fichte's response.

2

In *The Vocation of Man* the influence of two philosophers especially is omnipresent: Descartes and Kant. Given their importance let me spend the rest of this second session summarizing at least briefly some of the most significant points.

Few philosophers are initially as accessible and in the end as elusive as Descartes. Consider the seemingly easy steps which in the *Meditations* prepare the way for Descartes' proof of the existence of God, simple enough to serve as a popular introduction to philosophy.

(1) In order to gain an indubitable, unshakeable foundation Descartes begins by trying to doubt all that he had up to then taken for granted.

(2) He establishes that foundation by reflecting on the *cogito*: I cannot doubt that I, a thinking thing, exist.

(3) This leads to the discovery of a criterion of what is necessary if I am to truly know something: I must have a clear and distinct representation of it.

(4) But doubts return: how do I know whether what presents itself to me clearly and distinctly is really true? Have I not been deceived in the past and may I not be deceived again? How can I make sure that clear and distinct ideas will not also prove deceptive? That they allow me to get hold of reality?

(5) The proof of the existence of God is designed to defeat such doubts and thus to secure the trust put in clarity and distinctness.

Descartes introduces his doubt as a methodological device, guarding against error. Too often we accept what is questionable and are content with appearances, hypotheses and conjectures. Not that we can dispense with this altogether: we simply don't have time to examine and weigh carefully all that we see and hear. So we rely on what one says. But when a philosopher builds on hearsay and conjecture his thought will lack a foundation. To secure a foundation for philosophy, and beyond that for all scientific knowledge, Descartes demands that we take as false all that is not so patently true that it will resist all our attempts to doubt it.

In order to doubt we must be able to conceive of the possibility that things may be different from the way they appear to us. Essential to doubt is the contrast between the way things appear to us and reality. If there is no way of moving from the latter to the former, there can be no doubt. It is thus perfectly meaningful to doubt whether the world that I naively take to be as I see it really is that way. In this context philosophers, including Descartes, have always appealed to the many ways in which deception is part of our experience; think of defective vision, of optical illusions, or more generally of the limitations imposed on us by our senses.

But Descartes is not content with such well-known doubt concerning the reliability of our senses; he wants to go further. How can we be sure that the world in which we find ourselves is more than something we just imagine? Can we not conceive of an evil demon who delights in deluding us into thinking real what lacks reality? Perhaps the world exists only as my idea, an idea that does not misrepresent, but does not represent reality at all?

But when doubt is stretched to this point it threatens to become meaningless. To explain the meaning of this doubt Descartes still appeals to our ordinary understanding of what it means to doubt. But this appeal conceals the shift that has taken place. We may be able to make sense of doubting whether the world really is as it presents itself to us, but what sense does it make to doubt the reality of the world? What are we really doubting. What does "reality" mean here?

But do we not all know that that the world is real. Is a philosopher who attempts to doubt the reality of the world not just wasting his time? In some sense that must be admitted. But in what sense? Again the question returns: what do we mean by "real"? Perhaps I can conceive that this world lacks reality when I am completely absorbed in my

thoughts; but as soon as it is time to make a responsible decision this seems no longer possible. The reality of the world seems manifest in my actions.

What does it mean to act? All action is for the sake of something that is taken to matter. Suppose someone felt that nothing mattered. A total paralyzing indifference would be the consequence. In so far as we act we find things to matter. By saying that things matter we ascribe reality to the world. A world in which nothing matters is a world that lacks reality. Loss of reality is inseparably bound up with loss of meaning. So in asking: is the world real? we also ask: does the world have any meaning?

But is this not just a silly question? Of course it matters. — But why do we act the way we do? Do we have a good answer to that question? Is there a point to our life? Or can we only say: we act the way we do because it is our nature? Are we being reasonable when we say certain things matter? To be sure, instrumental reasons are easily given: we eat because we are hungry. But does reason determine what finally matters? The problem posed by Descartes's philosophy is at bottom the problem: can reason make a contribution to our understanding of what matters, or is this based on blind belief or instinct that is strictly speaking unreasonable.

For an answer Descartes turned to God. He attempted to prove that an all powerful good God provides our finite understanding with its measure. God provides us with an ideal of perfection that we can use to judge our more or less imperfect actions, where Descartes is especially interested in our attempts to understand and master nature. By proving the existence of God Descartes hopes to have proved the reality of the world. God thus becomes the principle that assures the possibility of meaningful action. A world without God would be for him a world in which nothing mattered.

Descartes thought that human reason was powerful enough to prove the existence of God. That is to say, he thought human reason powerful enough to answer the problem of meaning. As a matter of fact, a careful examination of his proofs of the existence of God will show that Descartes' arguments fail to be convincing. He has borrowed too much from the past. Despite much rhetoric claiming a radical break with the past, his faith in reason has not really left the medieval world view fully behind. In the end it is only the underlying assumption of this world-view that can give his proofs of the existence of God, which are to secure his faith in reason, some plausibility. A more skeptical age had no difficulty punching holes in Descartes' arguments.

3

This skepticism is best represented by the British empiricists, and here again especially by Hume. Hume insists that Descartes had believed reason to be capable of doing more than it actually can do. All meaningful statements are reduced by him to one of two kinds: either they are verifiable by reference to fact, and a fact is something that can be experienced in some sensory way, or the statement is of the nature $A=A$, i.e. a tautology. 'The sun rises in the morning' is an example of the former, the statement '7+5=12' an example of the latter. It is easy to see that with this key statements of Descartes' system turn out to be meaningless. The very idea of some reality behind the phenomena that present themselves to me in experience is meaningless and must be cancelled out. This reality behind what is experienced makes no sense.

What happens to meaning? Hume cannot deny that we do find our world meaningful in some sense. But this becomes a matter of subjective feeling, on which reason can shed no light. This is to say: a good action comes to mean at bottom: this action: hurrah! This is a bad action comes to mean: this action: booh! In Descartes and Hume we have thus the claims of reason and subjective feeling confronting each other.

Kant's work shows the influence of both thinkers. Kant was trained in the tradition of Cartesian rationalism, as represented in Germany especially by Leibniz, Wolff, and Baumgarten. He was in his fifties when, as he put it, Hume awakened him from his dogmatic slumber. And yet Kant could not follow Hume all the way. Hume's overly restrictive understanding of meaning had to be rejected. Take the statement: "man is a being in space." Surely it is meaningful. Is it a tautology? It would seem not: did not Descartes argue that the human being is essentially a *res cogitans*, a thinking substance, and as such not spatial? Is it experienced? One is tempted to say: yes. But how do we know that we are in space? By experiencing things in space, myself surrounded by such things. But this implies that these things can be encountered only as in some sense out there. Space is not deduced from our encounter with things, but presupposed by it. It is a condition of that encounter. And an analogous point can be made with respect to time. All I experience is in time, but time is not deduced from these facts, it is presupposed by my experiencing. Time and space are presupposes by the way I experience things. The world I experience is therefore spatial and temporal and

necessarily so. This is how it presents itself to me. But this is not to say anything about reality as it is in itself. Take a third statement: there is a necessary connection between A and B, where A is in our past and B in our future. Hume would have to deny this. All experiential knowledge can at best be probable. After having seen something happen all the time I infer that it will probably happen again, but I can never arrive at necessity in this way.

But let us assume that it is not necessary that the future is thus connected to the past, that everything could suddenly change so as to break all continuity. Kant argues that our experience is essentially a unity that does not tolerate such breaks. Thus unity is presupposed as a necessary condition of all my experience. He speaks of the transcendental unity of the apperception. Where radical discontinuity is introduced we case to be. But the world is give to us only in experience. Therefore there can be no radical discontinuity between past and future. The past is necessarily connected to the future.

Kant thus allows for knowledge that is necessary, but not tautologous. Such knowledge he terms transcendental. By this we man knowledge of the conditions without which there could not even be experience. But this does not return us to reality as it is in itself. On the contrary: all our experience is only of beings as they present themselves to us, is only of phenomena. Of things as they are in themselves we have no knowledge. The word is my world in the most radical sense of the word. The *Critique of Pure Reason*, which develops this analysis, seems thus to rob us of all hopes to account for meaning. In Kant's world of phenomena there seems to be no room for either God or meaning. That Fichte, then considered the leading follower of Kant, should be charged with atheism is not surprising.

The impact of this work on the intellectual elite of Kant's Germany is difficult to exaggerate. To give you some idea of this let me conclude with the poet Heinrich Heine's account of Kant's significance, which he wrote for a French audience"

"The history of Immanuel Kant's life is difficult to portray, for he had neither life nor history. He led a mechanical, regular, almost abstract bachelor existence in a little retired street of Königsberg, an old town on the north-eastern frontier of Germany. I do not believe that the great clock of the cathedral performed in a more passionless and methodical manner

its daily routine than did its townsman, Immanuel Kant. Rising in the morning, coffee-drinking, writing, reading lectures, dining, walking, everything had its appointed time, and the neighbors knew that it was exactly half-past three o'clock when Kant stepped forth from his house in his grey, tight-fitting coat, with his Spanish cane in his hand, and betook himself to the little linden avenue called after him to this day the "Philosopher's Walk." Summer and winter he walked up and down it eight times, and when the weather was dull or heavy clouds prognosticated rain, the townspeople beheld his servant, the old Lampe, trudging anxiously behind Kant with a big umbrella under his arm, like an image of Providence.

What a strange contrast did this man's outward life present to his destructive, world-annihilating thoughts! In sooth, had the citizens of Königsberg had the least presentiment of the full significance of his ideas, they would have felt far more awful dread at the presence of this man than at the sight of an executioner, who can but kill the body. But the worthy folk saw in him nothing more than a Professor of Philosophy, and as he passed at his customary hour, they greeted him in a friendly manner and set their watches by him.

If, however, Immanuel Kant, the arch-destroyer in the realm of ideas, far surpassed Maximilian Robespierre in terrorism, yet he possessed many similarities with the latter which invite comparison of the two men. In the first place, we find in both the same stubborn, keen, unpoetic, sober integrity. We also find in both the same talent for suspicion, only that the one directs his suspicion toward ideas and calls it criticism, while the other applies it to people and entitles it republican virtue. But both represented in the highest degree the type of provincial bourgeois. Nature had destined them to weigh coffee and sugar, but Fate determined that they should weigh other things and placed on the scales of the one a king, on the scales of the other a god.

And they gave the correct weight!²

² Heinrich Heine, "Concerning the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany," *Selected Works*, trans. by Helen M. Mustard (New York: Random House, Inc., 1973).

3. Freedom and Necessity

1.

The question Fichte attempts to answer in the book we are reading is: “what am I myself, and what is my vocation?”³ (5; 3) The word “vocation” suggests a calling. What are we human beings and to what have we been called? Have we been called at all? If so, who or what has called us? What are we supposed to be? The question intertwines thus with one with which we are already familiar: Can reason tell us what constitutes the meaningful life?

The first thing we human beings confront is nature. Everything in nature is something, a concrete entity determined in every respect.

But not only that: it has become this something. Nature is a ceaseless process of becoming. And we are parts of nature and as such part of this process.

And a third statement can be made about nature. Nature is governed by causality:

Nature proceeds throughout the whole infinite series of her possible determinations without pause; and the succession of these changes is not arbitrary, but follows strict and unalterable laws. Whatever exists in Nature, necessarily exists as it does exist, and it is absolutely impossible that it could be otherwise. I enter within an unbroken chain of phenomena, in which every link is determined by that which has preceded it, and in its turn determines the next; so that, were I able to trace into the past the causes through which alone any given moment could have come into actual existence, and to follow out in the future the consequences which must necessarily flow from it, then, at that moment, and by means of thought alone, I could discover all possible conditions of the universe, both past and future —past, by explaining the given moment; future, by predicting its consequences. In every part experience the whole, for *only*

³ References in the text are to Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Vocation of Man*, ed. and intro. Roderick M. Chisholm, (New York, Liberal Arts Press, 1956), followed by the corresponding places in the Peter Preuss edition (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987).

through the whole is each part what it is; but through this it is *necessarily* what it is. (9-10; 7)⁴

Fichte insists that if I could know anything exactly and completely I would know everything about the universe, its past and its future. Everything is absolutely determined.

A spirit who could look through the innermost secrets of Nature, would, from knowing one single man, be able distinctly to declare what men had formerly existed, and what men would exist at any future moment; in one individual he would discern *all* individuals. It is this, my interconnection with the whole system of Nature, which determines what I have been, what I am, and what I shall be. From any possible moment of my existence the same spirit could deduce infallibly what I had previously been, and what I was afterwards to become. All that, at any time, I am and shall be of absolute necessity; and it is impossible that I should be anything else. (18; 14)

Fourteen years after Fichte's *Vocation of Man* appeared, Pierre-Simon Laplace was to conjure up his demon, arguing that if someone knows the precise location and momentum of every atom in the universe the laws of classical mechanics allow us to reconstruct the past and predict the future. Something of the sort had indeed been a cardinal tenet of all science ever since Galileo and Descartes. Kant, whom Fichte here follows, thought he had proved this with respect to phenomena.

To be sure, categories have become a bit softer in our day. Causality is no longer the hard and fast relation that it was in classical physics. Quantum physics has thus been said to have defeated La Place's demon. Still, everything happens according to a cause and it is legitimate to ask for this cause. Probability does not change this. The very fact that we can expect nature to behave according to our probability expectations presupposes regularity.

But what happens to the human being on such a view. I myself am a link in this chain. I am part of nature and as such can be an object for scientific investigation as any other part of nature. Is psychology not in principle as much a science as physics,

⁴ Fichte presupposes a strict mechanism. Does probability deny this? Think of modern physics.

although the complexity of the human phenomenon may have caused psychology to operate with far less precision. But am I in principle more than a very complicated robot with an even more complicated computer brain? Is this not what cognitive science tells us? But does this not rob the human being of all freedom and thus of responsibility? This is what fills Fichte's "I" with dread.

Such an understanding of human being, Fichte suggests, must rob man of all freedom and thus responsibility. Take the example of someone who committed a crime. A social scientist is called in by the court and points out all the circumstances that caused this unfortunate individual to stray. If this causation is so strict as not to permit the individual any choice, with what right do we punish him at all? Punishment seems appropriate only when the person judged is in some sense responsible for his or her actions. But such responsibility can be only where there is freedom. In the absence of freedom the only thing left is correction of what is considered an undesirable state of affairs. Corrective rather than punitive legislation seems called for. But is such legislation more humane? I want to leave that question open, but in considering it, keep in mind the understanding of human essence that is presupposed in each case. What kind of a being is man? Is he a being totally subject to forces that in the end he cannot control, or is there a sense in which we must judge him free and therefore guilty and responsible?

But we must grant that freedom is an unscientific conception. Science cannot make sense if it; where it confronts so-called freedom of the will it will always try to uncover hidden causes, and should it fail in this, it will have to be content to call what happens an accident. There is no freedom in the world known by science.

And yet I seem to be conscious of myself as a free agent:

I am, indeed, conscious of myself as an independent, and, in many occurrences of my life, a free being; but this consciousness may easily be explained on the principles already laid down, and may be thoroughly reconciled with the conclusions which have been drawn. My immediate consciousness, my proper perception, cannot go beyond myself and the modes of my own being. I have immediate knowledge of myself alone: whatever I may know more than this, I know only by inference, in the same way in which I have inferred the existence of original powers of

Nature, which yet do not lie within the circle of my perceptions. But I myself — that which I call *me*—my personality —am not the same as Nature's power of producing a human being; I am only one of the manifestations of this power. And in being conscious of myself, I am conscious only of this manifestation and not of that power whose existence I infer when I try to explain my own. (18-19; 14)

How then would the scientist account for this freedom. He would explain it, too, in terms of natural causes, but he might insist, that where there is a sense of freedom these are internal to the organism.

Bestow consciousness on a tree, and let it grow, spread out its branches, and bring forth leaves and buds, blossoms and fruits, after its kind, without hindrance or obstruction—it will perceive no limitation to its existence in being only a tree, and a tree of this particular species, and this particular individual of the species; it will feel itself perfectly free, because, in all those manifestations, it will do nothing but what its nature requires; and it will desire to do nothing else, because it can only desire what that nature requires. (19; 14-15))

Spinoza said something very much like that of a stone in flight, supposing it had consciousness: it would think itself free. We have to distinguish **metaphysical freedom** from **freedom from external causes**. The latter freedom is perfectly compatible with science, while it can make no sense of the former. The human being, the scientist might say, is the place where nature becomes conscious of herself. (21; 15))

In each individual, Nature beholds herself from a particular point of view. I refer to myself as *I*, and to you as *you*. You call yourself *I* and me *you*; I exist beyond you, as you exist beyond me. Of what there is beyond me, I comprehend first those things which touch me most nearly; you, those which touch you most nearly—from these points we each proceed to the next step; but we describe very different paths, which may here and there intersect each other, but never run parallel. There is an infinite variety of possible individuals, and hence also an infinite variety of possible starting points of consciousness. This consciousness of all individuals, taken together, constitutes the complete consciousness of the universe; and there

is no other, for only in the individual is there definite completeness and reality. (22; 16-17)

Why does Fichte's I find this description of the human condition unsatisfactory? His aspirations seem to be denied by that view. What are these aspirations? For one, we want to think of ourselves as free in a stronger sense. We want to feel responsible, take credit and blame for our actions.

My actions shall be the result of this will; without it I shall not act at all, since there shall be no other power over my actions but this will. Then my powers, determined by, and subject to the dominion of, my will, will affect the external world. I shall be the lord of Nature, and she shall be my servant. I will influence her according to the measure of my capacity, but she shall have no influence on me.

This, then, is the substance of my wishes and aspirations. (28; 21-22)

But there is a second demand I make. I want this world to make sense. I demand that there be such a thing as good and evil, that without me there be some standard by which I can measure my actions or which I can perversely deny. One can be good only if one feels the temptation of evil. If one cannot be anything but good, is one still good, or if one cannot be anything but evil, is one still evil? Thus I demand both, freedom and a supreme authority, perhaps a God. But if the latter, God here would mean not so much the God of the Christian tradition, but more comprehensively, any principle by which human beings and their actions are measured. According to Kant, practical reason provides such a principle. The two positions that here confront each other are that of human **autonomy**, where the individual is his own author, or **heteronomy**. The former implies that our thoughts are the sources of our actions, the latter argues that these thoughts are just an epiphenomenon of natural processes, having their place in the chain of natural events.

The view that we human beings are autonomous so far has not been supported at all. It has only been stated as a view we would like to be true. The contrary view is certainly true in its place: the question is: can intelligence be reduced to a manifestation of nature subject to her law?

Which of these two opinions shall I adopt? Am I free and independent or am I nothing in myself, and merely the manifestation of a foreign power? It is clear to me that neither of the two doctrines is sufficiently supported. For the first, there is no other recommendation than the mere fact that it is conceivable; for the latter, I extend a principle which is perfectly true in its own place, beyond its proper and natural application. If intelligence is merely the manifestation of a power of Nature, then I do quite right to extend this principle to it: but the very question at issue is whether intelligence is such a manifestation. And this is a question which is not to be answered by deducing a one-sided assumption, which I have made at the start of my inquiry; the question must be answered by reference to other premises. In short, it would seem that neither of the two opinions can be established by appeal to proofs. (31; 24)

Where Fichte's own sympathies lie is clear:

The system of freedom satisfies my heart; the opposite system destroys and annihilates it. To stand, cold and unmoved, amid the current of events, a passive mirror of fugitive and passing phenomena—this existence is insupportable to me; I scorn and detest it. I will love; I will lose myself in sympathy; I will know the joy and the grief of life. (31; 24)

Does the scientific world view allow for love? Love presupposes that man is in possession of himself. To love is to make a gift of oneself. But to make such a gift we must possess ourselves.

So where does the end of Book One leave us? As the chapter's title "Doubt" suggests, it leaves us somewhat uncertainly between the positions sketched. The hold that the scientific world picture has on us is part of the world we live, a world shaped ever more decisively by technology and thus by science. And yet there is the resistance to that world view to which Fichte gives voice. The scientific world picture has no place for a vocation of man, as it has no place for freedom.

4. Idealism and Nihilism

1.

In the First Book Fichte presents us with the threat the scientific worldview poses to the dignity of man. In the Second Book he turns to the philosophy of Kant to blunt that threat. It is almost as if the Spirit that speaks here to Fichte were the spirit of Kant, although we should also keep in mind its resemblance to Descartes' evil genius. The argument that spirit advances is in substantial agreement with that advanced by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. We can call this the **argument of idealism**. It holds that the world that the sciences seek to describe is a world of appearances, not of things in themselves. But this means that this world is essentially for the human observer, who is therefore not part of that world. The subject stands before the world understood as the totality of phenomena, somewhat as an observer stands before a picture. That subject is thus not to be understood as just another part of nature, subject to its laws. As knowing subject man transcends nature. This gives you the outline of the argument. But let us move more slowly.

2

The first thing that cannot be doubted is that objects are present to me. (35; 27) How do I know about these objects? I sense them. (36; 28) Things are given to me in sensation. This sensation is a particular determination of myself (37; 28). I do not have direct access to things; all I have access to are my own sensations.

This point has been challenged. In his *Refutation of Idealism*, e.g., G. E. Moore argues that when I see a tree I have a perception of the tree as something that is there regardless of whether I perceive it or not. The perceived, he argues, is independent of the act of perception. Fichte disagrees. He holds that the perceived is dependent on perception. I can only think of the tree as it appears to me in perception. According to Fichte we are conscious only of our sensation, not of the objects before us. "In all perception you perceive only your own condition." (38; 29)

At first we might be inclined to side with the realism of Moore. We do think that the tree is not dependent on my perceiving it. But is what presents itself to me in

perception the tree? I do not want to settle here the issue between realism and idealism. Fichte's position at any rate is clear. All we perceive are our own sensations.

But how do we come to interpret them in such a way as to fashion out of them a world of objects out there in space that I take to be real? This much we have to grant Moore. But how do we arrive at this belief? How do we come to think that there is a world out there? Fichte's Spirit leads the "I" to recognize that our experience of things presupposes what Kant called a pure intuition of space:

Spirit. Thus there is nothing remaining of the object but *what is perceptible*, what is a property or attribute. This perceptibility you extend through a continuous space which is divisible to infinity; and the true substratum or supporter of the attributes of things which thou hast sought, is, therefore, only the space which is thus filled?

I. Although I cannot be satisfied with this, but feel that I must still suppose in the object something more than this perceptibility and the space which it fills, yet I cannot point out this something, and I must therefore confess that I have hitherto been unable to discover any bearer of attributes but space itself. (46; 36)

The objects I experience present themselves to me. But must there then not be something, some thing in itself that does the presenting? What I experience would seem to be representations. But how do we know that sensation does have a cause, as Fichte's I insists, that presentation is representation?

"I know nothing indeed," thou seem to say, "of things in themselves, but such things there must be; they are to be found, if I could but find them." You suppose another organ, which indeed you do not have, and you apply this to them and thereby apprehend them — of course in thought only. Strictly speaking, you have *no consciousness of things*, but only a *consciousness* (produced by a procession out of thy actual consciousness by means of the principle of causality) *of a consciousness of things* (such as ought to be, such as of necessity must be, although not accessible to you); and now thou will see that, in the supposition you have made, you have added to a knowledge which you do have, another which you have not. (51; 40)

Fichte's "I" does not give in so easily:

I find a thing determined this way or that. I cannot rest satisfied with knowing that it *is* in this state. I assume that it has *become so*, and that not through itself, but by means of a foreign power. This foreign power, which made the thing what it is, *contains the cause*, and the manifestation of that power, which did actually make it so, *is the cause* of this particular determination of the thing. My sensation must have a cause: this means that it is produced within me by a foreign power. (53; 42)

The Spirit counters

But how then do you know, and how do you propose to prove, *that* sensation must have a cause? (54; 42)

Can it be an immediate perception? Fichte answers, no! Perception establishes only that something is, not how it has become so, still less that it has become so by a power lying beyond perception. To generalize from an observation of external things would be to beg the issue (54; 43) All that remains is to say that within himself the human being has the power to break out of himself. He posits the things as other, they are not other in themselves.

You perceive then that all knowledge is merely a knowledge of yourself; that your consciousness never goes beyond yourself; and that what you assume to be a consciousness of the object is nothing but a consciousness of the fact that you have posited an object— posited it necessarily, in accordance with an inward law of your thought, at the same time as the sensation. (57; 45)

Presupposed by consciousness is a polarity (60). In the cogito both subject and object are present. Our being is that polarity and we have to guard against thinking of the self first of all as an isolated subject that has to establish relationships with an external world. Man is not a thing, but a relation. The object is nothing apart from human being.

You yourself are the thing; you yourself, by virtue of your finitude — the innermost law of your being— are thus presented before yourself, and projected out of yourself; and all that you perceive beyond yourself is still yourself alone. This consciousness has been well named "intuition. In all consciousness I am intuitively aware of myself; for I am myself; for the

subjective, conscious being, consciousness is intuitive self-contemplation.
(64; 50-51)

We are always caught within the net of our own consciousness. The world we encounter is the product of our own mind. When we die we might as well be nothing.

But is this not patently absurd? the realist will object. Is it not obvious that the world existed before I was conscious of it and will exist when I will be dead? If Fichte is right, it must be impossible for a human being to really think of his own death. Of course, as a finite being that is part of the world, he knows that he will die. Other people die and I am like them. But when I say this, what I speak about is not myself as consciousness, but myself as object in the world. This is the first thing that must be noted: the human being appears twice, once as an object in the world and once as consciousness. To say that man as object has posited the world is patently absurd. When we think about our own death what we ordinarily do is imagine ourselves as objects dying or dead, but here our consciousness transcends that death. Thus we might imagine ourselves looking at our own funeral. As long as we understand reality as the world of objects we encounter and interpret ourselves as parts of that world, speaking of man positing that world makes no sense. But for objects to be given at all consciousness must be presupposed. Objects can be given only in consciousness. The opposite cannot even be thought. For to think of objects as not thought is a contradiction. The world of objects must vanish with my death. Death negates the very condition of consciousness and can therefore be thought only as a limit.

2

Has the Spirit successfully banished the fear that we might be no more than insignificant parts of the world machine? This is what he claims to have shown:

From you, then, I need fear no objection to the principle now established: *that our consciousness of external things is absolutely nothing more than the product of our own presentative faculty*, and that, with respect to such things, we know only what is produced through our consciousness itself, through a determinate consciousness subject to definite laws. (74; 59)

The "I"'s fear of science is shown to have been groundless.

And with this insight, mortal, be free, and for ever released from the fear which has degraded and tormented you! You will no longer tremble at a necessity which exists only in your own thought; no longer fear to be crushed by things which are the product of your own mind; no longer place yourself, the thinking being, in the same class with the thoughts which proceed from you. (75; 59-60)

But Fichte's I is anything but grateful:

Stay, deceitful Spirit! Is this all the wisdom towards which you have directed my hopes, and do you boast that you have set me free? You have set me free, it is true; you have absolved me from all dependence, for you have transformed me and everything around me on which I could possibly be dependent, into nothing. Thou hast abolished necessity by annihilating all existence. (76; 60)

The spirit is a nihilist. *Nihil*, nothing, will have the last word. Everything will vanish into nothing. Like Descartes evil genius, Fichte's Spirit threatens to transform life into an empty dream. And even the dreamer dreaming that dream in the end dissolves into nothing. Given the Spirit's position it seems that in the end nothing matters, that my life is of no account. The good and the evil life are equally swallowed by nothing. The "I" finds itself utterly alone, surrounded by a nothingness that will devour all.

The mood in which this nothingness presents itself is dread, as Kierkegaard and Heidegger were to analyze it. What man dreads is nothing. That distinguishes it from fear, which is of a definite object.

Most of the time, to be sure, we are not in dread. The world keeps us too occupied. But there may be moments when the individual asks herself what is the point of it all? Take someone whose world has been shattered by war or some natural disaster. The world no longer seems to offer anything to hold on to. It has become mute.

And we should keep in mind that 1800 was a time when the old religious, social, and political order seemed to be collapsing. "Nihilism", first used by Jacobi to describe the kind of Kantian idealism defended by Fichte's spirit, was soon to describe a widely experienced state of mind. It was soon picked up by literary critics. In par. 2 of his *Vorschule der Ästhetik* the poet Jean Paul Richter speaks of "poetic nihilists." The passage is worth quoting:

It follows from the lawless willfulness of the current spirit of the age—which in its intoxication with the self would rather destroy the world and the cosmos, in order to clear for itself an empty playing field in the nothing ... that it has to speak in condescending terms of the imitation and study of nature. For when gradually the history of the age comes to resemble an historian and is without religion and fatherland: so self-centered willfulness finally has to bump against the hard and sharp decrees of reality and for that reason would rather fly into the desert of phantastic invention, where there are no laws to be followed except those that are its own, more confining, smaller, those of building with rhyme and assonance.

As art emancipates itself from the task of representation, an empty formalism becomes ever more important. It would be interesting to look at the evolution of modern art from this perspective.

It did not take nihilism long to make its appearance in literature. Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Sons* deserves special mention here. His Basarov became the paradigmatic nihilist. The pseudonymous author of volume one of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*, the aesthete A, is another unusually articulate nihilist. But the most influential philosopher of nihilism is Nietzsche, whose proclamation of the death of God implies also the devaluation of all of what were once our highest values. And nihilism is a presupposition of the thought of existentialists such as Sartre and Camus.

But the phenomenon is of course not confined to our modern particular age. We meet with it already in the *Gilgamesh Epic* and in the Bible in *Ecclesiastes*, where the preacher proclaims that all is vanity.

But to return to Fichte: is this then what reason leads us to, that all talk of God or absolute values or of a vocation of man is in the end but an escape from the truth? In the Third Book Fichte attempts to answer such questions by showing that even though theoretical reason can know nothing of God, talk of a vocation of man is anything but idle.

5. Faith and Meaning

1

The view that the Spirit has presented is even more depressing than the scientific world view that he has supplanted. Again the demand for meaning is not met and Fichte's "I" feels defrauded:

What do you seek, then, my complaining heart? What is it that causes you to rebel against a system to which my understanding cannot raise the slightest objection?

This it is: I demand something beyond a mere presentation or conception; something that is, has been, and will be, even if the presentation were not; and which the presentation only records, without producing it, or in the smallest degree changing it. (83; 67)

We demand more than presentations, floating like islands in a sea of nothingness. We demand reality, meaning.

A mere presentation I now see to be a deceptive show; my presentations must have a meaning beneath them, and if all my knowledge revealed to me nothing but knowledge, I would be defrauded of my whole life. That there is nothing whatever but my presentations, is, to the natural sense of mankind, a silly and ridiculous conceit which no man can seriously entertain, and which requires no refutation. (83; 67)

The desired escape is offered by the realization that we are first of all not thinking, but acting beings. The world may indeed seem unreal when I merely think about it, but, as soon as I become actively engaged it, this becomes impossible. Take the way we understand the place we live in or a tool. We don't know these things as mere objects. We don't have a disengaged, detached understanding of them, but we know them in their use. A tool is something to be used. It stands in a context of things to be done. Philosophy, especially since Descartes, has placed a premium on detached understanding. Science represents the same attitude. The subject was to enter as little as possible into its representations. Reality is what it is. But Kant and Fichte have put an end to that belief. Things as they are in themselves are inaccessible, Kant had insisted. And Fichte even

goes so far as to declare that we know nothing of things in themselves, that behind appearances we find nothing.

We must take care not to understand the self as a subject registering a world of mute facts. First of all we are engaged in the world. We exist in it as actors and as such we have no doubt concerning its reality:

“Your vocation is not merely to *know*, but to *act* according to your knowledge”; this is loudly proclaimed in the innermost depths of my soul, as soon as I recollect myself for a moment and turn my observation inward upon myself. “You are here not for idle contemplation of yourself, or for brooding over devout sensations—no, you are here for action: your action, your action alone, determines your worth.”

This voice leads me out from presentation, from mere knowing, to something that is beyond it and opposed to it — to something that is greater and higher than all knowledge, and that contains within itself the end and object of all knowledge. When I act, I doubtless know that I act, and how I act; nevertheless this knowledge is not the act itself, but only the observation of it. This voice thus announces to me precisely that which I sought; a something lying beyond mere knowledge, and, in its nature, wholly independent of knowledge. (83-84; 67-68)

Action then leads me to recognize that there is something in me that transcends nature as known by science, that refuses to take its place among phenomena. The voice within leads me to a recognition of my freedom:

There is within me an impulse to absolute, independent self-activity. Nothing is more insupportable to me, than to exist merely by another, for another, and through another; I must be something for myself and by myself alone. This impulse I feel along with the perception of my own existence, it is inseparably united to my consciousness of myself. (84; 68)

There is in me an impulse to be an autonomous actor. I recognize myself to will. Such recognition is inseparably bound up with the sense I have of my own reality. It is not so much as a thinking, but as a willing being that I experience my reality.

Here then, it appears, is the point at which consciousness connects itself with reality; the real efficiency of my conception, and the real power of action which, in consequence of it, I am compelled to ascribe to myself, is this point. Let it be as it may with the reality of a sensible world beyond me; I possess reality and comprehend it — it lies within my own being and is native to myself. (86; 69)

But is to be autonomous in this sense not to be altogether alone? Is not to be related to any other thing to be in some way dependent on it? I think I have a real power of action. But is this more than just another thought? Skepticism threatens to return:

I say that I feel this impulse: it is therefore I myself who say so, and think so while I say it. Do I then really feel, or only think that I feel? Is not all that I call feeling only a presentation produced by my objective process of thought, and indeed the first transition-point of all objectivity? And then again, do I really think, or do I merely think that I think? And do I think that I really think, or merely that I possess the idea of thinking? What can hinder speculation from raising such questions, and continuing to raise them without end? (87; 70)

Skeptical reflection can always raise such questions. No argument can finally defeat it. And so Fichte's I refuses to give in to thoughts that threaten to reduce life to "a mere play, which proceeds from nothing and tends to nothing." (88; 71)

I will freely accept the vocation which this impulse assigns to me, and in this resolution I will lay hold at once of thought, in all its reality and truthfulness, and on the reality of all things which are presupposed therein. I will restrict myself to the position of natural thought in which this impulse places me, and cast from me all those over-refined and subtle inquiries which alone could make me doubtful of its truth. (88; 71)

Theoretical knowledge presupposes a higher knowledge: faith, that voluntary acquiescence in the view that naturally presents itself to us, because only through this view can we fulfill our vocation.

Let me hold fast forever by this doctrine, which is no mere verbal distinction, but a true and deep one, bearing within it the most important consequences for my whole existence and character. All my conviction is

but faith; and it proceeds from feeling not from the understanding. (89; 71-72)

2

Fichte admits that there is no argument that will force the nihilist to abandon his position. Fichte's faith is essentially what Kant calls practical reason and discusses in his *Critique of Practical Reason*.

Now that I know this, I possess the touchstone of all truth and of all conviction. Conscience alone is the root of all truth. Whatever is opposed to conscience or stands in the way of the fulfillment of her behests is assuredly false; I could never become convinced, even if I should be unable to discover the fallacies by which it is produced. (90; 72)

What is conscience here is also the call of reality, which is submerged whenever the world is seen as the desiccated object of a detached, theoretical understanding. Our knowledge is interested. Bracket that interest and you lose reality.

What is it which holds us within the power of this first natural belief? Not inferences of reason, for there are none such; it is our *interest* in a reality which we desire to produce: in the good, absolutely for its own sake, and the common and sensuous, for the sake of the enjoyment they afford. No one who lives can divest himself of this interest, and just as little can he cast off the faith which this interest brings with it. We are all born in faith; he who is blind, follows blindly the secret and irresistible impulse; he who sees, follows by sight, and believes because he resolves to believe. (90-91; 73)

What separates the interested behavior of the child from the interested behavior of the philosopher is the intervening suspicion of nihilism. "With freedom and consciousness I have returned to the point at which Nature had left me. I accept that which she announces; but I do not accept it because I must; I believe it because I will." (92; 74) It follows that the good and the true are one. Nihilism is a matter of the will. It is a sin and sin is the forgetting of the true vocation of man. Man is someone called. This calling confronts him with what he ought to do. Conscience calls us in the categorical imperative to treat whatever rational beings we encounter as ends in themselves:

“Whatever these beings may be in and for themselves, you shall act towards them as self-existent, free, substantive beings, wholly independent of yourself. Assume it as already known, that they can give a purpose to their own being wholly by themselves, and quite independently of you; never interrupt the accomplishment of this purpose, but rather further it to the utmost of thy power.” (95; 76)

Kant had said that we should treat all persons as ends in themselves. This would seem to presuppose my ability to recognize them as indeed persons. But theoretical knowledge cannot supply such an understanding. For it I have to turn somewhere else. For Fichte the reality of the other person is given with the moral imperative. I do not confront the other person first and then conclude I ought to treat her or him as ends in themselves. Rather other human beings present themselves to me as beings to be respected in their being. Morality offers the key to the reality of the world:

My world is the object and sphere of my duties, and absolutely nothing more; there is no other world for me, and no other qualities of my world; my whole united capacity, all finite capacity, is insufficient to comprehend any other. Whatever possesses an existence for me, can bring its existence and reality into contact with me only through this relation, and only through this relation do I comprehend it: for any other existence than this I have no organ whatever. (96-97; 77)

For Fichte there are two coordinate ways of knowing: speculation and moral activity. Of these the latter is the more immediate. It is disrupted by reflection. Further reflection cannot lead us back to reality. The answer to nihilism is not to be found in speculation but in the affirmation of our moral vocation.

3

The voice of conscience, as Fichte understands it, is the voice of my own authentic being. What does this voice tell me? The first demand Fichte discusses is the demand for a better world. I demand to be myself. The world should therefore be such that that it permits me to be myself in the fullest possible sense. The present world fulfills this demand to only a very slight degree. Consequently it faces me with the task to make it a better place in which to live.

I cannot think of the present state of humanity as that in which it is destined to remain; I am absolutely unable to conceive of this as its complete and final vocation. Then, indeed, were all a dream and a delusion; and it would not be worth the trouble to have lived, and played out this ever-repeated game which tends to nothing and signifies nothing. Only in so far as I can regard this state as the means toward a better, as the transition point to a higher and more perfect condition, has it any value in my eyes. I can support it, esteem it, and joyfully perform my part in it, not for its own sake, but for the sake of that better world for which it prepares the way. (101; 81)

Faith in morality implies thus a faith in progress. Fichte is at heart an optimist. The world is going to be a better and better place in which to live. For Fichte that implies subjecting nature in such a way that it will supply what human beings need, e.g., the food problem must be solved. In this struggle science will be of great help. But, Fichte goes on to say, it “is not Nature, it is Freedom itself, by which the greatest and most terrible disorders incident to our race are produced.” (104; 83) Again and again selfishness will let a few lord it over the majority.

But Fichte remains an optimist:

And so go on forever? No! unless the whole existence of humanity is to be an idle game, without significance and without end. It cannot be intended that those savage tribes should always remain savage: no race can be born with all the capacities of perfect humanity and yet be destined never to develop these capacities, never to become more than that which a sagacious animal by its own proper nature might become. (106; 85)

But do the facts not make it difficult to hold on to this optimism? Fichte denies this. To be sure, the world may have known places where the general level of culture was as high or perhaps even higher as it is today, but surely it cannot be denied that today more people are better off than ever before? Despite all sorts of setbacks, the cause of freedom has advanced. Oppression, too, tends to progress, but it inevitably meets with growing opposition.

Urged by their insatiable desires, they will continue from generation to generation their efforts to acquire wider and yet wider privileges, and

never say “It is enough!” At last oppression shall reach its limit, and become wholly insupportable, and despair give back to the oppressed that power which their courage, extinguished by centuries of tyranny, could not procure for them. They will then no longer endure any among them who cannot be satisfied to be on an equality with others, and so to remain. In order to protect themselves against internal violence or new oppression, all will take on themselves the same obligations. (108; 87)

This leads Fichte to speak of a true state, “in which each individual, from a regard for his own security, will be irresistibly compelled to respect the security of every other without exception; since, under the supposed legislation, every injury which he should attempt to do to another, would not fall upon its object, but would infallibly recoil upon himself.” (109; 87) Not only will such a true state assure internal peace, but it will also make war less and less likely.

By the establishment of this only true state, this firm foundation of internal peace, the possibility of foreign war, at least with other true states, is cut off. In a true state, injury to the citizen of a neighboring state will be forbidden as strictly, and it will call forth the same compensation and punishment. The state will do so for its own sake—to prevent the thought of injustice, plunder, and violence entering the minds of its own citizens, and to leave them no possibility of gain, except by means of industry and diligence within their legitimate sphere of activity. (109; 87)

Freedom is contagious. The existence of one free state will tend toward the establishment of others, until we finally have a world of free states:

No free state can reasonably suffer in its vicinity associations governed by rulers whose interests would be promoted by the subjugation of adjacent nations, and whose very existence is therefore a constant source of danger to their neighbors; a regard for their own security compels all free states to transform all around them into free states like themselves; and thus, for the sake of their own welfare, to extend the empire of culture over barbarism, of freedom over slavery. (110; 88)

The progress of freedom, as Fichte understands it, tends towards a world culture that will see no need for war:

and thus, of necessity, by reason of the existence of some few really free states, will the empire of civilization, freedom, and with it universal peace, gradually embrace the whole world. (110; 88)

6. Morality and Eternity

1

History, we saw last time, ruled as it is, according to Fichte, by the progress of freedom, will of necessity tend towards a world culture that will no longer see a need for war. Imagine such a world: would this be a world in which everyone is finally happy?

But when this end shall have been attained and humanity shall at length stand at this point, what is there then to do? Upon earth there is no higher state than this; the generation which has once reached it, can do no more than abide there, steadfastly maintain its position, die, and leave behind it descendants who shall do the like, and who will again leave behind them descendants to follow in their footsteps. Humanity would thus stand still upon her path; and therefore her earthly end cannot be her highest end.

This earthly end is conceivable, attainable, and finite. (114; 91)

But this earthly ideal, which would mean the end of history, cannot satisfy Fichte's "I". And indeed, we have wonder whether a pervasive boredom would not overtake such a culture and introduce into it a moment of unrest. But that is not Fichte's worry. The question of what make this process significant remains:

To what end then is this final generation? Since a human race has appeared upon earth, its existence there must certainly be in accordance with, and not contrary to, reason; and it must attain all the development which it is possible for it to attain on earth. But why should such a race have an existence at all — why may it not as well have remained in the womb of nothingness? Reason is not for the sake of existence, but existence for the sake of Reason. An existence which does not of itself satisfy Reason, and solve all her questions, can not possibly be the true being. (114; 91)

Reason is made the measure of reality. But what justifies Fichte's invocation of Reason here, which occupies the place once given to God. Reason is thought to preside over history, which thus comes to be understood as a process that tends towards the realization of the good.

It seems that the Highest Good of the world pursues its course of increase and prosperity independently of all human virtues or vices, according to its own laws, through an invisible and unknown Power, just as the heavenly bodies run their appointed course, independently of all human effort, and that this Power carries along with it, in its own great plan, all human intentions good and bad, and, with overruling wisdom, employs for its own purpose that which was undertaken for other ends. (115; 92)

Do things really seem to be that way? A look at the history of the past two centuries hardly supports such optimism. It is not reason that supports this faith in the power of reason. And there is no convincing argument that Fichte offers us to support such faith. But the importance of such faith is enormous. Hegel will develop it into an elaborate philosophy of history that in turn will supply the foundation to Marx's optimistic view of history. Here in Fichte we see its germ: there is a supersensible meaning that rules the world: Reason. This Reason is the same reason that speaks within me and calls me to do my duty and obey the moral law.

No! I will not refuse obedience to the law of duty; as surely as I live and am, I will obey precisely because it commands. This resolution shall be first and highest in my mind; that to which everything else must conform, but which is itself dependent on nothing else; this shall be the innermost principle of my spiritual life. (116; 92)

As for Plato, so for Fichte the human being belongs to two worlds, this phenomenal world and the realm of Reason.

It is not necessary that I should first be severed from this terrestrial world before I can obtain admission into the world beyond the earth; I am and live in it even now, far more truly than in the terrestrial; even now it is my only sure foundation, and the eternal life on the possession of which I have already entered is the only ground why I should still prolong this earthly one. That which we call heaven does not lie beyond the grave; it is even here diffused around us, and its light arises in every pure heart. My will is mine, and it is the only thing that is wholly mine and entirely dependent

on myself; and through it I have already become a citizen of the realm of freedom and of pure spiritual activity. (118; 94)

My will is indeed mine. That cannot be doubted. But does such certainty translate into a conviction that by virtue of that freedom I know myself to belong to a spiritual realm that transcends the power of death. If Fichte is right, my conscience ties me to that spiritual realm where Reason rules and this reason commands me to do my best to realize its promise in this world.

And now the present life no longer appears vain and useless; for this and this alone it is given to us: that we may acquire for ourselves a firm foundation in the future life, and only by means of this foundation is it connected with our whole eternal existence. (123; Preuss 98)

Fichte seems to appeal here to a future life, but what supports that appeal? All that Fichte can point to is his freedom, which assures him that he is a citizen of two worlds. But not every reader of *The Vocation of Man* was convinced. Many a reader could find no consolation in the Third Book but felt that Fichte left him with a freedom in a world that gave no evidence of being presided over by reason.

And how much content is Fichte able to give to that higher world?

This, then, is my whole sublime vocation, my true nature. I am a member of two orders: the one purely spiritual, in which I rule by my will alone; the other sensuous, in which I operate by my deed. The sole end of reason is pure activity, absolutely by itself alone, having no need of any instrument out of itself, independent of everything which is not reason, absolutely unconditioned. The will is the living principle of reason—is itself reason, when purely and simply apprehended. That reason is active by itself alone—this means that pure will, merely as such, lives and rules. It is only the Infinite Reason that lives immediately and wholly in this purely spiritual order. (124; 99)

Fichte identifies God with this Infinite Reason. To the extent that Reason rules my life, I am citizen of that higher order. The will of God is alive in me:

That sublime Will thus pursues no solitary path withdrawn from the other parts of the world of reason. There is a spiritual bond between Him and all finite rational beings; and He himself is this spiritual bond of

the rational universe. Let me will, purely and decidedly, my duty, and He wills that, in the spiritual world at least, my will shall prosper. Every moral resolution of a finite being goes up before Him, and—to speak after the manner of mortals—moves and determines Him, not in consequence of a momentary satisfaction, but in accordance with the eternal law of His being. With surprising clearness does this thought, which hitherto was veiled in obscurity, now reveal itself to my soul—the thought that my will, merely as such, and through itself, shall have results. (133-134; 106)

What we are given here in a sermon rather than an argument. And that sermon leaves us with a number of questions. Fichte wants to insist that even if all my efforts to do my duty should fail to make this world a better place, they were yet not vain. A higher power takes note, where Fichte is aware that all such formulations are metaphors, are said, as he puts it, in the “manner of mortals.” All that grounds Fichte’s talk of heaven or the Kingdom of God is his passionate conviction that whatever a truly good will wills cannot finally be in vain. But what grounds that conviction? Does Fichte’s heaven provide for an after-life? He certainly invokes a future life, but that would seem to be but another expression “after the manner of mortals” of the conviction that it is Eternal Reason that gives meaning to our life. Following what my reason commands I am truly autonomous.

Again and again Fichte reminds us that, finite as we are, we cannot hope to comprehend the ground of our being.

I will not attempt that which the imperfection of my finite nature forbids, and which would be useless to me: *How* Thou art, I may not know. But let me be what I ought to be and Thy relations to me—the mortal—and to all mortals, lie open before my eyes and surround me more clearly than the consciousness of my own existence. *Thou workest* in me the knowledge of my duty, of my vocation in the world of reasonable beings: *how*, I know not, nor need I to know. *Thou knowest* what I think and what I will: *how* Thou canst know, through what act thou bringest about that consciousness, I cannot understand—nay, I know that the idea of an act, of a particular act of consciousness, belongs to me alone, and not to Thee, the Infinite One. *Thou willest* that my free obedience shall bring with it eternal consequences: the act of Thy will I cannot comprehend, I

only know that it is not like mine. Thou doest, and Thy will itself is the deed; but the way of Thy working is not as my ways— I cannot trace it. Thou livest and art, for Thou knowest and willest and workest, omnipresent to finite Reason; but Thou *art not* as I now and always must conceive of being. (141; 112)

The finite world that we confront is but a veil hiding from us a much more perfect world:

The world, on which but now I gazed with wonder, passes away before me, and is withdrawn from my sight. With all the fullness of life, order, and increase which I beheld in it, it is yet but the curtain by which a world infinitely more perfect is concealed from me, and the germ from which that other shall develop itself. My Faith looks behind this veil, and cherishes and animates this germ. It sees nothing definite, but it awaits more than it can conceive here below, more than it will ever be able to conceive in all time.

Thus do I live, thus am I, and thus am I unchangeable, firm, and completed for all Eternity; for this is no existence assumed from without — it is my own, true, essential life and being. (151; 123)

The finite world that we confront is but a veil hiding an infinite reality inaccessible to us. But can that veil not perhaps be lifted? But how is this to be achieved?

Here we come to an important difference between Fichte and some of his romantic compatriots, such as Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel. For Fichte we come closest to the Absolute by transforming the world in which we live into a moral order. The romantic poets who read him with great enthusiasm, also turned to freedom, but they severed freedom from the categorical imperative. Are we not truly free when we take our leave from the finite, when we tear away the veil hiding the infinite? How is this to be accomplished? Through **irony**. Romantic irony seeks to treat the finite in such a way that it is negated. The ironist will thus point out the foibles of his fellow human beings, not in order to reform them and to make this a better world, but to break the hold the world has in him, to reduce it to no more than a collection of occasions for the free play of the poet's imagination. Freedom here leaves reality behind for the realm of the imagination where freedom is unfettered even by reason.

7. The Power of Reason

1

Today we turn to Hegel. Hegel was born in 1770. He was thus eight years younger than Fichte. In 1788 he entered the Tübinger Stift, a Protestant seminary attached to the University of Tübingen, where his friends and roommates were the poet Hölderlin and the five-years younger precocious Schelling. Together they welcomed the French Revolution and followed the evolution of Kantian philosophy, especially of course by Fichte, who had come to be thought of as the most significant follower of Kant. After a few years working as a house tutor Hegel went in 1801 to the University Jena as a lecturer, encouraged by Schelling, who was already teaching there. That was two years after Fichte had been forced to leave. But lecturers received no salary and although Hegel was granted a very modest promotion, in 1807 he accepted an offer to become editor of a newspaper in Bamberg, only to soon leave to become headmaster of a Gymnasium in Nuremberg, a position he held until 1816, when finally his publications, including the *Phenomenology*, led to offers of a professorship from the universities of Erlangen, Berlin, and Heidelberg. He accepted Heidelberg, although after only two years Hegel changed his mind and went to Berlin, assuming a chair that had remained vacant since Fichte's death in 1814. There he remained until his death, presumably from cholera in 1831, occupying what by then had become the most prestigious professorship in Germany. He soon attracted students from all over.

Few thinkers have been as influential in shaping the intellectual, including especially the political climate of our day. Hegel can thus be considered the father of Marxism. But he has also been blamed for National Socialism, and indeed, both the totalitarian left and the totalitarian right may claim to have learned from him. But this by no means exhausts the significance of his thought. He is a crucial figure for understanding existentialism, especially the thought of Kierkegaard, to which we shall turn after Marx, and, in the 20th century, the thought of Jean-Paul Sartre. But he also had a significant influence on American pragmatism, especially on John Dewey. Today he is even beginning to have an impact on American analytic philosophy, as shown by the work of John McDowell and Robert Brandom. And one could go on in this manner. — But what was it that Hegel had to contribute that explains his continuing influence.

One way to approach that significance is to understand Hegel as the modern philosopher most concerned to bridge the gap between nature and spirit opened up by Descartes and to bring an end to the kind of schizophrenia that resulted. What do I have in mind?

Recall that for Descartes the human subject grasps itself first of all as a *res cogitans*, as a thinking substance. This excludes nature, understood as essentially *res extensa*, as extended substance. Thus it excludes from man's essence sensory reality, the body, the natural world. To be sure, I have a body. That body is part of nature, an object among objects, present to the subject as such. But the subject transcends the body, confronts it and nature, somewhat as an observer stands before a picture. Heidegger came thus to understand Descartes as the thinker who, more than any other, inaugurated our modern age, which Heidegger called "the age of the world picture."

Fichte's understanding of the relationship of the subject to nature is, as we saw, related. The tension between *res extensa* and *res cogitans* reappears thus in Fichte's *Vocation of Man* as the tension between the first book, which looks at the human being as an insignificant part of a nature ruled by cause and effect and the second book, which insists that the subject as the presupposition of the being of objects, cannot be understood as just another part of nature, but radically transcends it. As Book Two of *The Vocation of Man* shows, such transcendence brings with it a loss of meaning and reality. Nihilism seems to be the price for the self-elevation of the spirit that underlies Book Two.

Fichte, to be sure, attempts to regain lost meaning by insisting that man is first of all not a detached thinking subject, but free will. That will grounds Fichte's faith in reason. But this supposed solution bifurcates the human being once more, now in a different way, opposing theoretical reason to practical reason and faith. Fichte is here part of a tradition that we may trace back to Luther, who called reason a whore; and in back of Luther we find St. Augustine. Hegel, on the other hand, has no patience with such bifurcation, he wants no leap of faith and his philosophy is an attempt to reconcile whatever has been split. Thus he denies in particular the opposition of theoretical and practical reason, and thus the opposition of knowledge and faith, as Fichte has presented it to us.

Hegel also rejects the opposition of consciousness and reality. What was this polarity seen to rest on? In Descartes' case it was the argument that the *cogito* assured us

of the reality of the subject, while the reality of nature remained in doubt. The reality of the subject alone was indubitably certain, which left us with the problem of getting to the reality of nature. Following Kant, Fichte had given a different turn to the argument, which, however, still implied a loss of reality as far as nature is concerned.

Consciousness is once again thought to be prior to whatever content it might encounter. With both Descartes and Fichte we have a mechanism of detachment that leaves, in the one case the subject cut off from the object, in the other, consciousness disengaged from reality. And with both philosophers, something like faith has to come to the rescue as in their different ways both Descartes and Fichte turn to God.

What alternative does Hegel present? Hegel insists that the opposition of consciousness and nature or subjectivity lacks a sufficient foundation. Let me briefly state the argument against the Cartesian position. Descartes had argued that the subject is given more certainly than the object. This Hegel denies. He argues that the reality of both are given with equal certitude. The subject is given to me only in the encounter with objects, the objects are given to me only in the encounter. The two poles of the subject-object polarity are inseparably bound together. My consciousness of myself involves inseparably a consciousness of objects, and vice versa.

Put this way, this sounds very much like a position Fichte might have accepted. Where then is the difference. When Fichte argues that the subject is presupposed by the experience of objects, the subject remains formal and abstract. But, Hegel would argue, the subject is always concrete, finding itself in a concrete situation. To be sure, in reflection I can transcend myself as this concrete subject, but as long as I remain myself, my original situation is never left behind so completely that it is no longer experienced at all. The individual is never just a detached observer. He is engaged in the world, an actor, caught up in a process of becoming, who, should he think that he has gotten hold of his essence, is forced to recognize that what he has gotten hold of is never quite that. According to Hegel it is impossible to draw a sharp separation between a theoretical and a practical mode of knowledge. The two are ultimately expressions of one reason. Fichte thus sees part of the truth. He is right to recognize that the section on faith was necessary to correct what had been left unsatisfied by the exaggerated understanding of detachment that characterizes his notion of knowledge. This exaggeration required another exaggeration to correct it. What Fichte could not supply is the proper synthesis that

would heal the split between theoretical and practical reason. The turn to history provides for such a synthesis of nature and the demands of reason.

Hegel recognizes that there is something profoundly wrong with a view that considers reason relying on logic as a kind of tool that the subject uses to constitute the phenomena of the world. This presupposes that subject and reality can somehow be given apart from reason or logic. But this breaks apart what from the very beginning belongs together. The subject and its reason cannot be opposed in this way to nature; the structure of consciousness cannot be opposed the structure of reality. They are ultimately one and the same thing. Logic is ontology. The problem of the thing in itself does not exist.

This is not to say that our perceptions and what we now think we know give us an adequate picture of reality. As knowers we are underway towards an ever more perfect knowledge, just as actors we are underway towards an ever more adequate realization of what reason demands. This is to say, we know about the inadequacy of all our knowledge.

Consider the experience of an infant looking around. What such an infant would see might be just a booming, buzzing confusion. Slowly the child begins to single out and name objects, first of all perhaps the mother, and as it does it begins to oppose itself to the things of the world. But such naming and understanding is always a selective enterprise and that is to say, it leaves much out. And every way of understanding is in this way selective; it leaves much out and is limited by the interests and situation of the observer. It is therefore inadequate and invites objection. The inadequacy comes to be sensed as an insufficiency. One interpretation thus tends to generate another interpretation that attempts to correct the perceived deficiency. Such a correction is likely to overshoot the mark in the opposite direction: thesis leads to antithesis and both to a synthesis, which as a new thesis inaugurates the process all over again.

Hegel's dialectic seeks to overcome oppositions. Let us apply this strategy to understanding the human being. What is the essence of man? Let me approach this question by asking: what is the relationship of the human subject to nature. As we have seen, two answers have been given to this question, both extreme in their one-sidedness and therefore finally unsatisfactory: On one hand we can say that the human being is just part of nature, subject, like any other part of nature, to its laws. That is the answer

Fichte's struggles with in the first book of *The Vocation of Man*. On the other hand we can say that in its essence the human being transcends nature, is not part of it, but indeed presupposed by any experience of nature. That is the answer Fichte gives us in the second book of *The Vocation of Man*. More generally, the first answer is one many scientists would give us, while the second is one Descartes would give us, an answer anticipated by Plato and the Platonic tradition, which understands the essence of human being to be spirit, and understands spirit to transcend nature and to reach up to the universal. Kant is committed to such an understanding. And something like that is still true of existentialists such as Sartre, who emphasizes the individual and his freedom, severing however the tie of freedom to the universal provided by Kant's understanding of pure practical reason. But all these positions tend oppose the subject to world. Hegel seeks to overcome such one-sidedness. To be sure, he, too, recognizes that there is a sense in which the free human being transcends the particular situation in which the individual finds himself. In memory we are beyond ourselves in the past; in expectation we are beyond ourselves in the future. In thought we can oppose to what is the case what could possibly be. And yet we remain bound to our historical place. History provides the key to mediating the opposition of nature and the demands of freedom.

History for Hegel is the development of spirit in time.

The sole thought which philosophy brings to the treatment of history is the simple concept of *Reason*: that Reason is the law of the world and that, therefore, in world history, things have come about rationally. This conviction and insight is a presupposition of history as such; in philosophy itself it is not presupposed. Through its speculative reflection philosophy has demonstrated that Reason — and this term may be accepted here without closer examination of its relation to God — *is both substance and infinite power*, itself the infinite material of all natural and spiritual life as well as the *infinite form*, the actualization of itself as content. (11)⁵

The relation of Reason to God invites further discussion and raises the question to what extent what Hegel takes to have been demonstrated by speculative philosophy remains

⁵ References in the text are to Hegel, *Reason in History*, trans. Robert S. Hartmann (Library of Liberal Arts, Pearson, 1995)

dependent on Christianity. Hegel is convinced that he has proven that “reason is the law of the world” and appeals to history to support this presupposition:

Only the study of world history itself can show that it has proceeded rationally, that it represents the rationally necessary course of the World Spirit, the Spirit whose nature is indeed always one and the same, but whose one nature unfolds in the course of the world. (12)

Surveying history, especially history since Hegel’s days, which includes Two World Wars and the holocaust, makes it a bit difficult to accept this presupposition and that is to say also his claim that his philosophy had proven this.

That this Idea or Reason is the True, the Eternal, the Absolute Power and that it and nothing but it, its glory and majesty, manifests itself in the world — this, as we said before, has been proven in philosophy and is being presupposed here as proved. (11)

But if it is difficult to simply accept this claim, it is also difficult to simply reject it. History does seem to show something like progress, despite all sorts of setbacks. And that progress, as Hegel insists, involves essentially the progress of freedom:

The nature of Spirit may be understood by a glance at its direct opposite — Matter. The essence of matter is gravity, the essence of Spirit, its substance — is Freedom. It is immediately plausible to everyone that, among other properties, Spirit also possesses Freedom. But philosophy teaches us that all the properties of Spirit exist only through Freedom; all seek this and this alone. It is an insight of speculative philosophy that Freedom is the sole truth of Spirit. (22)

And do we not have to admit that despite countless setbacks the cause of freedom has progressed inexorably? That there is reason in history?

8. Reason in History

1

Last time I spoke of Hegel's turn to history as providing a key to his attempt to mediate the opposition of nature and the demands of freedom. Today I would like to examine in more detail Hegel's understanding of history.

In the very beginning of *Reason in History* Hegel distinguishes "three methods of treating history: 1 Original History, 2 Reflective History, and 3 Philosophical History.

(3)

Original history is written by persons, whose primary concern is to describe events that they witnessed, of which they themselves were part. The most obvious example is Thucydides, although Hegel also mentions Herodotus, Xenophon, the Italian Renaissance historian Francesco Guicciardini, and quite a number of more recent writers. Here the historian is primarily concerned to present the events he witnessed. Such historians, Hegel claims, lack the necessary distance to reflect about what they describe. As Hegel points out, often such histories are written by great men, such as Caesar or Frederick the Great, or, to give a more recent example, Churchill, whose history of the Second World War would seem to be a particularly impressive example of such history.

Reflective history transcends the described events, not necessarily "in time, but in spirit." (6) Hegel distinguishes several kinds of reflective history.

There are first of all attempts to deal with the history of a particular country in its entirety. Hegel speaks of **universal history**. Hegel is obviously suspicious of such history. It necessarily has to leave out a great deal and almost inevitably leads the historian to read the ways and prejudices of his own age into a past that is likely to have been very different.

Pragmatic history wants to teach a lesson. For instance we might write about the decline of the Roman Empire trying to draw parallels to our own situation. Hegel is suspicious of such histories, since they assume a similarity that cannot be assumed.

Critical history evaluates other histories. And once again Hegel is suspicious. Being twice removed from history such critical histories tend to be fanciful, giving too much space to the imagination.

The last kind of history is **fragmentary history**. Here the historian is content to deal with just one facet of history, e.g. art or religion. Hegel is more sympathetic to such histories since they invite reflection about how the phenomenon considered, say art, relates to the relevant whole. They thus prepare for the philosophical method of history.

Philosophical history attempts to uncover reason in history. It tries to make sense of history. The very attempt to write such a history presupposes that there is indeed such a thing as reason in history, that the progress of history is subject to laws that allow us to understand it. It would indeed seem that all historians that attempt to make sense of the events they are dealing with make some such assumption. They are trying to tell us why things happened as they did. But Hegel's point is stronger than that. He assumes that history is itself the working out of the Idea of Reason. As pointed out, Hegel recognizes that history itself has to bear out this presupposition, although he also thinks that it has been proven by philosophy.

In this introduction he points out that ever since Anaxagoras there has been a belief that reason rules the world. He also appeals to the Christian view, as represented for example by St. Augustine or medieval historians, that history is the working out of divine providence. But while very much aware of his proximity to the Christian understanding of history, Hegel refuses to place God and his ways beyond all human reason and thus to make history incomprehensible to us finite knowers. Rather it is necessary for us to understand history as the working out of divine providence. Hegel refuses to sever faith and reason. Reason has rather the task of working out what is originally present only in feeling and the imagining spirit.

In the Christian religion God has revealed Himself, which means He has given man to understand what He is, and thus is no longer concealed and secret. With this *possibility* of knowing God the *obligation* to know Him is imposed upon us. God wishes no narrow souls and empty heads for his children; He wishes our spirit, of itself indeed poor, rich in the knowledge of Him and holding this knowledge to be of supreme value. The development of the thinking spirit only *began* with this revelation of divine essence. It must now advance to the intellectual comprehension of that which originally was present only to the feeling and the imagining spirit. (16-17)

A Christian may object that faith demands that we accept that God transcends the reach of our reason. Hegel would counter that history is the working out of divine reason and our reason can to some extent follow its ways. Indeed, he insists that if religion insists on the privacy of the merely subjective then religion cannot become the universal force that it claims to be. Feelings cannot be argued for. The very word “catholic” implies a demand to make religion universal, but this Hegel insists can only be achieved by an appeal to reason.

But if history is the working out of divine providence, it can ultimately not be evil. Hegel is a life affirmer whose optimism cannot be defeated by all that we find so difficult to accept. Here his dialectic understanding of history is of help: history, as I pointed out last time, is a process tending towards ever greater freedom. All progress implies a negation of the past, but this negation is never complete; much is carried over into the future. From the point of view of some established order the forces that threaten to destroy it may well be considered evil. But evil is a relative term when viewed from a more comprehensive perspective. Every age will possess in its morality, in what it considers good, only part of the truth and will be doomed to give rise to an antithetical vision that will in turn yield to a higher synthesis. What separates is in the end always conquered by love.

I need to emphasize the extent to which this thinking is indebted to Christianity. It would have made no sense in the Greek world with its cyclical view of time according to which everything would return sooner or later to more or less the same state. This rules out progress. Does reason really support the Christian understanding of history as the working out of the divine Idea?

Let me accompany this question with three related questions:

1. The dialectic process is encountered not only in the progress of history, but also in the evolution of consciousness. But is consciousness not part of nature? To sever consciousness and nature would be to return to that split Hegel seeks to overcome. But how well does Hegel’s dialectic fit nature?

2. To what extent do most of us still believe in the progress of history? Is this not still part of our common sense, even if thinkers such as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, or Oswald Spengler, who write *The Decline of the West*, and, more importantly, all sorts of crises have made it more difficult to hold on to such conviction?

3. To what extent do we find Hegel's interpretation of history convincing?

The first question invites elaboration into a philosophical argument. The second appeals to common sense. The third appeals to history.

2

History, according to Hegel, tends towards a purpose, the realization of the Idea. The vehicle of this realization is man. Falling inevitably short of infinite spirit, man nevertheless tries to approximate it. The progress of history is the result of these efforts. This progress is one of the spirit ever more effectively mastering matter, where such mastery is inseparable from an increase in freedom. History can thus be described as the progressive realization of man's true essence, his freedom, where freedom is understood by Hegel, too, as autonomy, as self-legislating existence. We can according to this schema divide history into three periods:

1. In the first stage of history human beings did not yet know autonomy.

Orientals do not yet know that Spirit — Man as such — is free. And because they do not know it, they are not free. They only know that *one* is free; but for this very reason such freedom is mere caprice, ferocity, dullness of passion, or perhaps, softness and tameness of desire — which again is nothing but an accident of nature and thus again, caprice. This *one* is therefore only a despot, not a free man. (23)

Freedom then meant to be able to indulge in one's passions, to do what one was inclined to do. But so understood freedom is no different from caprice. Freedom then was the license to be capricious. There is as yet no consciousness of what it means to be truly autonomous: a law-giver unto oneself.

2. This consciousness Hegel sees arising first among the Greeks.

But they, and the Romans likewise, only knew that some after free—not man as such. This not even Plato and Aristotle knew. For this reason the Greeks not only had slavery, upon which was based their whole life and the maintenance of their splendid liberty, but their freedom was partly an accidental, transient, and limited flowering and partly a severe thralldom of human nature. (23-24)

Freedom here is the privilege of only a few. We have an aristocratic conception of society.

Only Christianity, according to Hegel, brought with it an awareness that man as such is free.

Only the Germanic people came, through Christianity, to realize that man is free and that freedom of Spirit is the very essence of man's nature. This realization first arose in religion, in the innermost region of spirit; but to introduce it in the secular world was a further task which could only be solved and fulfilled by a long and severe effort of civilization. (24)

How does history achieve this end? What are its means? The answer is: by extraordinary human beings. The passionate individual is the vehicle through which the Idea works. And passion means interest. Thus it is the individual's interest in himself that the Idea uses to further its ends. This is how Hegel understands Caesar:

In accomplishing his originally negative purpose — the autocracy over Rome — he at the same time fulfilled the necessary historical destiny of Rome and the world. Thus he was motivated not only by private interest, but acted instinctively to bring to pass that which the times required. (39)

Just before the battle of Jena (1806) Hegel experienced Napoleon as such a world-historical hero, whose anticipated victory over the Prussians he welcomed.

Hegel is not claiming that such a hero consciously strives to realize what the Idea demands. He follows time-bound personal interests. Hegel thus does not demand that the individual follow some abstract moral commandment, say the categorical imperative or what he understands Reason to demand:

If men are to act, they must not only intend the good but must know whether this or that particular course is good. What special course of action is good or not, right or wrong, is determined, for the ordinary circumstances of private life, by the laws and customs of a state. It is not too difficult to know them. (37)

Hegel, to be sure, is not speaking here of the hero who for the sake of the end he has in view is willing to suspend the ethical as ordinarily understood. But most of us are conservative. We do not want radical change. We want to pursue our happiness within the framework that the laws and customs of our state provide. The heroic individuals that

change the world are of course not content with this. They want change and for that very reason are likely to be resented by those committed to the establishment. But the dissatisfaction that governs the hero is itself supported by an obscure premonition of the Idea. They are, as it were, seers and in this way their action is the vehicle by which thesis gives way to antithesis. Individuals such as Alexander, Caesar or Napoleon derive their strength not from the existing order, but from a state of affairs that they want to become reality, which as yet still belongs to the future. History is thus full of tragic collisions where both parties are in the right, and where yet one will inevitably suffer defeat. And the same can be seen to repeat itself on a still larger scale when cultures such as the Roman world or that of Christian Europe collapse. As revolutions yield a new establishment, radicals give way to conservatives, defending what has been achieved against whatever new heroes might arise.

We should note how much cruelty such a view of history is willing to accept:

A world-historical individual is not so sober as to adjust his ambition to circumstances; nor is he very considerate. He is devoted, come what may, to one purpose. Therefore such men may treat other great and even sacred interests inconsiderately—a conduct which indeed subjects them to moral reprehension. But so mighty a figure must trample down many an innocent flower, crush to pieces many things in its path. (43)

Morality is evolving. The world-historical individual grasps a higher universality than most of his fellows and makes it his own. (39) He has a more immediate relationship to the universal. But only because many others have something like a premonition of what moves such heroes, are these accepted as leaders by them.

9. History and the State

1

History, we saw, is viewed by Hegel as tending towards a purpose, the realization of the divine Idea. We human beings are the vehicles of this realization. As finite beings we fall short of this Idea, but strive to draw ever closer to it. The progress of history is the result of these efforts. This process is one of the spirit freeing itself ever more decisively from its submersion in matter. History may thus be viewed as a process leading from the gravity of matter to the freedom of the spirit. It can thus be described as the progressive discovery on the part of human beings of their true essence, their freedom.

We can, according to this principle, divide history into three periods. The key is provided by the concept of freedom. What is freedom? Freedom is self-sustained, self-determined existence, is **autonomy**. But this, in the first stage of history, man did not as yet know. Here we meet only with what has been called **negative freedom**. Negative freedom means simply freedom from external constraints, freedom to be able to indulge in one's passions, to do whatever one was inclined to do. So understood freedom becomes caprice. There is as yet no consciousness of what it means to be truly autonomous, i.e, to be a lawgiver unto oneself. Such autonomy offers the key to Kantian **morality**.

A concern for this kind of morality Hegel sees arising first among the Greeks. But then it was applied only to a few. Take Plato's *Republic*: The large majority must be controlled by the philosopher-king. Most individuals are not fit to rule. We can generalize: In Greek society, Hegel suggests, some were free, but not human beings as such. It would not have occurred to them to think that barbarians or slaves possessed the same right as free Greeks. We have thus an **aristocratic society**. And the same can be said of Rome.

Only Christianity, according to Hegel, introduces the principle that freedom belongs to every human being, that it is part of man's very nature. Man is thought to be essentially free, where we should keep in mind that Hegel, like the French revolution, still thinks very much of the male when he speaks of man. We human beings, Hegel tells

us, were born to be free, but he remains unwilling to grant women the same freedom he is willing to grant to men.

Only when he becomes thus free does man become truly himself. Kant thus understood the Enlightenment as the culmination of this process, as the coming of age of humanity.

How does history manifest this movement toward freedom? What are the means it uses? History is not the working out of the universal in the abstract, but in the concrete. This means, it is the working out of the Idea through the activities of inevitably particular human beings. It is the passionate world historical figure, as we saw, who is the vehicle of the Idea working towards its goal. But to be passionate means to be interested. Such a passionate individual does not think of himself serving the end of history. He pursues his personal interest. Think of an Alexander, a Caesar, a Napoleon. They were all selfish and power-hungry. But in the end, without being aware of it, they all served the interests of the Idea and advanced history.

Why should this be so? Because man is himself spirit and as such ultimately has no different goal, even though he may conceive that goal only in a very inadequate and distorted manner. The realization of the Idea dwells as a kind of instinct in us human beings. Hegel thus does not claim that we have to consciously strive to realize the Idea. Man glimpses the Idea only inadequately in ways inevitably refracted by his particular situation. And here Hegel is critical of Kant. By stressing the universal as it does, Kantian morality fails to do justice to the way we are always remain embedded in particular communities. The individual cannot possibly live up to what Kantian morality commands. Kant's abstract understanding of autonomy, of freedom bound only by pure practical reason gives us a positive understanding of freedom and as such a powerful antithesis to the understanding of negative freedom that understands freedom only as freedom from external constraints. But that antithesis also remains one-sided. Hegel takes himself to provide the needed synthesis of negative freedom and the abstract positive freedom that presides over Kantian *Moralität* or morality with this understanding of *Sittlichkeit*.

What does Hegel mean by *Sittlichkeit*. *Sitte* can be translated as custom. *Sittlichkeit* thus names the ethical order shaped by the laws and customs of a particular community. Right conduct is therefore not to be guided by some abstract conception of

the good, some universal principle such as the categorical imperative, but by the customs and laws of the society of which the individual is a part:

If men are to act, they must not only intend the good but must know whether this or that particular course is good. What special course of action is good or not, right or wrong, is determined for the ordinary circumstances of private life, by the laws and customs of the state. It is not too difficult to know them. (37)

Hegel thus endorses, at least for “the ordinary circumstances,” a certain conservatism. For the ordinary person, as opposed to the world historical figure, there is a natural resistance to change. Pursue happiness as you understand it, where the pursuit of happiness is inevitably circumscribed by the historical circumstances.

The passionate, world historical individual, to be sure, is, as we saw not content with happiness so understood. He wants the world to bear the imprint of his deeds. From the point of view of the established order such deeds may well be judged evil and the society cannot be blamed for resisting such an individual’s efforts. On the other hand, the dissatisfaction that animates the hero is itself born of a premonition of what the Idea demands, a premonition that must also be felt in some way by those who respond to his call for change. Such world-historical figures are, in a way, prophets, seers, and their actions are the vehicle by which history advances. Hegel experienced Napoleon, whom he himself encountered, if only fleetingly, at Jena, as such a world-historical figure.

But does Hegel’s understanding of history allow for such leaders in the future? Our answer to that question will depend on whether we think that Hegel’s understanding of history is such that modernity means the end of history, that history has entered its final phase. If so there would be a sense in which, just as the modern world, according to Hegel, leaves no room for what once was art in its highest sense, so it leaves no room for further world-historical figures. In that case, someone who claimed to be such a figure, say a Hitler or a Stalin, would have to be judged evil.

2

I pointed out that there tension between what Hegel calls *Moralität*, morality und *Sittlichkeit*. Kant’s categorical imperative represents the former, while Hegel would have us recognize human beings not so much as isolated individuals, but as always

already bound into a larger communal context. This is not to be interpreted abstractly, as a context provided by the abstract idea of rational agency or humanity, which, Kant thought, provided sufficient ground for his categorical imperative, but rather to be thought concretely. The prime expression of this is for Hegel the **state**. Hegel has thus a moral conception of the state. The state is understood by him as the historical realization of the Idea. Only in the state does the individual gain his essential being:

This essential being is the union of the subjective with the rational will; it is the moral whole, the *State*. It is that actuality in which the individual has and enjoys his freedom, but only as knowing, believing, and willing the universal. This must not be understood as if the subjective will of the individual attained its gratification and enjoyment through the common will and the latter were a means for it — as if the individual limited his freedom among the other individuals, so that its common limitation, the usual constraint of all, might assure a small space of liberty of each. (This would only be negative freedom.) Rather, law, morality, the State, and they alone are the positive reality and satisfaction of freedom. (49-50)

Hegel is clearly suspicious of the liberal conception of the state, as exemplified by British political thought, afraid that caprice is mistaken for genuine freedom. But he is also suspicious of Kant's emphasis on the universal:

The subjective will, passion, is the force which actualizes and realizes. The Idea is the interior; the State is the externally existing, genuinely moral life. (50)

True freedom is when the individual acts in accord with his or her true nature. But that nature includes a universal and interior as well as a particular aspect. The state is representative of this moral aspect. In obeying the state the individual is not sacrificing his autonomy, because in such obedience he is faithful to his own moral being. What counts are not private desires, but being in accord with the common will and universal principles.

Hegel proposes here an idea of the state that invites submission and unquestioning subordination. But Hegel's state cannot serve any special interests. It has to serve the whole and partisanship in favor of or against some particular group is ruled out. One-sided self-interest or particular group interests are forbidden. It should be clear that this

conception of the state as a moral institution is radically opposed to the liberal conception of the state that derives from Hobbes and Locke. For Hobbes the state is the product of self-interested individuals, who are naturally greedy, but are driven by their self-interest to respect the state, which, while abridging some of their freedom makes it alone possible to enjoy life in some safety. For Hegel the state is not the product of self-interest alone, although he grants that self-interest plays a part in the formation of the state, but he insists that it is only as member of the state that the individual becomes truly moral. Man, according to Hegel, is essentially a political animal, as Aristotle recognized and Hobbes denied. We meet here with a kind of respect for the state that is alien to the British and the American tradition. For Hegel the state is “The divine idea as it exists on earth.” (53)

Hegel thus makes clear his opposition to Locke’s claim that man is free by nature:

That man is free “by nature” is quite correct in the sense that he is free according to the very concept of man, that is in his *destination* only, as he is, in himself; the “nature” of a thing is indeed tantamount to its concept. But the view in question also introduces into the concept of man his immediate and natural way of existence. In this sense a state of nature is assumed in which man is imagined in the possession of his natural rights and the unlimited exercise and enjoyment of his freedom. (54)

But so understood, man in the state of nature is not really free, but subject to his whims and passions.

Hegel also rejects the patriarchal conception of the state as not having its ground in reason, but rather in feeling. The state is here thought in the image of a family. And what links the two is “a feeling, a consciousness, and a will not of the individual personality and its interests but of the common personality, the interests of all members as such.” (56) But there is also a crucial distinction between this feeling-based conception of the state and Hegel’s:

But the expansion of the family to a patriarchal whole extends beyond the ties of blood relationship, the simple, natural basis of the state. Beyond that the individuals must acquire the status of personality. A detailed

review of the patriarchal condition would lead us to the discussion of theocracy. (56)

3

Hegel, as we have seen, is suspicious of the liberal conception of the state. Too easily it means that the majority can impose its will on the minority:

But already Rousseau has remarked that this means the absence of freedom, for the will of the minority is disregarded. In the Polish diet all decisions had to be unanimous and it was from this kind of freedom that the state perished. Moreover it is a dangerous and false proposition that the people *alone* has reason and insight and knows what is right, for each popular faction can set itself up as the People. What constitutes the state is a matter of trained intelligence, not a matter of “the people.” (57)

There have to be individuals with “trained intelligence” who will decide what is to be done, i.e., there has to be an effective government, an effective administration. There have to be those who command and those who obey.

What then is the constitution that best serves the interests of the state? In theory Hegel suggests, the “only true and just constitution” is the Republic, in which power resides in the people, who elect those who run the government (59). But most human beings, Hegel suggests, are not yet ready for a republican form of government. The spiritual development of a people needs to be taken into account. “A constitution is therefore not a matter of choice but depends on the stage of a people’s spiritual development.” (60) Consider oriental despotism! Or the Greek aristocratic conception of government! Even what the Greeks called democracy was fundamentally aristocratic in that the majority of the population was not admitted as citizens. Democracy presupposes a culture that has acquired an ingrained awareness of the dignity of the human being as such. The **will of the majority** should therefore be distinguished from and opposed to what Hegel, following Rousseau, calls the **general will**:

The main thing is that freedom, as it is determined by the concept, is not based on the subjective will and caprice, but on the understanding of the general will, and that the system of freedom is the free development of its stages. (62)

Rousseau is the originator of the modern conception of the state as a moral institution. Hegel follows him. For Hegel the state is the highest expression that the Idea takes for a given people at a given time, where he takes this expression to be intimately tied to religion, art, and philosophy, where religion is the devotion to the absolute Spirit, while art gives expression to the absolute Spirit in the sensible, and philosophy is the thinking of the absolute Spirit.

Religion is thus the way in which a people defines its relationship to the Absolute. The religion of a people expresses what it takes to be most fundamentally significant and true. But, since we are social animals, that has to embrace the state. The state must therefore be sanctioned by religion. Religion provides the common sense that is needed to support the state. Hegel thus rejects any bifurcation of state and religion, such as it came to be fundamental to the liberal conception of the state stemming from Hobbes and Locke. And in similar fashion a philosophy that seeks to articulate man's relationship to the Idea will have to support the foundation of the state. Something similar should be said of art. And all this fits rather well the reality of the Prussia that had called Hegel to Berlin and had found in him its philosopher.

We must, however not forget that history, according to Hegel, has been marked by the progress of reason. States have given way to others, and not just as the result of forceful intervention from without, but as the result of opposing forces generated from within, where Hegel would be thinking above all of the French Revolution. A new common sense was painfully emerging, where the agents of such change are those heroic individuals that overthrow the old order, such as Napoleon.

Ethical behavior for Hegel is nothing but the vitality of the state in individuals. So understood the state is all inclusive of what is significant in our lives. The totalitarian implications of such a conception are evident in that such a conception invites us to think the very distinction between private and public interests as immoral. This is profoundly different from the Lockean account of the sanctity of the private sphere. For Locke the state only has the function of enabling the individual to pursue his or her happiness as best she can. For Hegel the pursuit of the individual's destiny is one with his obedience and devotion to the state.

What distinguishes Hegel's view from that of the modern totalitarian is that the individual according to him must choose himself to be standing under the laws of the

state. And Hegel insists that the individual cannot be discriminated against in any fashion. Everyone is equally a citizen, where we must, however, note once more that Hegel thought of the citizen as very much a male. The statement, “everyone is equally a citizen,” did not include women.

As I have suggested, Hegel’s moral conception of the state is inescapably shadowed by the totalitarian threat. But Hegel’s conception of the state requires the individual to assume responsibility, not to abdicate it. The latter, I want to suggest, characterizes modern totalitarianism. One rests on the assumption, the other on the negation of responsibility. Modern totalitarianism would deliver the individual from a freedom that has become a burden the individual finds too heavy to bear. Hegel would have the individual shoulder that burden. Still, the two positions are similar enough for totalitarianism to have been able to invoke Hegel.

10. The Marxist Theory of History

1

Karl Marx was born in 1818. When Hegel died he was thus just in his early teens. Still, the influence of Hegel was still dominant at German universities, particularly at the university of Berlin where Hegel had taught and Marx concluded his studies; after receiving his doctorate, not from the university of Berlin, where one found his views too controversial, but from the more liberal university at Jena, for a dissertation on *The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature*, he ended up writing for a radical newspaper in Cologne. In 1843 he married and moved to Paris, where revolution was in the air. It was here that here he met his life long collaborator Friedrich Engels, who co-authored the *Communist Manifesto*.⁶ For our purposes it is not important to try to disentangle their respective contributions. In Paris, too, Marx was writing for a radical newspaper that in 1845 was closed by the French authorities, under pressure from the Prussian king. Marx had to leave Paris. Some restless years followed, that brought him to Brussels, then back to Cologne, where he was tried for treason and acquitted, then briefly again to Paris and finally to London, where he settled in 1849 and died in 1883.

Again and again it was the Prussian authorities that made life difficult for Marx. The Prussia that had been described by Hegel as the best possible state under the given historical circumstances, seems to have sensed, not without reason, in Marx a world-historical figure, heralding a new turn in the history of mankind. About Marx as a world historical figure little needs to be said. To be sure, the collapse of the Communist empire has also meant the end of an age where in perhaps a third of the world his teachings were received as something close to a secular gospel. These days are over. But all over the world his influence remains strong, and not just in China and Cuba. Socialist parties all over the world continue to appeal to Marx. But what was it that made the world so receptive to his message? What was it that he taught?

Let me begin with his understanding of history. The very beginning of the *Communist Manifesto* provides us with a clear statement:

⁶ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Communist Manifesto* (New York: International Publishers, 1948).

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank. In ancient Rome we have patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves; in the Middle Ages, feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs; in almost all of these classes, again, subordinate gradations.

The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones.

Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinct feature: it has simplified class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other — Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. (9)

Even a brief glance at this history suggests similarities with the view we have just examined, with that of Hegel. To briefly indicate some of these: Both take history to be progressing. Both understand this progress as not linear, but dialectical, proceeding by means of the by now familiar triad of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. And both see history as culminating in a final state in which human beings would finally be what they should be.

But as soon as this is said the differences become apparent. For Hegel the ground of the progress of history has to be sought in the fact that reason presides over history, i.e. history is a spiritual movement that finds its agents in particular human beings, but the progress of history is the progress of spirit. Human actors more or less unwittingly serve

that progress. That Hegel's understanding of history owes much to the kind of theological understanding of history presented by the medieval thinker Joachim of Fiore, who saw history dividing itself into three ages, the age of the Father, the age of the Son, and the age of the Holy Spirit, is evident. With both history is also a story of the progressive decent of the divine, for Hegel Reason, into the human sphere. Behind Hegel's Reason we still find the old God.

Marx had little patience with that theological inheritance. He wanted to stand Hegel's dialectic on its head. The driving force of history is not some abstract reason, but human beings trying to make their way in the world, is the ever evolving battle of oppressor and oppressed. Keeping much of the Hegelian story of history as the progress of freedom, Marx gave it a materialistic foundation. In this respect there is a certain similarity between Marx and Hobbes. For Hobbes human beings, in order to escape the insecurities entailed by trying to go it alone, enter the social contract. Human selfishness leads human beings to turn to the state to mitigate the negative effect of selfishness. For Marx the economic element is more important. But the basic fact remains: man's will to live lets him seek the association with others to produce the conditions that make life possible or more bearable. At the very center of human life is the economic sphere.

That different circumstances, different stages of human development, require different kinds of economic associations is evident. Marx posits an original communism, a primitive tribal or familial group where everyone shares the fruits of their labor as well as the risks. But when the first societies that we call civilized arise a new kind of economy is demanded that makes ever more complicated structures necessary. Arnold Toynbee thus described how the drying up of the Sahara forced human beings to abandon their nomadic life style and settle and cultivate the valley of the Nile. That forced them among other things to build dams, dig irrigation ditches and the like. The same conditions were true for Babylonia. But to accomplish such work cooperation and coordination became necessary on an up to then unknown scale; a new level of organization was needed that would weld a multitude into an effective whole. The result were the autocratic regimes of the Near East and Egypt, where all power is concentrated in the king, who is endowed with a religious aura: the God-king. His commands however had to be translated into action. A chain of classes had to emerge: patricians, knights,

plebeians, slaves. As the society crystalized into classes, tensions between them had to arise. History can thus be understood as the history of class struggle.

From primitive communism to the differentiation of a society into classes we have thus something like a fall. Man permits himself to be oppressed, at first out of necessity. Marx method is materialistic because it moves from material existence to consciousness, not the other way around. It is dialectic because of the way history progresses as the conflict of opposing forces.

I suggested that there is a sense in which Marx stood Hegel's dialectic on its head. Marx presents us with what might be called an inverse Hegelianism. For Hegel the state, religion, art, philosophy, all were expressions of the way in which human beings understand their relationship to the absolute. This relationship reflected the stage of the development of the spirit. The fundamental category of explanation is spirit. For Marx the state, religion, art, philosophy, the consciousness of a society, are all expressions of its economic situation. The spiritual is of only secondary importance. What drives history are material conditions. Marx thus invites a materialist science of history. And the history he envisions has to end in a culture that embraces the globe:

The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of Reactionists, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilized nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-

mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature. (12-13)

For us this raises the question of how to explain the nationalist fervor that fuelled the wars of the 20th century. Should the progress of history not have left such a nationalism behind? What human need did it address? You may want to raise a related question concerning the rise of religious fanaticism all over the world today.

The process Marx describes will inevitably also transform the way that human beings relate to the earth and to each other.

The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life. Just as it has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilized ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West.

More and more the bourgeoisie keeps doing away with the scattered state of the population, of the means of production, and of property. It has agglomerated population, centralized the means of production, and has concentrated property in a few hands. The necessary consequence of this was political centralization. Independent, or but loosely connected provinces, with separate interests, laws, governments, and systems of taxation, became lumped together into one nation, with one government, one code of laws, one national class-interest, one frontier, and one customs-tariff.

The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together. Subjection of Nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam-navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalization of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground — what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labor? (13-14)

2

We should note at this point a certain tension in Marx's position: According to his theory, he is himself the product of his age and class, i.e. of a certain stage in world history, and is himself a product of these forces, someone who has to believe what he believes. How can he then claim his understanding of history to be superior to that of others? In particular, when he tries to give us a picture of the end of history, must he not assume that he, Marx, is somehow exempt from the law that he has set up and can predict the shape of the final end stage, overlooking the progress in its entirety? A similar problem can be found with Hegel. He, too, claims to be able to survey history as a whole. This presupposes that reason or history has reached a stage where it has come to some sort of end and no further radical change is possible. Hegel was indeed convinced of something of the sort. All the same, Hegel does not give us a very clear statement of the end stage. In that sense he appears more aware of the limitations imposed by his own historical position.

Having described history in this way, one particular historical period interests Marx especially: the shift from the medieval feudal to the modern bourgeois society. This revolution is judged by Marx in two rather different ways: on the one hand it has freed the individual from what once were comforting illusions. But freeing the individual, it also robbed him of the illusion of having a dignity and an assigned place; the bourgeois state reduced the worker to a mere commodity:

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors", and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment". It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom — Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious

and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.

The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honored and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage laborers.

The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation. (11)

Man has become a commodity, a thing. Like everything else he has a price and can be bought. Nothings is hallowed. The ties that once bound individuals to family, to country, to landscape have been loosened or broken. The rise of towns and cities was just one aspect of this development. Another was increased political centralization.

And the key development is the polarization of classes. This is demanded by several facts that Marx takes to be irreversible. Value becomes the socially necessary quantity of labor required. The worker is bought, the price is a subsistence wage. But the value the worker produces is more than the wage he is paid. The profits belong to the capitalists, who are in command of the means of production. Competition demands that factories become ever more efficient producers. Productivity cannot stand still. The more efficient producers drive out their competitors. But as productivity increases less workers are required. The modern state thus faces a constant threat of unemployment. And while unemployment keeps wages low it reduces the number of potent consumers. As wealth increases on the one hand, misery increases on the other. This misery, coupled with the increase in communications characteristic of modernity, was said by Marx to lead inevitably to the revolution. The proletariat will sooner or later bring about the end of capitalism.

As we have seen, history did not quite develop in the way Marx foresaw. Why not? It seems that if the economic sphere possessed quite the significance Marx attributed it, the facts would have had to fit his theory better. But history developed in ways rather different from what he predicted. This has to mean that the economic sphere is not quite as important as Marx took it to be. The gradual development towards increased social responsibility that we can observe all over the world has no doubt in part an economic foundation. Society simply requires consumers and when the majority is

too impoverished to furnish the capitalist with the required market the structure will disintegrate. But, as a matter of fact, this is not what has happened. Moral and other considerations have intervened. The element of free trade on which Marx's prognosis depends has been restricted to varying degrees in every society. Why? I would suggest, in part, at least, for humanitarian reasons. And in the end, was not Marx himself moved by such reasons. He feels pity for the miserable proletariat.

11. Dialectical Materialism

1

Last time I suggested that Marx's theory of history may be understood as a translation of Hegel's theory into a new materialist or economic key. Marx, too, takes history to progress dialectically. He, too, sees it as about to enter its final stage, a kind of secular millennium. And, as is the case with Hegel's theory, the Marxist view of history, too, presupposes a certain view of man.

But what kind of being is man? To that question Hegel and Marx give very different answers. We know the Hegelian answer: man is spirit incarnated in matter, in search of his essence. His ultimate destiny is freedom; history is thus the progress of freedom. And freedom is what Kant and Fichte already told us it is: freedom is autonomy, the responsible choice of oneself, where for Hegel that choice is a choice of oneself as citizen.

Marx presents us with a different picture: man is part of the material dialectic process that is history. Human needs are to be understood first of all in economic terms. Human beings want to live and to reproduce themselves. To do so they need to feed and house themselves. To satisfy that need they will sell themselves, if that should prove necessary. On this account, too, human beings can be said to desire freedom, but the freedom they desire is once again the freedom to pursue one's happiness as one sees fit and as best one can. Unfortunately we do not live in paradise. Most human beings have to make sacrifices to make ends meet. Freedom then, as it did for Hobbes and Locke, demands first of all freedom from want. It is precisely the need to get by that lets human beings debase themselves into a mere commodity, a means of production.

It is from this that Marx would liberate human beings. The key to that liberation he finds in the abolition of private property:

All property relations in the past have continually been subject to historical change consequent upon the change in historical conditions.

The French Revolution, for example, abolished feudal property in favor of bourgeois property.

The distinguishing feature of Communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property. But modern

bourgeois private property is the final and most complete expression of the system of producing and appropriating products that is based on class antagonisms, on the exploitation of the many by the few.

In this sense, the theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property. (23)

And the abolition of private property will mean the end of those class struggles that according to Marx have been the driving force of history:

Political power, properly so called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another. If the proletariat during its contest with the bourgeoisie is compelled, by the force of circumstances, to organize itself as a class, if, by means of a revolution, it makes itself the ruling class, and, as such, sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class.

In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all. (31)

2

How is freedom understood here? Materialistically, as the freedom to satisfy one's bodily desires? A question that must be raised is whether human beings are ultimately satisfied with just such freedom. Fichte and Hegel would have insisted on more.

One thing must be admitted: the Marxist ideal seems more capable of realization than the Hegelian, which gestures towards an indefinite beyond. For Hegel human beings must find meaning in the knowledge that they have their place in a process that serves the progressive advancement of what reason demands. The Marxist, on the other hand, ultimately wants to overcome all such struggle. But is this not a vain hope? For the Marxist, in the end, when all class alienation will finally have been overcome, there will no longer be any need for struggle. But again the question: is that enough? Would it

not lead to an inevitable deterioration of society? Boredom would set in; stupidity, dullness would rule. Is this the ideal for which we are struggling?

This is not just a question the Marxist faces, but anyone who puts a premium on worldly happiness. Marx has given up on spirit as the fundamental category. He understands himself to be a materialist. But it is the spirit that with Hegel demands the dialectic. Does Marx have a right to invoke it, a right to his dialectical materialism? And here we should note that the dialectic characterizes what we can call fallen humanity. Once communism has triumphed there will be no need for dialectic. Just as it did not determine humanity before the division into classes emerged, it will not determine the final stage of history that will follow the victory of the proletariat over capitalism. In its essence humanity does not need the dialectic. The progress of history should therefore leave it behind.

3

A second departure from Hegel is that freedom for Hegel means that the free individual wills the allegiance to family, country, and state. The proletariat, however, Marx insists, knows no such allegiances. Hegel, he could insist, took his own bourgeois point of view too seriously. Take Hegel's, and of course not only his defense of the family. Marx's critique is scathing, somewhat surprising given the fact that he appears to have been an unusually devoted husband and father.

Abolition [*Aufhebung*] of the family! Even the most radical flare up at this infamous proposal of the Communists.

On what foundation is the present family, the bourgeois family, based? On capital, on private gain. In its completely developed form, this family exists only among the bourgeoisie. But this state of things finds its complement in the practical absence of the family among the proletarians, and in public prostitution.

The bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course when its complement vanishes, and both will vanish with the vanishing of capital.

Do you charge us with wanting to stop the exploitation of children by their parents? To this crime we plead guilty.

But, you say, we destroy the most hallowed of relations, when we replace home education by social.

And your education! Is not that also social, and determined by the social conditions under which you educate, by the intervention direct or indirect, of society, by means of schools, &c.? The Communists have not invented the intervention of society in education; they do but seek to alter the character of that intervention, and to rescue education from the influence of the ruling class. (26-27)

There is the related objection that in abolishing the traditional family, Communism will destroy the sacred bond between husband and wife. Marx has little patience with such talk:

But you Communists would introduce community of women, screams the bourgeoisie in chorus.

The bourgeois sees his wife a mere instrument of production. He hears that the instruments of production are to be exploited in common, and, naturally, can come to no other conclusion that the lot of being common to all will likewise fall to the women.

He has not even a suspicion that the real point aimed at is to do away with the status of women as mere instruments of production.

For the rest, nothing is more ridiculous than the virtuous indignation of our bourgeois at the community of women which, they pretend, is to be openly and officially established by the Communists. The Communists have no need to introduce community of women; it has existed almost from time immemorial.

Our bourgeois, not content with having wives and daughters of their proletarians at their disposal, not to speak of common prostitutes, take the greatest pleasure in seducing each other's wives.

Bourgeois marriage is, in reality, a system of wives in common and thus, at the most, what the Communists might possibly be reproached with is that they desire to introduce, in substitution for a hypocritically concealed, an openly legalized community of women. For the rest, it is self-evident that the abolition of the present system of production must

bring with it the abolition of the community of women springing from that system, i.e., of prostitution both public and private. (27-28)

4

Just as Marx rejects Hegel's defense of the family so he rejects Hegel's insistence on the moral significance of the state:

The Communists are further reproached with desiring to abolish countries and nationality.

The workingmen have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got. Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself the nation, it is so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word.

National differences and antagonism between peoples are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto.

The supremacy of the proletariat will cause them to vanish still faster. United action, of the leading civilized countries at least, is one of the first conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat.

In proportion as the exploitation of one individual by another is put an end to, the exploitation of one nation by another will also be put an end to. In proportion as the antagonism between classes within the nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end. (28)

The Hegelian can come back and counter that in an important sense Marx's economic man does not choose at all: he wants to return to the immediacy of individual enjoyment, to the immediacy of a liberated natural existence. The Marxist conception of man as ultimately atomic finds expression when Marx sketches his version of the millennium, when no human being is bound to any other, which is not to say that they will not care for their fellow human beings. What Marx does not consider is that many will binding ties, not because they are forced to do so by economic necessity, but because they will this, recognizing that only in this way can their own dignity be preserved. In

this connection it is instructive that in communist Russia allegiance to country, state, family all had to be reinstated after they had been declared outmoded as a result of the proletarian revolution.

And this brings me to a third question: The human being, according to Hegel has a vocation precisely he recognizes himself to be only an imperfect realization of what he should be. This task is infinite; it cannot be exhausted. But it points out the direction in which we should move. Human beings, according to such a view, realize that they have their ground in a reality that transcends them, in the absolute. That is what gives their lives dignity. Marx would want to argue that all this is part of bourgeois superstition. Think of Hegel claim that the state, and he was thinking first of all of 19th century Prussia, is “The divine idea as it exists on earth.” But as a matter of fact Marx himself has put his own ideal in the place of the absolute. The question is: is this idea rich enough to take on that role and to give meaning to life?

Let me sum up the three main points:

1. Marx lacks the category of freedom in the Kantian, Fichtean, or Hegelian sense, i.e, as autonomy, as choice of oneself, subject to what reason demands. He replaces it with the freedom to seek happiness as one sees fit, which presupposes freedom from want. But is happiness a fundamental enough category to make life meaningful?
2. Hegel subordinates the individual to the progress of reason. That is what makes their lives meaningful. This is denied by Marx. Human beings are what they are, beings that pursue happiness as best they can, possessed of a reason that has only an instrumental function. In this respect, Marx is closer to the British tradition as represented, e.g, by Bentham, than to German idealism.
3. Hegel places human being in relation to the absolute, where behind the absolute still lurks the old God. Marx would have us jettison such relics of a history that is irrevocably past.

12. Dreams of Paradise Regained

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3. Hegel places human being in relation to the absolute, where behind the absolute still lurks the old God. Marx would have us jettison such relics of a history that is irrevocably past.

The comparison with St. Augustine’s vision of history points to the appeal, but also to the inadequacy of its Marxist counterpart. Marx holds out the promise of a society where everyone will be able to live the good life. But how are we to understand that good life? Has Marx given us an adequate answer to that question? And here, it seems to me, we can only answer: no. Marxism has failed primarily

because it failed to do full justice to what human beings most profoundly want. According to Marx we human beings do not need God or the Hegelian absolute. What matters is that we can fulfill our physical needs. That we also have spiritual needs is not sufficiently considered. But among these is the need to cope with our mortality and inseparably bound up with it, the need to feel that our death-bound-life does not circumscribe all that matters. Consider once more Communism's critique of religion, marriage, of loyalty to country. I would suggest that these fulfill a real need, a need to feel that our life has a significance that transcends our death. But if we regard Communism as a program that attempt to furnish not final answers but minimum conditions that must be met if human beings are to be able to live truly humane lives, it has much to commend itself and some of its recommendations are indeed reminiscent of thoughts we encountered already in Fichte. And is there not a sense in which in countless ways the world has moved a bit closer to ideal proclaimed by Marx. Not that we can accept his dialectic. It is too plainly refuted by the progress of history. The proletariat has not evolved in quite the way he predicted, in part because the bourgeoisie was enlightened enough to recognize the inhumanity of many of the conditions Marx deplored and took steps to mitigate them. Think of Bismarck's decision in 1889 to institute an old-age social insurance program, making Germany the first nation in the world to adopt such a program. The class divisions are not as rigid as Marx took them to be. Something like a social conscience plays a more important role in history than Marx was willing to grant it. Spirit cannot altogether be rejected — reason to revisit Hegel. I would like to conclude with a warning. The real problem with Marx's understanding of history is that he does not do justice to freedom. By making the economic dimension fundamental as he does, by seeing all cultural production as dependent on the economic base, he is in danger of losing sight of our humanity.

13. Consciousness and Despair

1

Kierkegaard and Marx have this in common: they both felt that the Hegelian conception of man is inadequate; that this conception was too academic: did this professor know what it meant to suffer, to be anguished, to have to worry about food, shelter? Both, Marx and Kierkegaard, leave the ivory tower, as it were, but once this has been pointed out, it has to be emphasized that they move in different directions: Marx into the world, Kierkegaard into himself. Marx denied the element of spirit. He emphasized man's earthly needs. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, felt that Hegel had not understood his category of spirit and thus human freedom profoundly enough. According to Kierkegaard he was too objective, while according to Marx he was not objective enough.

In 1841/1842 the philosopher Schelling, having succeeded Hegel, lectured in the university of Berlin on the limits of reason. Reason, he pointed out, can touch only on essence, but the concrete individual had to escape it. In opposition to rationalism, needed was a philosophy of mere existing. First excited, soon young Kierkegaard, who was attending the lectures, was disappointed. What he heard was still too professorial. But the promise that had been given by Schelling was to be developed by Kierkegaard himself. It was to make him the first existentialist, developing a concrete philosophy of the spirit.

Kierkegaard was born in Copenhagen in 1813. He is thus a few years older than Marx. He died in 1855. *The Sickness unto Death*⁷ was written in 1849, one year after the *Communist Manifesto*. The pseudonymous author, Anti-Climacus, is presented to us very much as a Christian. He wants to edify us, lead us to an authentically Christian life, and only such a life, he is convinced can render the individual spiritually healthy. Thus he likens what he has to say to the address a physician makes besides the sickbed.

Everything that is Christian must bear some resemblance to the address which a physician makes besides the sickbed: although it can be fully

⁷ References in the text are to Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* and *The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013)

understood only by one who is versed in medicine, yet it must never be forgotten that it is pronounced beside the sick-bed. (255)

What then is the disease from which the patients, i.e. we, are suffering? The end of the preface names it rather cryptically: the sickness is **despair**. And, as the title suggests, that sickness is linked to death, where the concluding sentence of the preface claims that the key to the cure to the sickness lies buried in the nature of both death and despair. Presupposed is the assumption that we mortals, whether aware of it or not, are in despair, where we readers may well wonder whether a despair of which we are quite unaware really deserves to be called “despair.” Can despair really be likened to an illness of which we are quite unaware?

Kierkegaard’s *Anti-Climacus* speaks as a Christian and he claims that only the Christian really knows what is meant by the “sickness unto death.” The natural man is afraid of death. But the Christian knows that death is not what is most dreadful:

He acquires as a Christian a courage which the natural man does not know—this courage he acquires by learning fear for the still more dreadful... But the dreadful thing the Christian learned to know is “the sickness unto death.” (266)

The sickness unto death is said to be despair. According to *Anti-Climacus* despair has its foundation in the fact that man is spirit or that he is a self. And what is a self: “The self is a relation that relates itself to its own self.” (269)

What does this mean? Already, in our discussion of consciousness, we spoke of it as a relation between subject and object; but that is not sufficient. To get a sense of self we need to be aware of that relation. And such awareness is not something passive, but we actively relate ourselves to ourselves. Thus we bear responsibility for ourselves. That is part of freedom.

But all of this remains disturbingly empty: what sort of relation are we talking about?

Man is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short it is a synthesis. (269)

The general understanding is familiar from a tradition that includes Plato, Descartes, Kant, and Hegel. As the animal that has reason, the human being transcends itself as a being assigned its place in space and time. Every time I claim truth for some proposition

I reach up to the eternal; aware of my freedom and aware that despite what I owe to nature, I bear responsibility from being. And in my thoughts freedom knows no boundaries, but reaches up to the infinite.

Anti-Climacus continues that such a relation must either have constituted itself or have been constituted by another. But we have clearly not posited or constituted ourselves. So we must have been constituted by an other. The self is thus related to the power that constituted it.

The self was said to be a relation that relates itself to its own self. It is this that makes despair possible, for the self can relate itself to itself in a way that fails to do justice to what it really is; but it can do justice to what it really is only when it adequately relates itself to the power that constituted it:

This then is the formula which describes the condition of the self when despair is completely eradicated: by relating itself to its own self and by willing to be itself the self is grounded transparently in the Power which posited it. (271)

Despair is thus conquered only when man relates himself to himself as he really is: a relation that relates itself to itself constituted by God.

2

If despair is a sickness, it is one that presupposes that we human beings are capable of opening ourselves to the power that constituted us:

The possibility of this sickness is man's advantage over the beast; to be sharply observant of this sickness constitutes the Christian's advantage over the natural man; to be healed of this sickness is the Christian's bliss. (272)

The human being faces the task of making himself what he is to be. This distinguishes him from the animals. And that he faces this task, uncertain of just how to meet it, is despair, which is thus the mark of consciousness. The human being would seem to be always despairing, in one way or another. The person who says to himself: Caesar or nothing is in despair; he does not want to be himself. Similar is the case of someone who thinks that he will be truly happy only when he finds the right person to love; or the right job. Despair is over the fact that I am not free to simply lay down the conditions of my

life. I have been cast into the world by an opaque fate that limits my freedom. I may want to escape having to face this by attempting to master my fate; or, in the opposite way, seeking security by becoming just another unquestioning member of some community. In both cases I tear myself away from the power that constituted me.

Despair is thus inseparable from consciousness. In that sense it is a universal sickness. It dwells in us human beings simply in so far as we are spirit. There is a constant tension between what we are and what we ought to be. We constantly have to become ourselves.

But are there not as matter of fact countless individuals who are not in despair? Who think their reason or their common sense tells them quite adequately what they ought to do? Who live perfectly happy lives, unconcerned about the Power that constituted them? But as Anti-Climacus understands it, this is precisely a form of despair, for here the human being does not affirm himself as he is, but rather seeks happiness by losing himself. Happiness, according to Anti-Climacus, is not a characteristic of human existence, precisely because of its spiritual nature. As the relation that relates itself to itself, the human being will never be truly at one with himself. Some may indeed live as if they were not spirit in this sense, but this is an illusion. Despair lies underneath and breaks out into the open when the veil that everyday routines have cast over our lives is somehow torn away. Despair is the sense that we are in the hands of nothingness, unable to escape death, unable to secure a foundation for our life. But such despair is the necessary prelude to faith. In this connection you may want to think back to Fichte's Doubt. Or to Descartes. But their despair is too philosophical to allow us to think of them as in despair in Kierkegaard's sense.

3

As the relation that relates itself to itself, the self is constantly underway to itself, ever becoming:

The self is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude, which relates itself to itself, whose task is to become itself, a task which can be performed only by means of a relationship to God. (296)

Being such a synthesis human beings can miss themselves by seizing either the one or the other pole of the synthesis, instead of seizing the synthesis as a whole. There is thus what Kierkegaard calls the **despair of infinitude**. The human being here realizes that in thought and imagination, he is capable of transcending the finite. And this power of self-transcendence, inseparable from my freedom is, as already pointed out, infinite. Beyond reality the imagination thus opens up infinite realms. For the aesthete the real world thus offers no more than material for artistic play.

And this power of self-transcendence may tempt the philosopher, too, to identify himself with this abstract self and to think that the true home of the self is the eternal and infinite. Think of Plato's philosopher in the *Republic*, leaving the darkness of the cave of everyday existence behind as he ascends to the realm of true being. Nietzsche invites us to think of such a philosopher as a wanderer, a mountain climber, ascending to the heights; the air gets ever colder, icier, as he gets closer to eternity. Such a wanderer is losing himself and is thus in despair in Kierkegaard's sense.

The opposite form of despair is where the human being spurns all such fantasies, be they those of the romantic poet, or the philosopher, or the mystic. Kierkegaard speaks of **the despair of finitude due to a lack of infinitude**. Such an individual may indeed think of himself as anything but in despair. Is he not the realist who feels at home in his world? The self finds itself here so to speak on a track and never really questions the meaning of his actions. He does what one does. But it is not really the individual who is acting, but the anonymous they. Who is here responsible? No one really. Modern mass man comes to mind. The individual becomes a cypher, a statistic. And all too readily human beings allow themselves to become such cyphers.

But why criticize such a life? Is such an individual not well adjusted? Why say he is in despair? One way despair here expresses itself is in such an individual's unwillingness to venture. Venture what? Himself! But all authentic communication is a venture. A declaration of love, e.g., is such a venture, a venture that may well make the individual thus venturing look silly. And yet only by venturing, regardless of whether we win or lose, can we gain ourselves. Never to venture, always to play it safe, is to lose oneself. That should give you some idea of what Kierkegaard means by the **despair of finitude**.

4

Kierkegaard also views despair “under the aspects of Possibility/Necessity.” (168) The two pairs are indeed related, possibility to freedom and thus to infinity, necessity to the finite. The self in despair of possibility dreads having to make a decision, dreads having to become something definite. Hope and fear are two ways of going astray in this way: I refuse to make some decision in the hope for something that remains an elusive possibility or I refuse to make a decision fearing that my decision will create some unfortunate state of affairs that I will come to regret.

The opposite is the despair of necessity. The individual feels that everything has to be as it is, that there are no real possibilities open to him. He feels that there is nothing that he can do to change things, deplorable as they may be. Such despair is paralyzing, it suffocates the self. “Possibility is for the self what oxygen is for breathing.” (314)

Different from the fatalist or determinist who despairs over the lack of possibility is the philistine, who is comfortable with the present state of affairs and what is likely to happen and adjusts his life accordingly. He, too, lacks possibility, even as he thinks that by settling for the probable he has mastered possibility. Anti-Climacus suggests that such a philistine lacks spirit.

According to Anti-Climacus these four forms of despair are four ways of losing the self. These four ways have a seductive power. They appeal to something in us that makes us want to lose ourselves. For what is it that I am supposed to do with myself? What is my vocation?

Kierkegaard’s Anti-Climacus is a Christian. But suppose there is no God, that the world presents itself to us as absurd, where the absurdity of the world is a consequence of an encounter between a questioning self and a world that gives no answers to our demands for meaning. We do not need to invoke the slaughter of millions. Just one murdered innocent child is sufficient: what sense can we find in such events? How can they ever be justified? Is this not sufficient to establish the absurdity of the world? In the face of such absurdity, is it perhaps only by escaping from ourselves, by embracing one of Kierkegaard’s four ways of being in despair, that we can escape from open despair? Perhaps, as Nietzsche will suggest, whenever life is considered worth living, such life is supported by illusion. What sense can we make of the God of Anti-Climacus to whom

everything is possible? In the absence of such a God, is not despair inescapable, where, given the definition of human being as a synthesis of the finite and the infinite, I may try to escape despair by refusing the synthesis that I am: I may thus on one hand try to exist by denying the infinite in me, by existing like an animal or a plant, refusing to burden my existence with questions such as: what is my vocation? Or I may affirm myself as a free human being, treating the world as no more than a source of material for imaginative play. That is the way of Kierkegaard's aesthete, as he describes him in the first volume of *Either/Or*. Kierkegaard would of course insist that the self, attempting to escape despair, in both cases ends up more profoundly in despair, in despair of finitude or necessity in the first case, I despair of infinitude or possibility in the second.

14. The Individual and Society

1

Last time we looked at some of the different forms that despair could assume, at four forms in particular: despair over the infinite, despair over the finite, despair over necessity, despair over possibility. We did not have much to say about whether an individual was conscious of being in despair, or whether, as it were, despair remained hidden.

Now we return to this problem by viewing despair under the aspect of consciousness. And here the first point to make is that most people do not take themselves to be in despair. In its ordinary sense despair would seem to be a rather rare phenomenon. Anti-Climacus, to be sure, insists on just the opposite: just about everyone is in despair; the great exception is not to be in despair and that, he insists, is possible only for the true Christian. (284) But where is such a true Christian to be found? Kierkegaard's Anti-Climacus thus takes the Christian perspective for granted, raising the question: what does a philosopher have to learn from him.

Despair, as Anti-Climacus analyzes it, is a state of being where the self is not itself. To say that a human being can both be and yet all the same not be himself presupposes that the self is a relation that relates itself to itself and can do so, indeed usually does so, in a way that it is precisely not itself. But to be truly oneself we have to recognize both, our freedom and what we have not chosen, that we are vulnerable and mortal and have not chosen our situation. We have been cast into the world in a way that remains opaque. But something deep in us would have us be the author of our own being. The tradition speaks of the sin of pride. Our spirit would have us be in charge of our being. We can therefore expect, the more developed this consciousness, the more intense the despair. The devil, understood as pure spirit, would be most profoundly in despair. His is an existence of total defiance. (317)

Despair is least developed where consciousness is at a minimum. Let us begin by looking at this lower end of the spectrum. Here we have an existence that is quite unconscious of being in despair. Take the case of some happy person, who has what he thinks he needs, is content with the pleasures life has to offer. His is what Kierkegaard calls a "spiritless sense of security" (321). Such a person is unlikely to welcome those

who would awaken him from his unreflective state, to awaken the spirit within him. He is after all content with his life. But dread, Anti-Climacus suggests, lies buried beneath his sense of security. It is possible for such a person to suddenly wake up and realize that what he had been doing did not affect him at all. At this point despair becomes open. But that it can thus become open presupposes that this individual was already in despair. This kind of despair, which does not know that it is in despair, is the most common form of despair. (322)

2

But we need not think of the person who is unconscious of being in despair as such a self-satisfied unreflective person. Anti-Climacus indeed insists that “Paganism as it historically was and is, and paganism within Christendom, is precisely this sort of despair, it is despair, but does not know it.” (322) Anti-Climacus does not deny that such individuals may be capable of achievements “which aesthetically cannot be sufficiently admired.” (323) But aesthetic achievement does not provide us with a measure to decide whether someone is truly himself and that is to say not in despair. That measure requires a turn to the ethico-religious:

Every human existence which is not conscious of itself as spirit, or conscious of itself before God as spirit, every human existence which is not grounded transparently in God, but obscurely reposes or terminates in some abstract universality (state, nation, etc.), or in obscurity about itself takes its faculties merely as active powers, without in a deeper sense being conscious whence it has them, who regards itself as an inexplicable something which is to be understood from without—every such existence, whatever it accomplishes, though it be the most amazing exploit, whatever it explains, though it were the whole of existence, however intensely it enjoys life aesthetically—every such existence is after all in despair. (324)

Because they had no adequate understanding of self, the pagans could thus accept suicide. They did not realize that it “the most decisive sin” since it is a “rebellion against God.” (324-325)

Having admitted that there is paganism within Christianity, Anti-Climacus yet insists that there is a decisive difference between such Christian paganism and say the

paganism of someone of like Socrates. While lacking spirit in the full sense, the paganism of a Socrates is yet oriented towards spirit, while Christian paganism is oriented away from it. It is spiritlessness “in the strictest sense.” (326)

3

Anti-Climacus turns next to a discussion of “Despair which is conscious of being in Despair,” where there is the question how adequately such a person understands what despair is. He considers the case of a Pagan who, comparing himself to others, judges himself to be in despair, failing to recognize that those whom he considers more fortunate are also in despair, even though they may not know it.

Anti-Climacus proceeds to distinguish a despair of weakness from a despair of strength. Despair of weakness is not to will to be oneself, despair of strength is to will oneself defiantly. And yet the two are closely related, for to will oneself defiantly is in the end not to will to be oneself as one really is. Still, Anti-Climacus thinks the distinction of some use.

Despair of weakness is of two kinds. There is despair over something earthly, say over one’s bad fortune. If only I could have had the good fortune, say, to be as handsome, as rich, as smart, as my neighbor, I should be happy.

This form of despair is: despair at not willing to be oneself; or still lower, despair at not willing to be a self; or, lowest of all, despair at willing to be another than himself, wishing for a new self. (335)

To begin with the last: I wish I were X. The self is here something totally external, as if one could put it on like a dress. The desire not to be oneself presupposes some understanding of what it would mean to be a self.

To turn to the second kind of despair: consider someone who sees an accident that demands that he help; instead he turns away. He does not want to get involved. Or take someone living in a totalitarian regime, who does not dare to be a self.

The first named despair at not willing to be oneself characterizes the individual who poetizes himself, trying to create an image of himself that is only disguised despair. Does the whole advertising industry cater to despair? But despair also characterizes one who is sort of pleased with himself, well adjusted to the society of which he is a part, and recognized as such:

In Christendom he is a Christian (quite in the sane sense in which in paganism he would have been a pagan, and in England an Englishman), one of the cultured Christians. The question of immortality has often been on his mind, more than once he has asked the parson whether there really was such an immortality, whether one would really recognize oneself again — which indeed must have been for him a very singular interest, since he has no self. (341-342)

To despair over something earthly means ultimately that one is in despair over the eternal. Take the individual who failed to do something he knows he should have done. He goes home and despairs, despairs over his own weakness. But this plunges him only all the more deeply into despair: instead of doing what he should do, he reflects about what he failed to do. Similar is the case of the individual who knows that he should not place so much value on the temporal, but instead of humbling himself before God, despairs over his own weakness.

Many of the examples Kierkegaard has given us have been of individuals who, while in despair in his sense, like the self-satisfied individual I just described, do not think of themselves as being in despair. And yet, he suggests, “Every self which is even a little bit reflective has surely a notion of what it is to repress the self.” (353-354) He gives us the example of

a university man, husband and father, an uncommonly competent civil functionary, even, a respectable father, very gentle to his wife and carefulness itself with respect to his children. And a Christian? Well, yes, he is that too after a sort; however he preferably avoids talking of the subject, although he willingly observes and with a melancholy joy that his wife for her edification engages in devotions. (354)

But he is too reflective to take the seemingly so happy circumstances of his life too seriously. He lacks faith and broods over it. This renders him introverted, a melancholy sufferer. But he does not want to let go of his melancholy, he does not want to be parted from it, but clings to it. There is pride and defiance in his introversion. He wills to be himself despairingly. There is defiance in such willing.

We are thus given by Kierkegaard a kind of ladder of despair.

First comes despair over the earthly or something earthly, then despair over oneself about the eternal. Then comes defiance, which really is despair by the aid of the eternal, the despairing abuse of the eternal in the self to the point of being despairingly determined to be oneself. But just because it is despair by the aid of the eternal it lies in a sense very close to the true, and just because it is very close to the true it is infinitely remote. The despair which is the passageway to faith is also by the aid of the eternal: by the aid of the eternal the self has courage to lose itself in order to gain itself. Here on the contrary it is not willing to begin by losing itself but wills to be itself. (360)

The university man we just described is an example of “the despairing abuse of the eternal in the self to the point of being despairingly determined to be oneself.” Here despair does not will to lose the self; it wills itself defiantly. No longer is the despairing individual tempted to blame the outside. He wills to be himself, but in such a way that he keeps the world at a distance. He wills to become the most abstract, the emptiest self. This is the romantic kind of despair. The self here refuses to accept itself and its situation as something given; it begins to experiment with itself, to look at the world as offering no more than occasions for its imaginative play. Here we have the poetic nihilist of whom Jean Paul Richter, thinking of Fichte spoke. These poetic nihilists destroy a world in order to replace it with the airy constructions of their own imagination. The self becomes emptier and emptier, the world icier and icier. This kind of despair marks the aesthetic as Kierkegaard analyzes it in the first volume of *Either/Or*.

If one example of the defiantly despairing person is the romantic, another is the heroic nihilist. Heroic nihilism glorifies those who hold their position, even though they find themselves in an absolutely hopeless situation. One of the most powerful literary expressions of heroic nihilism is the Nibelungen epic. Its hero, Hagen know that he is going to his doom, and not only he, but his king, whom he loyally serves, and his fellow Burgundians. There is really no point to his actions. He knows that the situation is hopeless. But he wants no quarter, no understanding. Knowingly he accepts his doom and remains faithful to himself. We do not have here a tragedy in Hegel’s sense. There is no collision of competing values.

Kierkegaard writes as a Christian. He would have to understand such a heroic nihilism as an example of demonic defiance, i.e. in the image of Satan. But if there is no God, does such defiance in the face of the opacity of the world not come closest to an authentic self-affirmation that we can get? Kierkegaard comes close to admitting this. Recall what he had said about defiance: it

really is despair by the aid of the eternal, the despairing abuse of the eternal in the self to the point of being despairingly determined to be oneself. But just because it is despair by the aid of the eternal it lies in a sense very close to the true, and just because it is very close to the true it is infinitely remote. (360)

The heroic nihilist recognizes that his freedom transcends the world. Take Camus' Sisyphus. He knows that all his labors are in vain. They amount to nothing. And yet Camus will say of Sisyphus that he is happy, because he knows that although this world is absurd, without meaning, he can defy it. He can affirm himself in this defiance. Such a hero stands as a witness against God.

What then does Kierkegaard mean when he writes:

But just because it is despair by the aid of the eternal it lies in a sense very close to the true, and just because it is very close to the true it is infinitely remote. (360)

Lucifer comes to mind, who was very close to God, but whom his despairing defiance rendered infinitely remote.

15. Questionable Freedom

1

Kierkegaard's pseudonym Anti-Climacus writes as a Christian, secure in his faith. So it is no surprise that he should link despair and sin:

Sin is this: before God, or with the conception of God, to be in despair at not willing to be oneself, or in despair at willing to be oneself. Thus sin is potentiated weakness or potentiated defiance: sin is the potentiation of despair. (375)

One can consider Kierkegaard, as opposed to Anti-Climacus, an example of someone on the borderline that separates despair and sin. Indeed this is how he understood himself. Anti-Climacus illustrates this borderline by conjuring up a "poet-existence in the direction of the religious." (375) Such a poet cares deeply about God, has a deep need for Him, is tormented by his absence; but he loves this torment and does not want to let go of it, loves thinking and talking about it, rather like an unhappy lover. "He is not in a strict sense a believer, he has only the first prerequisite of faith, and with that an ardent longing." (377)

With the introduction of sin, the discussion becomes problematic in a way that makes one wonder whether the philosopher does not have to keep silent at this point, for as a philosopher, committed to reason, must he not keep his distance from Christianity. He cannot make sense of it. As Anti-Climacus puts it:

In the foregoing there is steadily pointed out a gradation in the consciousness of the self. ... This whole situation must now be turned about and viewed in a new way. The point is this. The gradations in the consciousness of the self with which we have hitherto been employed are within the definition of the human self, or the self whose measure is man. But this self acquires a new quality or qualification in the fact that it is the self directly in the sight of God. (378)

To the human self Anti-Climacus opposes the theological self, the self that has its measure in God, that exists in the sight of God. It is precisely when the self understands itself as existing in the sight of God, Anti-Climacus suggests, that it becomes infinite. In this sense the pagan or the natural man, and that is to say also, the philosopher, does not understand the theological self. They find their measure in the merely human self. And

this is to say that the pagan did not sin in the strictest sense of the word. So understood, Christianity is not at all a humanism, for humanism makes man the measure of all things. That Sartre's humanism should be an atheism is only to be expected. From his perspective a Christian humanism is almost a contradiction in terms.

The Christian's relationship to God is not such that it could be supported with arguments. Faith is more like love. It is a relationship between particulars. Can you defend why you fell in love with this particular person? The very attempt to give reasons for your love would make me doubt whether you really are in love. The case of faith is similar. One sees thus "how extraordinarily stupid it is to defend Christianity, how little knowledge of men this betrays, and how truly, even though it be unconsciously, it is working in collusion with the enemy, by making of Christianity a miserable something or another which in the end has to be rescued by a defense." (392) The person who defends Christianity is likened to Judas: he betrays with a kiss. (392) As Anti-Climacus points out, the humanist or pagan will object to this rejection of all argumentation. He will have difficulty making sense of this "before God." For him this demands a bit too much. (392)

The pagan, Anti-Climacus suggests, has no real understanding of sin. Take Socrates. For him sin is ignorance, an intellectual failing. The pagan cannot understand why someone would willingly fail to do what he recognizes to be the good. And something similar would seem hold for a utilitarian such as Bentham. Can we make sense of defiance: of willing to do what we recognize not to be the good? Here Kierkegaard sees the decisive difference between the Christian and the pagan. "What determinant is it then that Socrates lacks in determining what sin is? It is will, defiant will. The Greek intellectualism was too happy, too naïve, too aesthetic, too ironical, too witty ... too sinful to be able to get it into its head that a person knowingly could fail to do the good, or knowingly, with knowledge of what is right, do what is wrong." (397) To be sure, Socrates, too, knew that an individual, an orator for example, could proclaim the truth in his rhetoric, only to betray it by his actions. But this Kierkegaard would take to mean that he did not really understand the good, that he served instead another good. And is this not how most of us live and act? The values we pay lip service to are not the values we really live by. But there is no defiance here. We just demonstrate thereby that what we really take to be our good is not what we proclaim. Anti-Climacus sees

Christianity in similar terms. He speaks of the irony of the Christian life, of the Christian who has read about Christ, who knows about the kind of life he would have us live, and yet lives a very different life, refusing to surrender too many of his creature comforts. What we need, Anti-Climacus, suggests, is a Christian Socrates.

But are such individuals sinners? Are they not sinful only in the sense in which sin is ignorance? They have not really understood what is truly God. But sin is not a matter of not understanding what is right, but of not willing to understand it. And why would an individual not will to understand it? Because of concern for self, because of pride. Christianity recognizes that “sin lies in the will” (402), not in the intellect. But such recognition is itself not based on reason. It presupposes revelation.

The definition of sin which was given in the preceding chapter therefore still needs to be completed: sin is, after having been informed by a revelation from God what sin is, then before God in despair not to will to be oneself, or before God in despair to will to be oneself. (407-408)

God and sin cannot be understood because they are thereby negated. And this conviction makes Anti-Climacus a critic of every attempt to somehow rationalize Christianity, to bring it in line with the reigning culture of reason.

But this is just the way Christianity is talked about by believing priests. They either “defend” Christianity, or they translate it into “reasons” — if they are not at the same time dabbling in “comprehending” it speculatively. This is what is called preaching, and it is regarded in Christendom as already a big thing that such preaching is done and that some hear it. And it is precisely for this reason that Christendom (here is the proof if it) is so far from being what it calls itself that the lives of most men are, Christianly understood, too spiritless to be called in a strictly Christian sense sin. (421)

As a good Christian Anti-Climacus is convinced that we are all subject to original sin. But he is also aware that most human beings do not experience themselves in that way. Thus he also recognizes that to recognize sin presupposes faith. And faith presupposes that God has revealed himself to us humans. But the very possibility of such faith was denied to countless human beings, thus to the Greeks. Socrates thus knew nothing of sin. And in a different sense something similar can be said of those spiritless Christians just

mentioned that today make up Christendom. Understood in a strictly Christian sense sin presupposes a recognition of the dependence of one's existence on God. And so understood sin grows every moment one does not get out of it. For what is sin? It is defiance, an unwillingness to place oneself under God. And if to sin is human, to choose to remain in sin is devilish.

The progress towards both faith and demonic defiance is not unexpected. The first stage is that of the constant temptation to lose sight of the divine ground of our being. The world is too much with us. Conscience recalls us to ourselves as dependent on God. But to sin is to resist acknowledging that dependence. The individual here seeks to affirm himself as independent of God, but that is the pride of the devil. We can thus distinguish two consistent ways of life: that of the demoniac individual and that of the believer. The person of faith is tempted by sin, the demonic individual is tempted by the good. He wants to be author of himself, that is how he understands authenticity, and that means also that he would seek the origin of what matters to him in his own freedom. And yet, by attempting to be the author of himself in this way he empties his world of meaning. You cannot freely choose that something will matter to you. Freedom lacks such power. So understood it has to empty life of meaning, render everything unbearably light.

In faith the individual relates itself to its own self, wills to be itself, in such a way that it is transparently grounded in the power that constituted it. But no self can escape having to relate itself to itself, where the self can will or not will to be itself. In that sense every individual is responsible for what he is. And yet, first of all and most of the time, we escape such responsibility, finding security in what the community of which we are part considers right and wrong. Once again Anti-Climacus offers the Christian community of his day as an example:

And since now in our enlightened age when people find all anthropomorphic and anthropomorphic conceptions of God improper, yet do not find it improper to think of God as a judge in likeness of an ordinary civil judge or solicitor general who cannot get at the rights of such a prolix affair—they conclude then that it will be exactly so in all eternity. Therefore only let us hold together and secure ourselves by seeing to it that that the parson preachifies in this way. And if there

should be an individual who ventured to talk differently, an individual who was foolish enough to make his own life anxious and responsible in fear and trembling, and should then want also to worry others—then let us secure ourselves by regarding him as mad, or if need be, by putting him to death. If only there are many of us engaged in it, it is not wrong; what the many do is the will of God. (454)

Religion here is identified with a kind of popular ethics. The voice of the people is identified with the voice of God. Sin is here opposed to virtue as publically understood. No room is left here for faith as understood by the author of *Fear and Trembling*, as a relationship of the individual to a Deity to whom even the smallest detail of our life is transparent. Such an ethical religion can become itself a power that alienates the self from itself. It too can call an individual guilty, but here it is we ourselves who pronounce judgment over ourselves. Does it have room for forgiveness? Are their not acts so horrendous that in principle they cannot be forgiven? But the sin of refusing forgiveness is the sin of affirming the rift between man and his divine ground as being in principle incapable of being bridged, as if God could not reach across the abyss and extend forgiveness to the individual.

So far Anti-Climacus has addressed mostly a community that considers itself Christian, that grants the reality of God, but nevertheless lacks faith as he understands it. But what of those who deny the existence of God altogether or the agnostic who is not particularly concerned with the existence of God. “I do not believe,” he says, “but I pass no judgment.” (404-405) Believer that he is, Anti-Climacus considers this an unacceptable position: “If Christ is preached to thee, it is offense to say, ‘I will have no opinion about it.’” (465) “When God lets Himself be born and becomes man, this is not an idle notion of His, something that occurs to Him as a way of undertaking something to put an end after all to the boredom which people have been impudent enough to say must be associated with being God — it is not for the interest of an adventure. No, when God does this it is the seriousness of existence.” (466)

Anti-Climacus considers next someone who is preoccupied with the paradox that a man should be God. But by wrestling with this paradox “he attests what a reality Christianity possesses.” (467)

And Anti-Climacus concludes by turning to what he considers the greatest offense, which “declares that Christianity is a falsehood and a lie, it denies Christ (that He existed or said He was what he said He was) either docetically or rationalistically, so that Christ either becomes a particular man, but only apparently or He becomes only a particular man, so that He either becomes, docetically, poetry and mythology which makes no claim to reality, or rationalistically, a reality which makes no claim to be divine. In this denial of Christ as the paradox there is naturally implied the denial of everything Christian: sin, the forgiveness of sins, etc.” (467-468) For the Christian this is the highest potentiation of sin.

The philosopher is likely to have difficulty with the Christian faith of Anti-Climacus. He may thus wish that Kierkegaard had stooped with the first part, i.e. with page 371. And as we are approaching Kierkegaard from the point of view of philosophy it is this first part that matters most to us. The second part is more theological, if the separation of philosopher and theologian makes any sense in the case of Anti-Climacus.

What then is the philosophical significance of the text? First of all there is the emphasis on the individual. Kierkegaard grasped life in its concreteness. This made it impossible for him to accept any form of the traditional view that the universal is higher than the particular, especially Hegel’s philosophy. The individual can teleologically suspend the ethical, as he put it in *Fear and Trembling*. Kierkegaard recognizes that human freedom transcends the binding power of reason. And yet he recognizes that freedom must ground itself in a transcendent reality. So he turns to God. But God is infinite and an abyss separates him from the finite individual. There is no continuity between the human and the divine. Kant, Fichte and Hegel had sought such continuity in reason. By his rejection of this continuity Kierkegaard places God beyond the reach of our reason. But the infinite does not provide the individual with a measure. For that very reason Anti-Climacus places such weight on the paradox that God should have become man and that is why he insists that only faith can offer an answer to despair.

16. The World as Representation

1

Many today are led to Schopenhauer by their interest in Nietzsche. I do indeed think that it is impossible to have an adequate understanding of Nietzsche without knowing *The World as Will and Representation*.⁸ But this is not to say that I want to treat Schopenhauer here as an introduction to Nietzsche. Schopenhauer deserves our attention in his own right. What I find most significant is that **Schopenhauer stood the traditional philosophical anthropology on its head**. Thereby he became the founder of a new anthropology, where by "philosophical anthropology" I mean no more than a reasoned account of human being.

What do I mean by the traditional philosophical anthropology? Consider once more Descartes' determination of human being as first of all *res cogitans*, a thinking substance. To a considerable degree it would seem to remain part of our common sense. Take our attitude to sex. Are we not first of all persons, happening to have a body, happening to be gendered? Yet is this view not challenged by the very nature of experience? We find ourselves *in* the world as embodied actors, not standing before it as spectators standing before a picture. The embodied self is the measure of the corporeal world. Are we not first of all desiring, wanting, rather than pure thinking beings? And does this not force us to take the body more seriously than philosophy traditionally has tended to do?

2

In the first of his three prefaces Schopenhauer calls attention to the thinkers to whom he feels most indebted. He mentions Plato and the Upanishads, but first of all he

⁸ Page references are to Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 2 vols., trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1966), vol. 1. For a fuller discussion of Schopenhauer see Karsten Harries *Schopenhauer's The World as Will and Representation*, Fall Semester 2014, Yale University, <http://karstenharries.commons.yale.edu/>

points to Kant. Indeed it is in their departure from Kant that Schopenhauer sees the most serious fault of the German idealists.

The influence of Kant is obvious when we read the very first sentences:

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

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

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

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

1. Things are **never given in isolation**, but **only in relation to other representations**.
2. My body occupies a special place among these things. There is a sense in which **the embodied self is the measure of all things**.
3. What I see is always only the appearance of objects, where the object is the cause of the appearance. I see the sun because the sun acts on my eyes.

The point is further developed in par. 4

The first, simplest, ever-present manifestation of understanding is perception of the actual world. This is in every way knowledge of the cause from the effect and therefore all perception is intellectual. Yet one could never arrive at perception, if some other effect were not immediately known, and thus served as the starting point. But this is the action or effect on animal bodies. To this extent these bodies are the *immediate objects* of the subject; through them the perception of other objects is brought about. The changes experienced by every animal body are immediately known,

that is to say, felt; and as this effect is referred at once to its cause, there arises the perception of the latter as an *object*. This relation is no conclusion in abstract concepts, it does not happen through reflection, it is not arbitrary, but is immediate, necessary, and certain. (11-12)

The most obvious difference between Schopenhauer and Kant is Schopenhauer's claim that **perception is intellectual**. An **immediate understanding of causality** is immediately bound up with it. This has to challenge the Kantian understanding of the difference between sensibility and understanding. I find it difficult not to agree with Schopenhauer's **causal theory of perception**. Note how such an understanding readily leads to a privileging of the **brain as that part of the body, where the body first becomes present to itself**.

3

Together with the object the subject is necessarily given.

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

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

Thus in this first book we consider the world only from the abovementioned angle, only in so far as it is representation. The inner reluctance with which everyone accepts the world as his mere representation warns him that this consideration, quite apart from its truth, is nevertheless one-sided, and so is occasioned by some arbitrary abstraction. On the other hand, he can never withdraw from this acceptance. (4)

What is it that has been left out? Consider this passage from Book Two:

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

4

The first essential form of the world as representation is the division into subject and object. But the *a priori* form under which objects stand is provided by **the principle of sufficient reason**, where that principle has its foundation in something rather like the Kantian transcendental unity of the apperception, i.e. in the fact that my experience must form a coherent whole: all our representations stand in a nexus, the form of which can be determined a priori. But the matter is complicated by the fact that our representations are not all of one type. In his dissertation on *The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* Schopenhauer had thus distinguished four classes:

1. **empirical representations**, phenomena, not just thought, but sensed: e.g. this rose. The principle of sufficient reason applied to the first class gives us the category of **causality**. Every change must have a cause. This means that there can be no first cause, no *causa sui*. *Causa sui* is understood by Schopenhauer as a contradiction in terms. In such cases we lose hold of the meaning of *causa*.

2. **abstract representations**, propositions, such as “this is a rose.” To this second class corresponds the **principle of sufficient reason in knowledge**. Everything we can be said to know, i.e. for which we can claim truth must have its sufficient reason, although this reason may not be confused with a cause. Schopenhauer distinguishes between different kinds of truth:

- a. **logical truth**, where the reason is provided by other propositions. Logic explores this realm.
- b. **empirical truth**, where the reason is provided by experience.
- c. **transcendental truth**, where the reason is provided by the forms of the possibility of experience, the Kantian pure intuitions of time and space. The truths of geometry would be an example.

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

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

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

And yet these four classes have one common form. This form is most readily grasped, Schopenhauer suggests, in the case of time, the simplest of these forms.

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

It should be clear that the principle of sufficient reason can not be used to connect subject and object. The subject is not the cause of the world of objects, nor can the world of objects generate the subject. Both attempts represent a misapplication of the principle of sufficient reason. The opposite of a materialism that would found consciousness in matter is the subjectivism of a philosopher like Fichte.

5

There is one important point made in these first pages of *The World as Will and Representation* on which I have not touched as yet: the distinction between the **intuitive** and the **abstract**, which Schopenhauer states in the beginning of par. 3:

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

The contrast is developed further by the beginning of par. 8

As from the direct light of the sun to the borrowed reflected light of the moon, so do we pass from the immediate representation of perception, which stands by itself and is its own warrant, to reflection, to the abstract, discursive concepts of the reason, which have their whole content only from that knowledge of perception, and in relation to it. As long as our attitude is one of pure perception all is clear, firm, and certain. For there are neither questions nor doubts nor errors; we do not wish to go farther, we cannot go farther; we have rest in perceiving, and satisfaction in the present moment. Perception by itself is enough; therefore what has sprung purely from it and has remained true to it, like the genuine work of art, can never be false, nor can it be refuted through any passing of time, for it gives us not opinion, but the thing itself. With abstract knowledge, with the faculty of reason, doubt and error have appeared in the theoretical, care and remorse in the practical. (35)

With reason we come to the faculty that distinguishes human beings from animals, which, on Schopenhauer's view, do have understanding. Reason is what the Greeks meant by *logos*, which however can also mean speech or discourse— we shall turn presently to what separates and unites the two. As the being that has reason the human being is the being capable of **doubt**, also the being constituted by **care**.

It is only this new consciousness at a higher potential, this abstract reflex of everything intuitive in the non-perceptive conception of reason, that

endows man with that thoughtfulness which so completely distinguishes his consciousness from that of the animal, and through which his whole behavior on earth turns out so differently from that of his irrational brothers. He far surpasses them in power and in suffering. They live in the present alone; he lives at the same time in the future and the past. They satisfy the need of the moment; he provides by the most ingenious preparations for the future, nay, even for times that he cannot live to see. They are given up entirely to the impression of the moment, to the effect of the motive of perception; he is determined by abstract concepts independent of the present moment. He therefore carries out considered plans, or acts in accordance with maxims, without regard to his surroundings, and to the accidental impressions of the moment. Thus, for example, he can with composure take cunning measures for his own death, dissemble to the point of inscrutableness, and take his secret with him to the grave. Finally he has an actual choice between several motives, for only *in abstracto* can such motives, simultaneously present in consciousness, afford knowledge with regard to themselves that the one excludes the other, and can thus measure against one another their power over the will. (36)

The human being is capable of so raising himself beyond himself that he need not give in to his first level desires.

6

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

Only by the aid of language does reason bring about its most important achievements, namely the harmonious and consistent action of several individuals, the planned cooperation of many thousands, civilization, the State; and then, science, the storing up of previous experience, the summarizing into one concept of what is common, the communication of truth, the spreading of error, thoughts and poems, dogmas and superstitions. The animal knows death only when he dies, but man consciously draws every hour nearer his death; and at times this makes life

a precarious business, even to the man who has not already recognized this character of constant annihilation in the whole of life itself. Mainly on this account man has philosophies and religions, though it is doubtful whether that which we rightly esteem above all else in his conduct, namely voluntary rectitude and nobility of feeling, have ever been the fruit of them. (37)

The human being is the being who speaks. Yet this should not be construed to mean that language and reason should be equated. Take the German "rot" and the English "red." In an obvious sense they mean the same. It is this meaning that receives different expression in these two languages that Schopenhauer calls the concept. It is these meanings that we attend to when we understand a discourse.

The medium of concepts is characterized by its **generality**.

Thus a concept has generality not because it is abstracted from several objects, but conversely, because generality, that is to say, non-determination of the particular, is essential to the concept as abstract representation of the reason: different things can be thought through the same one. (42)

7

By virtue of his reason the human being looks beyond the present to the future, weighs possibilities, is capable of resisting what more immediately claims him:

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

Note the asserted analogy between rational understanding and seeing:

We, on the other hand, by virtue of knowledge in the abstract, comprehend not only the narrow and actual present, but also the whole past and future

together with the wide realm of possibility. We survey life freely in all directions, far beyond what is present and actual. Thus what the eye is in space and for sensuous knowledge, reason is, to a certain extent, in time and for inner knowledge. But just as the visibility of objects has value and meaning only by informing us of their tangibility, so the whole value of abstract knowledge is always to be found in its reference to knowledge of perception. Therefore, the ordinary natural man always attaches far more value to what is known directly and through perception than to abstract concepts, to that which is merely thought; he prefers empirical to logical knowledge. (84)

Important is the asserted dependence of reason on perception. The human being is subject to desires, often to conflicting desires. These desires are objectified and mirrored in the sphere of concepts. Values on this understanding are products of reason. Not in the sense that reason simply invents values. It does so no more than it invents a concept like "blue." The ground for values lies in the feelings to which they correspond and to which they give expression. Here Schopenhauer is concerned to distance himself from Kant:

This demand by Kant that every virtuous conduct shall be done from pure, deliberate regard for and according to the abstract maxims of the law, coldly and without inclination, in fact contrary to all inclination, is precisely the same thing as if he were to assert that every genuine work of art must result from a well-thought-out application of aesthetic rules. The one is just as absurd as the other. (527)

Again the key thought is already familiar: reason provides no content. It cannot as such be the source of imperatives. All imperatives that it furnishes are conditioned, rest on immediately experienced feelings, claims, desires. By virtue of being both, a being of perception and a being of reason, the human being lives a double life: in the world and at the same time, at a distance from himself as a being in the world. It is precisely this distance from life that can give us a sense that we are only dreaming, or that we are only actors in a play that we do not fully understand and of which we are not the author.

It is in the case of such distancing that Schopenhauer thinks we can speak of a genuinely practical reason. It finds its highest expression in the Stoic sage.

The most perfect development of *practical reason* in the true and genuine sense of the word, the highest point to which man can attain by the mere use of his faculty of reason, and in which his difference from the animal shows itself most clearly is the ideal represented in the *Stoic sage*. For the Stoic ethics is originally and essentially not a doctrine of *virtue*, but merely a guide to a rational life, whose end and aim is happiness through peace of mind. Virtuous conduct appears in it, so to speak, only by accident, as means, not as end. Therefore the Stoic ethics is by its whole nature and point of view fundamentally different from the ethical systems that insist directly on virtue, such as the doctrines of the Vedas, of Plato, of Christianity, and of Kant. (86)

Note the premise on which this strategy rests: it recognizes the tension between the human desire for happiness and the miseries that are such a striking part of this life. Indeed, if Schopenhauer is right, the very idea of a truly happy life is a contradiction in terms. Happiness demands a being at one with oneself that temporality precludes. This is why Stoicism tries, not to take the individual out of life, but to establish a distance between the life of reason and concrete life, so that, while continuing to live, the individual becomes his own spectator and is no longer really the one who is living.

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

But, however much this end is to a certain extent attainable through the application of reason and through a merely rational ethic, and although experience shows that the happiest are indeed those purely rational characters commonly called practical philosophers—and rightly so, because just as the real, i.e. theoretical philosopher translates life into the concept, so they translate the concept into life—nevertheless we are still very far from being able to arrive at something perfect in this way, from being actually removed from all the burdens and sorrows of life, and led to

the blissful state by the correct use of our reason. On the contrary we find a complete contradiction in our wishing to live without suffering, a contradiction that is therefore implied by the frequently used phrase, "blessed life."(90)

17. The World as Will

1

In the first paragraph Schopenhauer spoke of the inner reluctance with which we accept the view of the world as mere representation. That view seems to be based on some arbitrary, one-sided abstraction. This argument it is not peculiar to Schopenhauer. Consider once more Fichte's *The Vocation of Man*. On the level of detached knowing, Fichte had suggested, there is no escape from the Cartesian dream. But why do we recognize the dream as a dream? Because we compare the pale reality that remains after the theoretical reduction, with the richer sense of the experience of our being in the world that preceded it. It can be recovered only by giving up the primacy of the theoretical and by turning to the practical.

2

Schopenhauer makes this point at the beginning of par. 18

In fact, the meaning that I am looking for of the world that stands before me simply as my representation, or the transition from it as mere representation of the knowing subject to whatever it may be besides this, could never be found if the investigator himself were nothing more than the purely knowing subject (a winged cherub without a body). But he himself is rooted in that world; and thus he finds himself in it as an *individual*, in other words, his knowledge, which is the conditional supporter of the whole world as representation, is nevertheless given entirely through the medium of a body, and the affections of this body are, as we have shown, the starting-point for the understanding in its perception of this world. (99)

We are not pure knowers. We are individuals located in the world by our bodies, acted on by that world.

The crucial transition is made in par. 19. Here Schopenhauer makes explicit what he considers **the double awareness that we have of our body**. As **will** we recognize ourselves as transcending ourselves as mere representations.

Whereas in the first book we were reluctantly forced to declare our own body to be mere representation of the knowing

subject, like all the other objects of this world of perception, it has now become clear to us that something in the consciousness of everyone distinguishes the representation of his own body from all others that are in other respects quite like it. This is that the body occurs in consciousness in quite another way, *toto genere* different, that is denoted by the word *will*. It is just this double knowledge of our own body which gives us information about that body itself, about its action and movement following on motives, as well about its suffering through outside impressions, in a word, about what it is, not as representation, but as something over and above this; and hence what it is *in itself*. We do not have such immediate information about the nature, action, and suffering of any other real objects. (103)

Schopenhauer is not saying that I have an adequate understanding of the will as it is in itself, even in my own case. The knowledge I have of myself is inevitably mediated. When I understand myself as willing, such understanding is inevitably tied to representations. I know myself as willing only in particular acts. In this sense Schopenhauer will say that **the individual will is a phenomenon of the will**, but a phenomenon apparently different from a phenomenon like a tree in that I in a sense inhabit that phenomenon; I am that phenomenon. I am my body. Still, the human will, too, is inevitably **phenomenon, subject to the principle of sufficient reason, i.e. to motives**.

This ambiguous phenomenon provides Schopenhauer with the entrance to the thing in itself. It is obvious that the word "will" here is only a **metaphor**. We have no choice but to turn to an object to name the thing in itself. There is thus an inevitable violence to such naming. Consider the nature of the will:

The will as thing in itself is quite different from its phenomenon, and is entirely free from all the forms of the phenomenon into which it first passes when it appears, and which therefore concern only its *objectivity*, and are foreign to the will itself. Even the most universal form of all representation, that of object for subject, does not concern it, still

less the forms which are subordinate to this and collectively have their common expression in the principle of sufficient reason. As we know, time and space belong to this principle, and consequently plurality as well, which exists and has become possible only through them. In this last regard I shall call time and space the *principium individuationis*, an expression borrowed from the old scholasticism, and I beg the reader to bear this in mind once and for all. For it is only by means of time and space that something which is one and the same according to its nature and the concept appears as different, as a plurality of coexistent and successive things. (112)

Schopenhauer calls the will groundless.

The groundlessness of will has actually been recognized where it manifests itself most distinctly, that is, as the will of man; and this has been called free and independent. But as to the groundlessness of the will itself, the necessity to which its manifestation is everywhere liable, has been overlooked, and actions have been declared to be free, which they are not. For every individual action follows with strict necessity from the effect of the motive on the character. As we have already said, all necessity is the relation of the consequent to the ground, and nothing more. (113)

Schopenhauer is a determinist and takes determinism to be compatible with our sense of freedom. Crucial here is the introduction of the notion of character.

But because in self-consciousness the will is known directly and in itself, there also lies in this consciousness the consciousness of freedom. But the fact is overlooked that the individual, the person, is not will as thing-in-itself, but is *phenomenon* of will, is as such determined, and has entered the form of the phenomenon, the principle of sufficient reason. Hence we get the strange fact that every one consider himself to be *a priori* quite free, even in his individual actions, and imagines he can at any moment enter upon a different way of life, which is equivalent to saying that he can become a different person. But *a posteriori* through experience, he finds to his astonishment that he is not free, but liable to necessity; that

notwithstanding all his resolutions and reflections he does not change his conduct, and that from the beginning to the end of his life he must bear the same character that he himself condemns, and, as it were, must play to the end the part he has taken upon himself. (113/114)

One has to wonder at this point, whether Schopenhauer has really penetrated beyond phenomena to the thing-in-itself, even in his own case. He answers this question by pointing to the strangest of all phenomena, to human **freedom**. In turning to the experience of freedom to gain access to the thing-in-itself Schopenhauer is again quite close to Kant.

3

Let me return to the question: why does Schopenhauer choose the word "will" to name this transcendent being? Within us we discover the abyss of the thing-in-itself, which is the will.

This will constitutes what is most immediate in his consciousness, but as such it has not wholly entered into the form of the representation, in which object and subject stand over against each other; on the contrary, it makes itself known in an immediate way in which subject and object are not quite clearly distinguished, yet it becomes known to the individual himself not as a whole, but only in its particular acts. (109)

But that discovery is inseparably bound up with our awareness of our individual will. This offers Schopenhauer the metaphor that he takes to do greatest justice to the being of the thing-in-itself.

I therefore name the genus after its most important species, the direct knowledge of which lies nearest to us, and leads to the indirect knowledge of all the others. But anyone who is incapable of carrying out the required extension of the concept will remain involved in a permanent misunderstanding. For by the word *will*, he will always understand only that species of it hitherto exclusively described by the term, that is to say, the will guided by knowledge, strictly according to motives, indeed only to abstract motives, thus manifesting itself under the guidance of the faculty of reason. This, as we have said, is only the most distinct

phenomenon or appearance of the will. We must now clearly separate out in our thoughts the innermost essence of this phenomenon, known to us directly, and then transfer it to all the weaker, less distinct phenomena of the same essence, and by so doing achieve the desired extension of the concept of will. (111)

When we call the reality of all things “will” we are calling the genus by its most familiar species. The term is thus a metaphor, more precisely a synecdoche—here a term appropriate to a particular species is extended to the genus. This presupposes that we in some sense recognize a family resemblance in all things. The things must strike us in some sense as if they were variations on some unknown theme.

But we see at once from the instinct and the mechanical skill of animals that the will is also active where it is not guided by any knowledge. That they have representations and knowledge is of no account at all here, for the end towards which they work as definitely as if it were a known motive remains entirely unknown to them. (114)

According to Schopenhauer the behavior of these animals does betray some sort of knowledge, but it is not guided by it. It is in this sense blind activity, although nevertheless purposive, so that in describing such activity we invoke final causes. Something manifests itself here that does seem to justify the invocation of the metaphor “will.”

Implicit in Schopenhauer’s observations is a critique of attempts to reduce everything to mechanical causes and all explanation to causal explanation so understood. According to Schopenhauer, Aristotle was quite right to insist on teleological explanations, especially when dealing with the organic sphere. Final causes, he tells us, are the clue to understanding organic nature, just as efficient causes give us the key to the understanding of inorganic nature. The reduction of all teleological to efficient causation would, if Schopenhauer is right, do violence to the phenomena we are trying to understand. Here, too, he follows Kant — see the *Critique of Judgment*. I take this to be an empirical claim, a claim to be tested.

According to Schopenhauer a fear of theology has often stood in the way of an acceptance of teleological explanation. But he professes to see no necessary connection between teleology and theology. His own and Aristotle's philosophy are offered as

evidence. Schopenhauer, once more agreeing with Kant, would grant, however, that we have a natural tendency to explain every phenomenon mechanically, because here we get by with a minimum of occult qualities, and much of such explanation rests on what is given to us *a priori*.

4

Inseparably bound up with this view is Schopenhauer's appropriation of Plato's ideas. The Platonic idea, as Schopenhauer understands it, would seem to occupy a place half way between will and representation, to mediate between the two. Let me begin by returning once more to the duality of representation and thing-in-itself. All representations are

1. subject to the subject-object form.
2. subject to the principle, of sufficient reason.

The thing-in-itself, Schopenhauer proclaims, lies outside of these. It is the completely other: transcendence.

The thing-in-itself, as such, is free from all forms of knowledge, even the most universal, namely that of being an object for the subject; in other words, it is something entirely different from the representation. Now, if this thing-in-itself, as I believe I have sufficiently proved and made clear, is the will, then, considered as such and apart from its phenomenon, it lies outside time and space, and accordingly knows no multiplicity, and consequently is one. (128)

Representations are understood by Schopenhauer as the objectifications of this will. These objectifications show different degrees.

Therefore the plurality of things in space and time that together are the *objectivity* of the will, does not concern the will, which in spite of such plurality, remains indivisible. It is not the case of there being a smaller part of will in the stone and a larger part in man, for the relation of part and whole belongs exclusively to space, and has no longer any meaning the moment we have departed from this form of intuition or perception. More and less concern only the phenomenon, that is to say, the visibility, the objectification. There is a higher degree of this objectification in the

plant than in the stone; a higher degree in the animal than in the plant; indeed, the will's passage into visibility, its objectification, has gradations as endless as those between the feeblest twilight and the brightest sunlight, the loudest tone and the softest echo. Later on, we shall come back to a consideration of these degrees of visibility that belong to the objectification of the will, to the reflection of its nature. (128)

Schopenhauer considers human beings the highest manifestation of the will. In them the will manifests itself most completely.

One might ask whether Schopenhauer is not guilty here of an undue anthropocentrism. But let us bracket this question and the value connotations of higher and lower.

Accordingly, what follows, and this has already impressed itself as a matter of course on every student of Plato, will be in the next book the subject of a detailed discussion. Those different grades of the will's objectification, expressed in innumerable individuals, exist as the unattained patterns of these, or as the eternal forms of things. Not themselves entering into time and space, the medium of individuals, they remain fixed, subject to no change, always being, never having become. The particular things, however, arise and pass away; they are always becoming and never are. Now I say that these *grades of the objectification of will* are, nothing but *Plato's Ideas*. (129)

The **Platonic idea** is thus subject to the subject-object polarity, but not to the principle of sufficient reason and thus not locatable in space and time.

Several questions are raised by Schopenhauer's introduction of these ideas:

1. What evidence is there for them?
2. How justified is their identification with Plato's ideas?
3. In what relationship do they stand to the will?

5

Let me turn to the first: What evidence is there for Schopenhauer's Platonic ideas? Given Schopenhauer's understanding of reason we know already that we will have to ground the claim that there are Platonic ideas in some kind of intuitive

understanding. He has to appeal to some sort of experience. As we shall see, it is primarily aesthetic experience that is relevant in this context and we shall return to it when we turn to the third book. In the second book the evidence is tied to a consideration of the **nature of explanation**. Consider an explanation that accounts for a certain effect, say, a falling stone. Does the stone fall because of gravity? Schopenhauer rejects this:

It is therefore wrong to say "gravity is the cause of a stone's falling"; the cause is rather the nearness of the earth, since it attracts the stone. Take away the earth, and the stone will not fall, although gravity remains. The force itself lies entirely outside the chain of causes and effects, which presupposes time, since it has meaning only in reference thereto; but the force lies also outside time. (131)

Although presupposed by causal explanation, gravity itself lies outside the chain of causes and effects. It is, Schopenhauer would say, a *qualitas occulta*.

Similarly, when we try to explain the behavior of a person, we can say that he acted because of certain motives. But this explanation presupposes an understanding of the individual's character, which is the individual's own and whose contours can only be discerned by studying that individual and by perceiving a certain family resemblance linking his actions.

Let me therefore turn briefly to the second question: how justified is the identification of Schopenhauer's ideas with Plato's? If we were to understand Plato's ideas to be universals, then there would be an obvious misinterpretation. But Plato's ideas, as indeed the word *eidos* suggests, cannot be done justice to in that way. Not that they are to be identified with Schopenhauer's thing-in-itself. They are objects of perception, although not subject to the principle of sufficient reason. But what kind of perception are we speaking about? An aesthetic perception? This invites reflection on the relationship of Schopenhauer's Platonic idea to Kant's aesthetic idea and of both to Plato's. But interesting as it is in its own right, little depends on our answer to this second question.

Let me therefore go on to the third question: in what relationship do Schopenhauer's Platonic ideas stand to the will? The answer has already been given: They represent degrees of the will's objectification. The same essence reveals itself in all its manifestations. Everywhere we meet with an endless striving. All of the different

expressions of the will share thus a family resemblance. This allows us to speak of them as phenomena of the same will.

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

The lowest as well as the highest phenomena demonstrate this:

Finally, the same thing is also seen in human endeavors and desires that buoy us up with the vain hope that their fulfillment is always the final goal of willing. But, as soon as they are attained, they no longer look the same, and so are soon forgotten, become antiquated, and are really, although not admittedly, always laid aside as vanished illusions. It is fortunate enough when something to desire and to strive for still remains, so that the game may be kept up of the constant transition from desire to satisfaction, and from that to a fresh desire, the rapid course of which is called happiness, the slow course sorrow, and so that this game may not come to a standstill, showing itself as a fearful, life-destroying boredom, a lifeless longing without a definite object, a deadening languor. According to all this, the will always knows, when knowledge enlightens it, what it wills here and now, but never what it wills in general. Every individual act has a purpose or end; willing as a whole has no end in view. (164-165)

The will is will to live. In nature this manifests itself as a striving to ensure the survival of the species. Why should the animal be possessed of such a desire? For Schopenhauer there is no answer. All of the activity of nature seems to have a point in the short run, while in the long run, according to Schopenhauer, it is recognized to be finally pointless. That is why teleology does not lead to theology.

18. The Turn to the Aesthetic

1

I would like to approach Schopenhauer's turn to aesthetics with a statement the painter Giorgio de Chirico made in 1913. It is from "Mystery and Creation." De Chirico here attempts to describe the kind of experience that gives rise to art:

I remember one vivid winter's day at Versailles. Silence and calm reigned supreme. Everything gazed at me with mysterious, questioning eyes: And then I realized that every corner of the palace, every column, every window possessed a spirit, an impenetrable soul. I looked at the marble heroes, motionless in the lucid air, beneath the frozen rays of the winter sun which pours down on us without love, like perfect song. A bird was warbling in a window cage. At that moment I grew aware of the mystery which urges man to create certain strange forms. And the creation seemed more extraordinary than the creators.

Let me note some key points:

1. The **transfiguration** of the familiar.
2. The apparent **freezing of time** in aesthetic experience, mirroring here the frozen landscape.
3. The **dissociation of light and love**.
4. The association of such loveless light with **artistic perfection**.
5. The paradigm of such perfection is said to be **song**.

But let me return to the crucial simile:

I looked at the marble heroes, motionless in the lucid air, beneath the frozen rays of the winter sun which pours down on us without love, like perfect song.

Is the beautiful object like a sun? In what way? Does **beauty illuminate**? Does it allow us to see? How are beauty and visibility linked? And why does de Chirico emphasize **without love**? When philosophical speculation on the nature of the beautiful began with the Greeks, the beautiful was indeed likened to **light**, but it was also brought into an intimate relationship to **love**.

While the quoted text gives the impression of a personal recollection, Chirico also would seem to remember a passage from Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*.

Light is the largest diamond in the crown of beauty, and has the most decided influence on the knowledge of every beautiful object. Its presence generally is an indispensable condition; its favorable arrangement enhances even the beauty of the beautiful. But above all else, the beautiful in architecture is enhanced by the favor of light, and through it even the most insignificant thing becomes a beautiful object. Now if in the depth of winter, when the whole of nature is frozen and stiff, we see the rays of the setting sun reflected by masses of stone, where they illuminate without warming, and are thus favorable only to the purest kind of knowledge, not to the will, then the contemplation of the beautiful effect of light on these masses moves us into the state of pure knowing, as all beauty does. (203)

Once again we meet with the association of beauty with light. Light is not only necessary for something to be seen, but its favorable arrangement is said to enhance beauty, making what is already beautiful even more beautiful. Beauty once again seems to have something to do with visibility. The more beautiful is also more visible. Schopenhauer, too, speaks of the winter sun, which illuminates, but does not warm. He himself explains that significance for us.

Yet here, through the faint recollection of the lack of warmth from these rays, in other words, of the absence of the principle of life, a certain transcending of the interest of the will is required. There is a slight challenge to abide in pure knowledge, to turn away from all willing, and precisely in this way we have a transition from the feeling of the beautiful to that of the sublime. It is the faintest trace of the sublime in the beautiful, and beauty itself appears here only in a slight degree. (203)

Beauty is thought here in opposition to the interest of the will. That interest must be left behind. But love, for Schopenhauer, is very much an expression of the interested will. Schopenhauer thus places aesthetic experience and its object, the beautiful, in opposition to the will and to love. De Chirico thus only follows Schopenhauer when he links the beautiful to a loveless light.

Schopenhauer in turn is hardly original when he places the beautiful in opposition to life and its interests. He only develops Kant's famous definition of the beautiful as the object of an entirely **disinterested satisfaction**.

2

When we experience something aesthetically our normal attitude to things is bracketed. Such a bracketing has often been said to be central to the aesthetic experience. In Schopenhauer's words, in such experience

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

In aesthetic experience the human being exploits that distance from himself as desiring. For a time the will within him is negated. The human being is no longer interested. Art therefore pauses at this particular thing; it stops the wheel of time; for it the relations vanish; its object is only the essential, the Idea. We can, therefore, define it accurately *as the way of considering things independently of the principle of sufficient reason*, in contrast to the way

of considering them which proceeds in exact accordance with this principle, and is the way of science and experience. This latter method of consideration can be compared to an endless line running horizontally, and the former to a vertical line cutting the horizontal at any point. The method of consideration that follows the principle of sufficient reason is the rational method, and it alone is valid and useful in practical life and in science. The method of consideration that looks away from the content of this principle is the method of genius, which is valid and useful in art alone. The first is Aristotle's method; the second is, on the whole, Plato's. (185)

3

Why does the aesthetic experience please? Why do we take pleasure in the beautiful? By now Schopenhauer's answer should be obvious: Schopenhauer sees the human being as desiring satisfaction, yet he is denied such satisfaction by his own being, which forever lets him look for fulfillment in the future, beyond the present. The **temporality of aesthetic experience** is very different from the **temporality of everyday life**. It allows us to exist in the present, at one with ourselves. In time it gives us a fleeting deliverance from the burden of time, a **semblance of redemption**.

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

Art delivers us, if only for a time, from that contradiction between what we are and what we want that is part of our being.

4

To the extent that we see the world aesthetically we also bracket our usual reliance on reason. As the interesting is bracketed, the aesthetic experience is no longer directed to the particular. But Schopenhauer defined the **Platonic idea** as a representation that as such is still subject to the form of subject and object, but not to the principle of sufficient reason. Pure knowing and the Platonic idea belong together. So, as we have seen, do art and science.

The individual, as such, knows only particular things; the pure subject of knowledge knows only Ideas. For the individual is the subject of knowledge in its relation to a definite particular phenomenon of will and in subjection thereto. (179)

In the aesthetic experience the human being frees himself from this subjection. Thus freeing himself he also frees himself from his individuality. In time he is himself in a sense transported beyond time:

if, for example, I contemplate a tree aesthetically, i.e., with artistic eyes, and thus recognize not it, but its Idea, it is immediately of no importance whether it is this tree or its ancestor that flourished a thousand years ago, and whether the contemplator is this individual, or any other living anywhere and at any time. The particular thing and the knowing individual are abolished with the principle of sufficient reason, and nothing remains but the Idea and the pure subject of knowing, which together constitute the adequate objectivity of will at this grade. (209)

5

Aesthetic experience possesses two poles, the experiencing subject and the experienced object:

Knowledge of the beautiful always supposes, simultaneously and inseparably, a purely knowing subject and a known Idea as object. But yet the source of aesthetic enjoyment will lie sometimes rather in the

apprehension of the known Idea, sometimes rather in the bliss and peace of mind of pure knowledge free from all willing, and thus from all individuality and the pain that results therefrom. (212)

Aesthetic enjoyment, Schopenhauer suggests, will be sometimes more objective, sometimes more subjective. He goes on to suggest that the lower we are on the ladder of objectification the more the subjective moment will predominate:

And, in fact, this predominance of the one or the other constituent element of aesthetic enjoyment will depend on whether the intuitively grasped Idea is a higher or a lower grade of the will's objectivity. Thus with aesthetic contemplation (in real life or through the medium of art) of natural beauty in the inorganic and vegetable kingdoms and of the works of architecture, the enjoyment of pure, will-less knowing will predominate, because the Ideas here apprehended are only low grades of the will's objectivity, and therefore are not phenomena of deep significance and suggestive content. On the other hand, if animals and human beings are the object of aesthetic contemplation or presentation, the enjoyment will consist rather in the objective apprehension of these Ideas that are the most distinct revelations of will. For these exhibit the greatest variety of forms, a wealth and deep significance of phenomena; they reveal to us most completely the essence of will, whether in its violence, its terribleness, its satisfaction or its being broken (this last in tragic situations), finally even in its change or self-surrender, which is the particular theme of Christian painting. (212-213)

As we ascend, the significance of the object will more and more absorb our attention.

We can thus contrast two poles of the aesthetic experience. It is this distinction that furnishes Schopenhauer with the key to his classification of the arts, both by subject matter and by the quality of the experience.

Most attempts to classify the arts end up by doing violence to what is to be classified. I would, e.g. argue, that a painter like Mondrian offers us works that fit what Schopenhauer has to say about architecture much better than much architecture. But more interesting than the actual classification is the principle governing that classification. Let us examine it more carefully:

Particularly suggestive seems to me what Schopenhauer has to say about the subjective pole. The aesthetic object appears here as the occasion of a pure will-less knowing. This understanding of the aesthetic object is close to Kant's understanding of the beautiful as object of an entirely disinterested satisfaction. I want to speak in both cases of an **aesthetic conception of the beautiful**. What matters according to such a conception is first of all the quality of the occasioned experience.

We can contrast this aesthetic conception with an **ontological conception**. On that conception the work of art is understood first of all as revelation of the truly real, however that is to be understood. The Platonic understanding of the beautiful as an epiphany of the form would be an example. Schopenhauer combines the aesthetic and the ontological approach: he advances an aesthetic conception when he emphasizes with Kant the disinterested character of the aesthetic experience; he represents the ontological approach when he understands the aesthetic object as the revelation of the Platonic idea. The work of art reveals the essence of reality. What joins the two is the conviction that freedom from the self-centered will, from the *principium individuationis*, and that means for Schopenhauer also from the principle of sufficient reason, makes visible the essence of reality in way denied to us as long as we remain caught up in that principle.

The aesthetic conception, if Schopenhauer is right, is most appropriate in the case of architecture, least appropriate in the case of poetry, especially tragedy. It is not surprising therefore that defenders of the aesthetic approach will so often draw on examples from architecture and painting.

6

I have not said anything about music, and yet it is music that is perhaps most often mentioned when there is talk of Schopenhauer's aesthetics. Music, on Schopenhauer's view, is different from all the other arts. It alone finds no place in the hierarchy I have sketched:

It stands quite apart off from all the others. In it we do not recognize the copy, the repetition, of any Idea of the inner nature the world. Yet it is such a great and exceedingly fine art, its effect on man's innermost nature is so powerful, and it is so completely and profoundly understood by him in his innermost being as an entirely universal language, whose

distinctness surpasses even that of the world of perception itself, that in it we certainly have to look for more than that *exercitium arithmeticae occultum nescientis se numerare animi* [music is a hidden arithmetical exercise that does not know it is counting], which Leibnitz took it to be. Yet he was perfectly right, in so far as he considered only its immediate and outward significance, its exterior. (256)

Leibniz's definition is thus thought to be not altogether wrong. There is indeed a peculiar tie between music and mathematics. We could go back to Pythagoras. But there has always been a rival account: music as the language of the emotions. In Plato we find thus the distinction between the music of Apollo and the music of Marsyas. Music possesses an Apollinian and a Dionysian side. Schopenhauer recognizes both, although the second is to him by far the more significant.

But if it were nothing more, the satisfaction afforded by it would inevitably be similar to that which we feel when a sum in arithmetic comes out right, and could not be that profound pleasure with which we see the deepest recesses of our nature find expression. Therefore, from our stand point, where the aesthetic effect is the thing we have in mind, we must attribute to music a far more serious and profound significance that refers to the innermost being of the world and of our own self. In this regard the numerical ratios, into which it can be resolved, are related not as the thing signified, but only as the sign. (256)

The mathematical view gets only at the surface; the Dionysian at its real character.

Note that music refers at one and the same time to the innermost being of the world and of our own self. This of course is to be expected: the essence of both is the same: will. Music is thus understood by Schopenhauer as a copy of the will itself, not of the will as mediated by the Platonic ideas.

Therefore music is by no means like the other arts, namely a copy of the Ideas, but *a copy of the will itself*, the objectivity of which are the Ideas. For this reason the effect of music is so very much more powerful and penetrating than is that of the other arts, for these others speak only of the shadow, but music of the essence. However, as it is the same will that objectifies itself both in the ideas and in music, though in a quite different

way in each, there must be, not indeed an absolutely direct likeness, but yet a parallel, an analogy, between music and the Ideas, the phenomenon of which in plurality and in incompleteness is the visible world. (257-258)

Schopenhauer belongs thus with those who understand music as the language of the emotions, but our emotions reach down to the heart of the world, to the will.

But the details of Schopenhauer's discussion of the arts, interesting as they often are, matter little in this context. What does matter is that he finds in the aesthetic experience a first escape from that suffering that is our lot as long as we remain submerged in the will, a fleeting redemption. The difficulty with art is that this redemption is so fleeting. Art does not deliver us from time forever, but only for a time, perhaps just a few moments. It is this inability of the aesthetic sphere to sustain its magic that finally makes it incapable of solving the problem of life. An account of what is proposed as true redemption is offered only in the fourth book.

19. Journey to the East

1

According to Schopenhauer true satisfaction is incompatible with our temporal condition. We are satisfied when we are entire, complete, at one with ourselves, in the present. The aesthetic experience grants us something like such satisfaction, if only for a time and at the price of what we usually consider reality. Are we not denied satisfaction or completeness by our temporality? Desire, care, anticipation, they all betray a lack that appears to be inseparable from human existence.

Schopenhauer sees dissatisfaction as part of the essence of the will. It therefore shows itself in all its phenomena. Suffering and pain are not the privilege of human beings, who are however unique by virtue of their reason; as the reasonable animal the human being is concerned for his being and therefore also about the possible lack of being, i.e. his death. (281) And yet, Schopenhauer points out, given this certainty, most of us are surprisingly undisturbed by our inevitable death. Is this because, as Heidegger suggests, that most of the time we hide from ourselves our own essential being, because we find death too dreadful to bear? This would make such existence inauthentic. Or does something else announce itself here, an unarticulated knowledge that death does not deserve to be taken all that seriously?

What is it that makes death terrifying? Is it that life is so pleasant? Schopenhauer could hardly find this a convincing answer. Death has indeed often been thought of as a release. Is it then simply the thought of our non-existence that fills us with dread? But were this the case the time before we were born would harbor as much dread as thoughts of the time when we shall be no longer. How then are we to understand the fear of death? That fear has no rational ground, but is just the other side of the will to live.

And yet, what are we to make of the fact that we do not usually worry all that much about death? What kind of a culture would be most obsessed with and find it most difficult to accept death? I suspect that it would have to be one where the individual understands himself as his own end, as sufficient unto himself instead of as part of a larger order. If the human being on the other hand understands himself as part of something ongoing and larger that endures even when he is no longer, then his death will become more acceptable, even something one might choose for the sake of the larger

whole, as a parent might chose to sacrifice herself for the sake of her child. How are we to understand such self-sacrifice? What shows itself here, according to Schopenhauer, is something instinctive that links human beings to animals, part of our species being, which also expresses itself in sexual desire and in care for the young. A human being who sees the end of his life as satisfaction of his individual self must end in despair. Given egoism, death must seem to undercut all meaning.

2

Schopenhauer also offers a second metaphysical consideration designed to show that death is not really a threat to our essence, even if it does mean the end of the individual. For Schopenhauer the human being is an objectification of the will. As individual he is phenomenon, subject to the principle of sufficient reason and thus to time. But as will, the human being transcends time. Can the will ever die?

Above all, we must clearly recognize that the form of the phenomenon of the will, and hence the form of life or of reality, is really only the *present*, not the future or the past. Future and past are only in the concept, exist only in the connection and continuity of knowledge insofar as this follows the principle of sufficient reason. No man has lived in the past, and none will live in the future; the present alone is the form of all life, but it is also life's sure possession which can never be torn from it. (278)

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

Of course, if we think back to the thousands of years that have passed, to the millions of men and women who have lived in them, we ask, What were they? What has become of them? But, on the other hand, we need recall only the past of our own life and vividly renew its scenes in our imagination, and then ask again, What was all this? What has become of it? As it is with our life, so is it with the life of those millions. Or should we suppose that the past took on a new existence by its being sealed through death? Our own past, even the most recent, even the previous day, is only an empty dream of the imagination, and the past of all those millions is the same. What was? What is? The will, whose mirror is life and will-free knowledge beholding the will clearly in that mirror. (278)

Schopenhauer is not arguing here for a life before or after death. He points rather to a vertical dimension that connects the individual with the will. In his essence the human being transcends time. And yet this thought, as Schopenhauer insists, is no consolation for the egoist.

Schopenhauer's thoughts here point in the direction of Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal recurrence, to which we shall turn later. There is indeed a sense in which Schopenhauer may be said to have inscribed the possibility Nietzsche seized into his text.

Therefore, a philosophical knowledge of the nature of the world which has reached the point we are now considering, but went no farther, could even at this point of view, overcome the terrors of death according as reflection had power over direct feeling in the given individual. A man who had assimilated firmly into his way of thinking the truths so far advanced, but at the same time had not come to know, through his own experience or through a deeper insight, that constant suffering is essential to all life and took perfect delight in it; who desired, in spite of calm deliberation, that the course of his life as he had hitherto experienced it should be of endless duration or of constant recurrence; and whose courage to face life was so great, that in return for life's pleasures, he would willingly and gladly put up with all the hardships and miseries to which it is subject; such a man would stand "with firm strong bones on the well-grounded, enduring earth," (Goethe, *Grenzen der Menschheit*) and would have nothing to fear. Armed with the knowledge we confer on him, he would look with indifference at death hastening towards him on the wings of time. (283-284)

Schopenhauer of course is convinced that suffering is essential to all life and that there is no higher meaning that might redeem it. He cannot find refuge in a yes to life that affirms death and battle. But it is interesting that at this stage of the argument he very much leaves this possibility open.

Schopenhauer thinks that we cannot exist with our eyes open to our own and others' suffering and declare the world to be good. Optimism is not so much wrong as it

is wicked. But we should consider the presuppositions on which Schopenhauer's condemnation rests. In this connection I have spoken of an ethics of satisfaction. Given such an ethics we cannot say yes to the world. The turn against the world is inseparable from an ethics of satisfaction, and it matters little whether we encounter it in its Platonic, or Christian, or Schopenhauerian version. God may be dead, but Schopenhauer understands the Christian message as a profound expression of the human condition:

According to this, religious teaching regards every individual, on the one hand, as identical with Adam, with the representative of the affirmation of life, and to this extent as fallen into sin (original sin), suffering, and death. On the other hand, knowledge of the Idea also shows it every individual as identical with the Saviour, with the representative of the denial of the will-to-live, and to this extent as a partaking of his self-sacrifice, redeemed by his merit, and rescued from the bonds of sin and death, i.e., of the world (*Rom. v. 12-21*). (329)

The **desire for complete and lasting satisfaction**, according to Schopenhauer, marks the human condition. The fact that this satisfaction is denied to us humans can let this disappointment become a motive for **refusing to play along**; knowledge now becomes a quieter of the will: the will negates itself; seeks peace, quiet, redemption.

But is the world really a place that, once its essence has been understood, invites us to turn away from it? Characteristic of Schopenhauer's understanding of satisfaction is the statement with which he introduces par. 58:

All satisfaction, or what is commonly called happiness, is always really and essentially always *negative* only, and never positive. It is not an gratification which comes to us originally and of itself, but it must always be the satisfaction of a wish. For desire, that is to say, want, is the precedent condition of every pleasure; but with the satisfaction, the desire and therefore the pleasure cease; and so the satisfaction or gratification can never be more than deliverance from a pain, from a want. (319)

4

To the emphasis on the individual corresponds egoism, where **egoism** so understood is not confined to human beings. Animals, too, are possessed by a desire to

maintain themselves in being, often at the cost of the same will as expressed in other animals. In human beings, however, egoism finds particularly pronounced and strident expression, bringing one individual into conflict with other similarly egoistic individuals. Law and order suppress this strife. When they are removed, we see that Hobbes was pretty much correct when he described the natural state of man as a **state of war**:

But it appears most distinctly as soon as any mob is released from all law and order; we then see at once in the most distinct form the *bellum omnium contra omnes*, which Hobbes admirably described in the first chapter of *De Cive*. We see not only how everyone tries to snatch from another what he himself wants, but how one often even destroys another's whole happiness or life, in order to increase by an insignificant amount his own well-being. This is the highest expression of egoism, the phenomena of which in this respect are surpassed only by those of real wickedness that seeks, quite disinterestedly, the pain and injury of others, without any advantage to itself. (333)

Egoism leads to **wrong**. **Wrong** in all its forms is interference with another's pursuit of his own being. It finds its most radical expression in murder:

As regards the *doing* of wrong generally, it occurs either through *violence* or through *cunning*; it is immaterial as regards what is morally essential. (337)

For Schopenhauer cunning is worse than violence. For all human association is based on a certain openness, an expectation that the other is more or less as he presents himself and will behave in predictable fashion

Schopenhauer insists that the notion of wrong has primacy over that of right. Right is the negation of wrong.

The concept of *right*, however, as the negation of wrong, finds its principal application, and doubtless also its first origin, in those cases where an attempted wrong by violence is warded off. This warding off cannot itself be wrong, and consequently is right, although the violent action committed in connection with it, and considered merely in itself and in isolation, would be wrong. (339)

For Schopenhauer the terms "right" and "wrong" do have a meaning even in the state of nature. There is thus a natural morality. On this point he criticizes Hobbes. But Schopenhauer is forced to admit, as was Locke before him, that such natural morality is rather ineffective against the selfishness of man. "Right conduct from moral grounds," he argues, "is not to be expected."

5

It is for this reason that human beings set up political organizations. The **state** itself is a product of reason. Egoistic as man is, that very egoism fills him with fear that the egoism of others will interfere with his own. First of all the human being wants to live and to live with a minimum of suffering. But the suffering that others are able to inflict on me is likely to outweigh the joy I get from stepping on them in the pursuit of my own selfish ends:

The state, according to Schopenhauer, is not an institution that makes human beings less egoistic. Quite to the contrary: it is born of and supported by egoism. In this respect it is very different from the family. If Schopenhauer is right, we have to separate sharply between social groupings that would have us affirm ourselves as parts of a larger whole — the paradigm is the family — and an organization like the state, which is born of a contract that serves the individual ends of human beings. Schopenhauer insists thus on a sharp **separation of the social from the political**. The point of the state is to diminish the suffering of individuals by creating barriers to individual selfishness. Legislation should therefore be only concerned with deeds, not with motives, and not with the deed committed except in so far as it might invite, if left unpunished, future repetition.

For Schopenhauer the terms "right" and "wrong" do have a meaning even in the state of nature. There is thus a natural morality. On this point he criticizes Hobbes. But what does this disagreement presuppose? If the principle of individuation ruled human behavior without restriction Hobbes would seem to be right. That Schopenhauer disagrees with Hobbes presupposes that even in the state of nature we feel that there is something wrong when I push my self-interest to a point where it seriously infringes on that of my fellow human beings.

6

Schopenhauer suggests that there are actions, that while not wrong in his sense can be called **diabolical**. “Thus, for example, the refusal to help another in dire distress, the calm contemplation of another’s death from starvation while we have more than enough, are certainly cruel and diabolical, but are not wrong.” (339) This suggests that true virtue and the diabolical must be sought beyond right and wrong. Also beyond what we ordinarily call good and bad.

What do we mean by **good**? Schopenhauer insists on its relative nature. When we declare something to be good we declare it fit for or suitable for a particular effort of the will. (360) Good is what suits the will. Schopenhauer goes on to distinguish two subspecies of the good, the **agreeable** and the **useful**, where the useful may be understood as a means to the agreeable. The good so understood is essentially relative. It follows from the relative nature of the good that there can be no absolute good:

Absolute good is a contradiction; highest good, *summum bonum*, signifies the same thing, namely in reality a final satisfaction of the will after which no fresh willing would occur; a last motive, the attainment of which would give the will an imperishable satisfaction. According to the discussion so far carried on in this fourth book, such a thing cannot be conceived. (362)

And yet Schopenhauer does not want to give up the idea of a *summum bonum* altogether:

However, if we wish to give an honorary, or so to speak an emeritus position to an old expression, that from custom we do not like entirely to discard, we may, metaphorically and figuratively call the complete self-effacement and denial of the will, true of will-lessness, which alone stills and silences forever the craving of the will; which alone is world-redeeming; and which we shall now consider at the conclusion of our whole discussion the *summum bonum*. (362)

A first pointer in the direction of this "highest good" is provided by the call of conscience. What calls the human being in conscience is tied to a fleeting recognition that the individual is only the phenomenon, not the thing in itself.

Consequently, the wicked man’s inward alarm at his own deed, which he himself tries to conceal from himself, contains that presentiment of the

nothingness and mere delusiveness of the *principium individuationis*, and of the distinction established by this principle between him and others.

(366)

Egoism, as we have seen, presupposes a superficial understanding of the self. Some such recognition would seem to be present already in the just individual who refuses to do wrong even though there is nothing that restrains him, no penalty that would be exacted if he were to do wrong. And the more the individual sees that essentially his being is the same as that of his fellow human beings, indeed the same as that of all beings, the less will he want to push his own individual ends at the expense of theirs. He will refuse to hurt even an animal. This disregard of one's own well being can lead even to self-sacrifice:

In such a case, the character that has reached the highest goodness and perfect magnanimity will sacrifice its well-being and its life completely for the well-being of many others. So died Codrus, and Leonidas, and Regulus, Decius Mus, and Arnold von Winkelried; so does everyone die who voluntarily and consciously goes to certain death for his friends, or his native land. And everyone also stands at this level who willingly takes suffering and death upon himself for the maintenance of what conduces and rightfully belongs to the welfare of all mankind, in other words, for universal and important truths, and for the eradication of great errors. So died Socrates and Giordano Bruno; and so did many a hero of truth meet his death at the stake at the hands of the priests. (375)

And yet, Schopenhauer's explanation of such self-sacrifice is not altogether convincing. Leonidas did not hesitate to kill. So it was not a loyalty to human beings as such that explains his sacrifice. It was very much a loyalty to Sparta and perhaps to Greece. We have here once more examples of the individual experiencing himself as a part. But that of which he feels a part is here a quite specific community; he thus remains in an important sense bound to the realm of phenomena. More difficult is the case of Socrates. He, too, feels that he, like all human beings, belongs to a higher realm. But this realm is finally not of this world. Socrates has seen through the phenomenality of the individual and because he has done so, he can accept death.

There would seem to be two routes to Schopenhauer's *summum bonum*, an **aesthetic** and a **moral route**. The beautiful, as Schopenhauer understand it, prefigures Nirvana. The aesthetic blurs with the ascetic.

Different is what we can call the moral route. For Schopenhauer **sympathy** must lead to an increased awareness of suffering:

If that veil of Maya, the *principium individuationis*, is lifted from the eyes of a man to such an extent that he no longer makes the egoistical distinction between himself and the person of others, but takes as much interest in the sufferings of other individuals as in his own, and thus is not only benevolent and charitable in the highest degree, but even ready to sacrifice his own individuality whenever several others can be saved thereby, then it follows automatically that such a man, recognizing in all beings his own true and innermost self, must also regard the endless suffering of all that lives as his own, and thus take upon himself the pain of the whole world. (378)

Such insight, according to Schopenhauer, leads finally to a decision to negate the condition of all suffering, the will. Thus we find a decision not to give in to the hunger that bids us eat, not to sexual desire, which is an expression not only of the individual will, but of the will of the species, so that in negating it not only the individual is negated, but the species as well. For a person who has thus negated the will, death will appear no longer as an enemy, but as a welcome friend. Thus the dying Socrates asked that a cock be sacrificed to the god of healing. Schopenhauer is thinking of a different kind of hero. It is in this Schopenhauer sees the essence of saintliness, be these saints Christian, Buddhist, or Hindu. Only superficially do the great religions differ. At bottom they all mean the same. They all preach a salvation linked to self-negation.

7

This then is the one sense in which Schopenhauer does admit of redemption. "The will itself cannot be abolished by anything except knowledge." (400) Such knowledge may indeed lead to death. An individual may simply stop caring about life sufficiently to stay alive.

Schopenhauer's whole argument rests on his correct insight into the self-contradictory project that rules what I have called an ethics of satisfaction. There is no *summum bonum*. The very idea is self-contradictory. The human being cannot hold on to both being and satisfaction. But is Schopenhauer not attempting something of just that sort with his reinterpretation of the *summum bonum* as self-negation? Consider carefully the ending of the book where Schopenhauer's understanding of this *summum bonum* is spelled out:

But we now turn our glance from our own needy and perplexed nature to those who have overcome the world, in whom the will, having reached complete self-knowledge, found itself again in everything, and then freely denied itself, and who then merely wait to see the last trace of the will vanish with the body that is animated by that race. Then, instead of the restless pressure and effort; instead of the constant transition from desire to apprehension, and from joy to sorrow; instead of the never-satisfied and never-dying hope that constitutes the life of the man who wills, we see that peace that is higher than all reason, that ocean-like calmness of the spirit, that deep tranquility, that unshakable confidence and serenity, whose mere reflection in the countenance, as depicted by Raphael and Correggio is an complete and certain gospel. Only knowledge remains, the will has vanished. We then look with deep and painful yearning on that state, beside which the miserable and desperate nature of our own appears in the clearest light by the contrast. Yet this consideration is the only one that can permanently console us, when, on the one hand, we have recognized incurable suffering and endless misery as essential to the phenomenon of will, to the world, and, on the other, see the world melt away with the abolished will, and retain before us only empty nothingness. In this way, therefore, by contemplating the life and conduct of saints, to meet with whom is of course rarely granted to us in our own experience, but who are brought to our notice by their recorded history, and, vouched for with the stamp of truth by art, we have to banish the dark impression of that nothingness which as the final goal hovers behind all virtue and holiness, and which we fear as children fear darkness. We must not even evade it,

as the Indians do, by myths and meaningless words, such as reabsorption in *Brahman* or the *Nirvana* of the Buddhists. On the contrary, we freely acknowledge that what remains after the complete abolition of the will is, for all who are still full of the will, assuredly nothing. But also conversely, to those in whom the will has turned and denied itself, this very real world, with all its suns and galaxies, is—nothing. (411-412)

20. Apollo and Dionysus

1

Today we turn to *The Birth of Tragedy*.⁹ Born in 1844, Nietzsche was just 28 when the book appeared in 1872. Written at the time of the Franco-Prussian War, *The Birth of Tragedy* is of course far more than its title suggests, not only an analysis of the birth of tragedy, but equally an analysis of its death, and a celebration of Wagner as the artist of genius who had brought about its rebirth. As we shall see, the death of tragedy is blamed on Socrates, but the tendency Nietzsche associates with Socrates is one that Nietzsche takes to be constitutive of a tradition that stems from Socrates and includes modernity. Thus Nietzsche's Socrates, I want to suggest, is also a figure of Descartes. The critique of Socrates must thus be understood first of all as a critique of modernity, where the problem of modernity is also the problem of science.

And science itself, our science — indeed, what is the significance of all science, viewed as a symptom of life? For what—worse yet, whence—all science? How now? Is the resolve to be so scientific about everything perhaps a kind of fear of, an escape from, pessimism? A subtle last resort against—*truth*? And morally speaking, a kind of cowardice and falseness? Amorally speaking, a ruse? O Socrates, Socrates, was that perhaps *your* secret? O enigmatic ironist, was that perhaps your—irony? (18)

Science itself, Nietzsche here suggests, functions as a bulwark against truth, “a kind of fear of, an escape from, pessimism? A subtle last resort against—*truth*?” What truth? I take it against the truth that reality in itself has no meaning, that meaning or value are not discovered, are not properties of things, but human creations. In his understanding of pessimism Nietzsche follows Schopenhauer:

“There is an ancient story that King Midas hunted in the forest a long time for the wise Silenus, the companion of Dionysus, without capturing him. When Silenus at last fell into his hands, the king asked

⁹ References in the text are to Friedrich Nietzsche, “*The Birth of Tragedy*” and “*The Case of Wagner*,” trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967). For a fuller discussion of the material covered in these concluding lectures see *Nietzsche: Truth, Value, Tragedy*, Seminar Notes, Spring Semester 2015, Yale University. <http://karstenharries.commons.yale.edu/>

what was the best and most desirable thing for man. Fixed and immovable, the demigod said not a word, till at last, urged by the king, he gave a shrill laugh and broke into these words: "Oh, wretched ephemeral race, children of chance and misery, why do you compel me to tell you what it would be most expedient for you not to hear? What is best of all is utterly beyond your reach: not to be born, not to be, to be nothing. But the second best for you is—to die soon." (3, p. 42)

Schopenhauer quotes these same lines from the *Elegies* of Theognis and refers to *Oedipus at Colonus* (II, 587) where we find these lines spoken by the chorus of elders:

Say what you will, the greatest boon is not to be;
 But, life begun, soonest to end is best,
 And to that bourne from which our way began
 Swiftly return.
 (OC.1225. trans. Watling)

This suggests that science and art are competing strategies for coping with this dismal truth, more precisely to evade it.

How is the world of the Olympian gods related to this folk wisdom? Even as the rapturous vision of the tortured martyr to his suffering. Now it is as if the Olympian magic mountain had opened before us and revealed its roots to us. The Greek knew and felt the horror of existence. That he might endure this terror at all he had to interpose between himself and life the radiant dream-birth of the Olympians (42)

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

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

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

2

What is life? Or rather, what is Nietzsche's view of life? What is his view of nature? In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche gives a rather Schopenhauerian answer.

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

The debt to Schopenhauer is evident, although Nietzsche poetically transforms Schopenhauer's will into an artist who seeks redemption from his own suffering an illusion. **To the essence of reality belongs illusion. Being is an endless process of self-transcendence.** Nietzsche was to return to this point and to criticize it in the later preface:

Already in the preface addressed to Richard Wagner, art, and *not* morality, is presented as the truly *metaphysical* activity of man. In the book itself the suggestive sentence is repeated several times, that the existence of the world is *justified* only as an aesthetic phenomenon. Indeed, the whole book knows only an artistic meaning and crypto- meaning behind all events—a "god," if you please, but certainly only an entirely reckless and amoral

artist-god who wants to experience, whether he is building or destroying, in the good and the bad, his own joy and glory—one who, creating worlds, frees himself from the *distress* of fullness and *overfullness* and from the *affliction* of the contradictions compressed in his soul. The world—at every moment the *attained* salvation of God, as the eternally changing, eternally new vision of the most deeply afflicted, discordant, and contradictory being who can find salvation only in *appearance*: you can call this whole artists' metaphysics arbitrary, idle, fantastic; what matters is that it betrays a spirit who will one day fight at any risk whatever the *moral* interpretation and significance of existence. Here, perhaps for the first time, a pessimism "beyond good and evil" is suggested. Here that "perversity of mind" gains speech and formulation against which Schopenhauer never wearied of hurling in advance his most irate curses and thunderbolts: a philosophy that dares to move, to demote, morality in the realm of appearance — and not merely among "appearances" or phenomena (in the sense assigned to these words by Idealistic philosophers), but among "deceptions," as semblance, delusion, error, interpretation, contrivance, art. (22-23)

Nietzsche's metaphysics is an artist's metaphysics. Being is an artistic activity; what Schopenhauer called will is understood as such activity, as process tending towards form, *energeia*, coming to rest in some *ergon* resembling a work of art. (Cf. Aristotle) But what matters more to Nietzsche is the rejection of a higher meaning.

And yet human beings would seem to insist on such a meaning, on such a justification. What Nietzsche suggests is that such a justification will always be an **aesthetic representation** of what **is**. As he put it in *The Will to Power*: "we possess art lest we perish of the truth."¹⁰ In the language of *The Birth of Tragedy*: *Only as an aesthetic phenomenon is the existence of the world justified.*\

3

In the later preface Nietzsche accuses himself of having obscured his central insight in two ways: by fumbling along with a Schopenhauerian vocabulary and by

¹⁰ *The Will to Power* 822, translated by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (Random House: New York, 1967)

confusing his insights into the Greek issue with Wagnerian ideas. But let me return to Nietzsche's dependence on Schopenhauer.

In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche pretty much takes for granted Schopenhauer's distinction between the world as will and the world as representation, and the related distinction between two kinds of art, one transfiguring representations by making visible in them the Platonic ideas; the other music, giving a copy of the inner essence of the world itself, the will. Nietzsche associates Apollo both with the world of representations, which in his myth he interprets as the work of a divine artist, and with art; and Dionysus with both will and music. Dionysus himself is an Apollinian image.

Nietzsche understands Apollinian creation in the image of dreaming:

The beautiful illusion of the dream worlds, in the creation of which every man is truly an artist, is the prerequisite of all plastic art, and, as we shall see, of an important part of poetry also. In our dreams we delight in the immediate understanding of figures; all forms speak to us; there is nothing unimportant or superfluous. But even when this dream experience is most intense, we still have, glimmering through it, the sensation that it is *mere appearance*: at least this is my experience, and for its frequency — indeed, normality—I could adduce many proofs, including the sayings of the poets. (34)

Note how much here recalls traditional descriptions of the aesthetic. Nietzsche reads the beautiful object in the image of the dream; more precisely perhaps, he reads the dream in the image of the beautiful object. The beautiful is marked by plenitude: in it nothing seems unimportant or superfluous. But this plenitude is bought at the price of reality: we sense that the beautiful lacks reality.

But the significance of the Apollinian is not exhausted with this look at the beautiful. The dream sphere contrasts with waking reality by its clearer form and heightened meaning: it transforms reality so that it acquires a plenitude that it lacked. But is not everyday reality itself a reality that has already been transformed, subjected the human understanding and its modes of organization.

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 and 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 the image he trains himself for life. (34)

Note that this invites an interpretation of artists and of philosophers such as Schopenhauer as human beings who have somehow become distanced from reality, have lost their place in everyday life and now observe it from the outside, as it were, as aesthetic spectators. But the analogy between waking reality and dream on which Nietzsche, following Schopenhauer, here insists, also suggests that it is precisely by shaping reality in a quasi-artistic fashion that we give it structure and meaning.

Apollo is understood by Nietzsche as the incarnation of what Schopenhauer had called the *principium individuationis*.

The joyous necessity of the dream experience has been embodied by the Greeks in their Apollo: Apollo, the god of all plastic energies, is at the same time the soothsaying god. He, who (as the etymology of the name indicates) is the "shining one," the deity of light, is also ruler over the beautiful illusion of the inner world of fantasy. The higher truth, the perfection of these states in contrast to the incompletely intelligible everyday world, this deep consciousness of nature, healing and helping in dreams and sleep, is at the same time the symbolical analogue of the soothsaying faculty and of the arts generally, which make life possible and worth living. (35)

Nietzsche suggests here that to make life possible and worth living we must transfigure it by means of artistic illusions, which in turn are linked to our dreams.

Note that this implies a profound disagreement with Schopenhauer. According to Schopenhauer art affords redemption from life, while according to Nietzsche art makes life worth living. Art serves life by transfiguring it. In the later preface, "Attempt at a Self-Criticism," Nietzsche will return to this point:

In the book itself the suggestive sentence is repeated several times, that the existence of the world is *justified* only as an aesthetic phenomenon.

Indeed, the whole book knows only an artistic meaning and crypto-meaning behind all events. (22)

In that later preface Nietzsche is quite aware of how profoundly this set him apart from Schopenhauer, despite all the Schopenhauerian rhetoric of the book. **Art is placed in the service of life.** In this connection you should also note that according to Schopenhauer the aesthetic experience delivers us from the rule of the *principium individuationis*, while Nietzsche insists on just the opposite.

4

In his understanding of the Dionysian, too, Nietzsche follows Schopenhauer, but once again gives his account a twist very much his own.

In the same work Schopenhauer has described for us the tremendous *terror* which seizes man when he is suddenly dumbfounded by the cognitive form of phenomena because the principle of sufficient reason, in one of its manifestations, seems to suffer an exception. If we add to this terror the blissful ecstasy that wells from the innermost depths of man, indeed of nature, at this collapse of the *principium individuationis*, we steal a glimpse into the nature of the *Dionysian*, which is brought home to us most intimately by the analogy of intoxication. (36)

There are experiences when we glimpse that everyday reality is only the surface, when we begin to suspect the superficiality of the ruling reality principle. That such suspicion should be attended by terror can hardly surprise. Yet terror is linked to blissful ecstasy: Nietzsche could be said to transform Schopenhauer's pessimistic reading of reality as will into almost its opposite:

Either under the influence of the narcotic draught, of which the songs of all primitive men and peoples speak, or with the potent coming of spring that penetrates all nature with joy, these Dionysian emotions awake, and as they grow in intensity everything subjective vanishes into complete self-forgetfulness. In the German Middle Ages, too, singing and dancing crowds, ever increasing in number, whirled themselves from place to place under this same Dionysian impulse. In these dancers of St. John and St. Vitus, we rediscover the Bacchic choruses of the Greeks, with their

prehistory in Asia Minor, as far back as Babylon and the orgiastic Sacaea. There are some, who, from obtuseness or lack of experience turn away from such phenomena as from "folk-diseases," with contempt or pity born of the consciousness of their own "healthy-mindedness." But of course such poor wretches have no idea how corpse-like and ghostly their so-called "healthy-mindedness" looks when the glowing life of the Dionysian revelers roars past them. (37)

Art can serve Dionysus as well as Apollo. An art serving Dionysus has to challenge the established reality principle with the promise of liberation.

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. Freely, earth proffers her gifts, and peacefully the beasts of prey of the rocks and desert approach. The chariot of Dionysus is covered with flowers and garlands; panthers and tigers walk under its yoke. Transform Beethoven's "Hymn to Joy" into a painting; let your imagination conceive the multitudes bowing to the dust, awestruck — then you will approach the Dionysian. Now the slave is a free man; now all the rigid, hostile barriers that necessity, caprice, or "impudent convention" have fixed between man and man are broken. Now, with the gospel of universal harmony, each one feels himself not only united, reconciled and fused with his neighbor, but at 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. (37)

This is a reading of Schopenhauer's will that appears to substitute for the pain and suffering that Schopenhauer took to be essential to the will and to all its manifestations joy. In the Dionysian experience the individual affirms himself not as this individual, but as a part of humanity, to which he is joined by an ecstatic fellow feeling — I don't want to use the Schopenhauerian "sympathy" because that word suggests something like pity, i.e. that we are joined through shared suffering, rather than through joy.

The distinction between Apollo and Dionysus suggests the possibility of distinguishing between two kinds of art. Nietzsche marks this distinction by contrasting the Apollinian art of Homer with the Dionysian art of the lyric poet Archilochus.

To understand Nietzsche's turn to tragedy, we have to keep in mind the shortcomings of the Apollinian and the Dionysian. A purely Apollinian state would lose touch with reality, would substitute for reality beautiful illusion. In this sense the aesthetic approach in its entirety, as I have discussed it, is Apollinian. A purely Dionysian state, on the other hand, would destroy the individual. This is to say: human beings can truly affirm themselves only by saying yes to both, individuality and reality, to both Apollo and Dionysus. This calls for a mediation of the Apollinian and Dionysian spheres. And precisely such mediation or synthesis, according to Nietzsche, is effected by tragedy. We can see now how tragedy serves life. Tragedy is the art form that allows for the fullest self-affirmation. And here we return once more to the radical difference between Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Listen to how Nietzsche himself puts this difference in the later preface:

I regret now that in those days I still lacked the courage (or immodesty?) to permit myself in every way an individual language of my own for such individual views and hazards — and that instead I tried laboriously to express by means of Schopenhauerian and Kantian formulas strange and new valuations which were basically at odds with Kant's and Schopenhauer's spirit and taste! What, after all did Schopenhauer think of tragedy?

"That which bestows on everything tragic its peculiar elevating force" — he says in *The World as Will and Representation*, volume II, p. 495 — "is the discovery that the world, that life, can never give real satisfaction and hence is not worthy of our affection: this constitutes the tragic spirit — it leads to *resignation*."

How differently Dionysus spoke to me! How far removed I was from all this resignationism! (24)

It was precisely the ability to temper the Dionysian with the Apollinian that is said to have distinguished Greek culture from the barbarian cultures around it.

From all quarters of the ancient world—to say nothing here of the modern—from Rome to Babylon, we can point to the existence of Dionysian festivals which the bearded satyr, who borrowed his name and attributes from the goat, bears to Dionysus himself. In nearly every case these festivals centered in extravagant sexual licentiousness, whose waves overwhelmed all family life and its venerable traditions; the most savage natural instincts were unleashed, including even that horrible mixture of sensuality and cruelty which always has seemed to me the real "witches brew." For some time, however, the Greeks were apparently perfectly insulated and guarded against the feverish excitement of these festivals, though knowledge of them must have come to Greece on all routes of land and sea; for the figure of Apollo, rising full of pride, held out the Gorgon's head to this grotesquely uncouth Dionysian power—and really could not have countered any more dangerous force. It is in Doric art that this majestically rejecting attitude of Apollo is immortalized. (39)

But, a question must be raised at this point: is this Doric culture not an overly aesthetic, dishonest, repressive culture, which stands in need of a critique? Why does Nietzsche not plead here for a more wholehearted return to the Dionysian? One reason is Nietzsche's Schopenhauerian reading of the Dionysian sphere. In the beginning of this lecture I cited what the wise Silenus has to tell us poor humans: "What is best of all is utterly beyond your reach: not to be born, not to be, to be nothing. But the second best for you is — to die soon." (42) Were one to listen to this wisdom of Silenus, one would be well on one's way towards becoming a Schopenhauerian saint. But the Greeks refused to listen to Silenus. Before the darkness that finds expression in Silenic wisdom they placed their artistic construction of the Olympians. The human will to live here triumphs over the wisdom of Silenus and inverts it. And yet the Dionysian sphere cannot be banished without banishing something essential about our own being. We need an art that is not only Apollinian, like Homer's, but also Dionysian. That is to say, we need tragedy.

21. Socrates and Descartes

1

In the preceding lecture I showed that one thing Nietzsche is concerned about in *The Birth of Tragedy* is the nihilistic character of a culture that accepts the hegemony of objectifying reason, of science. The connection between such a reason and nihilism is crucial. To the extent that objectifying reason governs our approach to what we experience, things must present themselves as contingent, as arbitrary, as not justified. This is one thing Nietzsche learned from Schopenhauer.

But Schopenhauer had also pointed to a sort of experience that delivers us from contingency, to aesthetic experience, if at the price of lifting us out of what we usually consider reality. Lost in the appreciation of the beautiful, I become absorbed in the aesthetic object and lose myself as this individual with these fears and concerns. Such experience, which in time delivers us from the burden of our temporal existence, justifies itself.

But for Schopenhauer the experience of the beautiful is also tied to an escape from reality. But is it not possible to understand such experience as embracing and transfiguring reality? Nietzsche suggests that a positive answer can be given. Following his terminology in *The Birth of Tragedy*, we may want to speak of a transformation of the **aesthetic** into the **mythic**. While the aesthetic replaces reality with a self-justifying illusion, myth represents and idealizes reality in such a way that it appears to us as justified.

But why a **tragic** myth? The healing power of tragedy, we saw, is tied to its ability to reconcile us with the human condition. Such reconciliation requires distancing, the aesthetic **translation of human existence into an ideal sphere**. But it also requires the **appropriation or recollection of the truth concerning our ephemeral existence**.

2

But what place is there for tragedy in the modern world, given the way that world is dominated by faith in reason? Must modernity not divorce the beautiful and the real, turn to the beautiful as to an escape from reality, a supplement?

Nietzsche gives a first answer to this question in his discussion of Euripides, where Euripides is, just like Socrates, also an ideal type, if you wish, a caricature.

But if we desire, as briefly as possible, and without claiming to say anything exhaustive, to characterize what Euripides had in common with Menander and Philemon, and what appealed to them so strongly as worthy of imitation, it is sufficient to say that Euripides brought the spectator onto the stage. He who has perceived the material out of which the Promethean writers, prior to Euripides formed their heroes, and how remote from their purpose it was to bring the faithful mask of reality onto the stage, will also be aware of the utterly opposite tendency of Euripides. (77)

Nietzsche's description of Euripides here comes pretty much straight from the *Frogs* of Aristophanes, where Euripides is made to say the following:

I put things on the stage that came from daily life and business
Where men could catch me if I tripped; could listen without dizziness
To things they knew and judge my art. I never crashed and lightened
And bullied people's senses out; nor tried to keep them frightened
With magic Swans and Aethiop knights, loud barb and clanging vizor

And a bit later

This was the kind of lore I brought
To school my town in ways of thought —
I mingled reasoning with my art
And shrewdness, till I fired their heart
To brood, to think things through and through;
And rule their houses better, too.

As the Dionysus of the play then points out, the Athenian who had gone through the school of Euripides cased to be a

Religious, unsuspecting fool,
And happy in a sheeplike way.¹¹

Euripides appears here rather as a representative of enlightenment, indeed of the Enlightenment and its commitment to realism in art, prefigured in the Renaissance.

¹¹ Aristophanes, *The Frogs*, trans. Gilbert Murray.

The spectator now actually saw and heard his double on the Euripidean stage, and rejoiced that he could talk so well. But this joy was not all; one could even learn from Euripides how to speak oneself. He prides himself upon this in his contest with Aeschylus: from him the people have learned how to observe, debate, and draw conclusions according to the rules of art and with the cleverest sophistries. (77)

We can speak of a **profanation** of tragedy. One could perhaps liken this to the profanation of medieval painting in the Renaissance, which finds its expression in the turn to representation and the abandonment of the idealizing gold background. To use a metaphor, the Euripidean tragedy had lost the gold background of the older tragedy, represented there by the chorus, which should perhaps also be understood as an **idealizing, metaphorical device**: the chorus helps to let us experience the tragic hero as a mask of Dionysus. And we also meet with an insistence on **realism**, on the probable. The gods are psychologized. The individual psyche is substituted for the sacred.

However we judge Nietzsche's interpretation of Euripides, he does seem to sketch the place of an art that has subordinated itself to reason: the place of art in the modern age.

3

Nietzsche goes on to link Euripides and Socrates.

That Socrates was closely related to the tendency of Euripides did not escape the notice of contemporaneous antiquity. The most eloquent expression of this felicitous insight was the story current in Athens that Socrates used to help Euripides write his plays. Whenever an occasion arose to enumerate the demagogues of the day, the adherents of the "good old times" would mention both names in the same breath. To the influence of Socrates and Euripides they attributed the fact that the old Marathonian stalwart fitness of body and soul was being sacrificed more and more to a dubious enlightenment that involves the progressive degeneration of the powers of body and soul. (86)

Euripides is the poet of aesthetic Socratism.

The most acute word, however, about this new and unprecedented value set on knowledge and insight was spoken by Socrates when he found that he was the only one who acknowledged to himself that he knew *nothing*, whereas in his critical peregrinations through Athens he had called on the greatest statesmen, orators, poets, and artists, and had everywhere discovered the conceit of knowledge. To his astonishment he perceived that all these celebrities were without a proper and sure insight, even with regard to their own professions, and that they practiced them only by instinct. "Only by instinct"; with this phrase we touch upon the heart and the core of the Socratic tendency. With it Socratism condemns existing art as it condemns existing ethics. Wherever Socratism turns its searching eyes it sees lack of insight and the power of illusion; and from this lack it infers the essential perversity and reprehensibility of what exists. Basing himself on this point, Socrates conceives it to be his duty to correct existence: all alone, with an expression of irreverence and superiority, as the precursor of an altogether different culture, art, and morality, he enters a world, to touch whose very hem would give us the greatest happiness. (87)

Nietzsche calls the Greeks *the chariot-drivers of every subsequent culture*, that is to say, Greek culture has provided the heroes that offered orientation and models to every subsequent culture. Socrates is one of these. He is the model of the theoretical man.

In order to vindicate the dignity of such a leader's position for Socrates, too, it is enough to recognize in him a type of existence unheard of before him: the type of theoretical man whose significance and aim it is our next task to try to understand. Like the artist, the theoretical man finds an infinite delight in whatever exists, and this satisfaction protects him against the practical ethics of pessimism with its Lynceus eyes that shine only in the dark. Whenever the truth is uncovered, the artist will always cling with rapt gaze to what still remains covering even after such uncovering; but the theoretical man enjoys and finds satisfaction in the discarded covering and finds the highest object of his pleasure in the

process of an ever happy uncovering that succeeds through his own efforts. (94)

Both the artist and the theorist are said to delight in what exists. The artist, however, is said to remain with what even after the uncovering still remains covering. He is content to gaze at beautiful appearance. Theoretical man, on the other hand wants to uncover, wants to get to the bottom of things. Just this desire Nietzsche questions. One thing pre-Socratic Greek culture can teach us is, in the words of *The Gay Science*, is to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in forms, tones, words, the whole Olympus of appearance. Those Greeks were superficial — **out of profundity**... Are we not, precisely in this respect, Greeks? Adorers of forms, of tones, of words, and therefore—**artists**?

Art is content with beautiful appearance. It lets it be. This ability to let things be presupposes a certain renunciation: no longer does the artist insist on being, as Descartes put it, the master and possessor of nature. So understood all genuine art has something of tragedy about it. It is born of a will to power that recognizes its own lack of power.

Science, on the other hand, wants to seize reality. Theory, as Nietzsche presents it in *The Birth of Tragedy*, is possessed of a will to power that wants to appropriate reality, to comprehend it. It fails to recognize the human being's final inability to overpower reality. Science covers up such impotence. Over its progress presides thus the

profound *illusion* that first saw the light of the world in the person of Socrates: the unshakable faith that thought, using the thread of causality, can penetrate the deepest abysses of being, and that thought is capable not only of knowing being, but even of *correcting* it. This sublime metaphysical illusion accompanies science as an instinct and leads science again and again to its limits at which it must turn into art — *which is really the aim of this mechanism*. (95)

What is the boundary at which science must turn into art of which Nietzsche is here speaking? How are we to understand this turning? I take it, science reaches this point when it realizes that it is not laying hold of the thing in itself but remains caught in the net of its own constructions.

But science, spurred on by its powerful illusion, speeds irresistibly towards its limits, where its optimism, concealed in the essence of logic, suffers shipwreck. For the periphery of the circle of science has an infinite number of points; and while there is no telling how this circle could ever be surveyed completely, noble and gifted men nevertheless reach, e'er half their time and inevitably such boundary points on the periphery from which one gazes into what defies illumination.

When they see to their horror how logic coils up at these boundaries and finally bites its own tail—suddenly the new form of insight breaks through, tragic insight which, merely to be endured needs art as a protection and remedy. (97 - 98)

Socratic faith is faith in the commensurability of a thinking governed by the principle of causality, and more generally, the principle of sufficient reason, and being. This faith is inseparable from science. It has been its ruling myth. When insight into the incommensurability of thought and being dawns, into the final unavailability of the truth, insight into the Dionysian abyss, Socratic culture will turn from science to art, where this turn is prefigured by Socrates' own turn to music.

We do indeed find some recognition of the final inadequacy of the Socratic project in Plato's account of the life of Socrates. In the *Phaedo* Plato tells of Evenus, a poet, who has heard that Socrates, awaiting his death in prison, has turned to the writing of verse and music. He asks Cebes about the rumor and Cebes in turn checks it with Socrates. Socrates answers that there is indeed something to the story: he had had a recurrent dream, which always told him that he should "cultivate and make music." Hitherto, Socrates explains, he had thought that he had been engaged in making the right kind of music when engaging others in conversation, that the dream was just exhorting him to continue his pursuit of philosophy. But now, that he is facing death, he is uneasy about that interpretation. Could it be that the dream meant the popular music rather than philosophy? The delay of the return of Apollo's sacred ship from Delos has given him a bit of extra time, which he spends composing a hymn to Apollo and by putting some of Aesop's fables into verse.

The voice of the Socratic dream vision is the only sign of any misgivings about the limits of logic: Perhaps—thus he must have asked himself—

what is unintelligible to me is not necessarily unintelligent? Perhaps there is a realm of wisdom from which the logician is exiled? Perhaps art is even a necessary correlative of, and supplement for science? (93)

Nietzsche finds an analogue in the life of Euripides:

In the evening of his life, Euripides himself propounded to his contemporaries the question of the value and the significance of this [the Socratic] tendency, using myth. Is the Dionysian entitled to exist at all? Should it not be forcibly uprooted from Hellenic soil? Certainly, the poet tells us, if only that were possible; his most intelligent adversary — like Pentheus in the *Bacchae* — is unwittingly enchanted by him, and in his enchantment runs to meet his fate. (81)

The play is curious. One cannot but sympathize with Pentheus who sees in the anarchic potential of Dionysiac frenzy a threat to the establishment, to the state. And yet the Dionysian power he battles proves stronger than his measure. In the end he is torn to pieces by his own mother in just such a frenzy.

But if indeed both Euripides and Socrates came to recognize the one-sidedness of Socratic culture, such recognition, Nietzsche points out, came too late. With the privileging of reason art had lost its religious, mythical significance. With Euripides art comes to be entertainment—the aesthetic conception of art—with Plato art becomes an edifying discourse—a moralizing tale. Interesting in this connection is Nietzsche's suggestion that the Platonic dialogue is the Aesopian fable raised to its highest power, an interpretation that invites one to read the reference to Aesop in the *Phaedo* somewhat differently: Socrates could then be seen as pointing ahead to Plato. But more important is that in the wake of the Socratic privileging of reason, art comes to be caught between an aesthetic and a moralizing function. To the extent that the Socratic spirit presides over the reality principle of the modern world, Hegel's famous pronouncement, that art in its highest sense belongs to the past, would seem to be correct.

Nietzsche is unwilling to accept the finality of this judgment. Such unwillingness leads him to attempt to take a step beyond the Socratic reality principle and that means also beyond the aesthetic approach, across the threshold that separates modern Socratic from a post-modern and once again tragic culture.

Here we knock, deeply moved, at the gates of the present and future: will this “turning” lead to ever-new configurations of genius and especially of the *Socrates who practices music*? Will the net of art, even if it is called religion or science, that is spread over existence be woven ever more tightly and delicately, or is it destined to be torn to shreds in the restless, barbarous, chaotic whirl that calls itself “the present?”

Concerned but not disconsolate, we stand aside a little while, contemplative men to whom it has been granted to be witness of these tremendous struggles and transitions. Alas, it is the magic of these struggles that those who behold them must also take part and fight. (98)

Note that science is here discussed as itself as a kind of art, a myth that like other myths helps liberate us from the fear of death

Hence the image of the dying Socrates, as the human being whom knowledge and reason have liberated from the fear of death, is the emblem that, above the entrance gate of science, reminds all of its mission—namely to make existence appear comprehensible and thus justified; and if reasons do not suffice myth has to come to the aid in the end—myth which I have just called the necessary consequence, indeed the purpose of science. (96)

4

If Socrates is the paradigm of the theoretical optimist, the death of tragedy is the other side of such optimism.

For who could mistake the optimistic element in the nature of dialectic, which celebrates a triumph with every conclusion and can breathe only in the cool clarity and consciousness—the optimistic element which having once penetrated tragedy must gradually overgrow its Dionysian regions and impel it necessarily to self-destruction—to the death-leap into the bourgeois drama. Consider the consequences of the Socratic maxims: “Virtue is knowledge; man sins only from ignorance; he who is virtuous is happy.” In these three basic forms of optimism lies the death of tragedy. (91)

Given such optimism art cannot be given more than a peripheral significance. It becomes the servant of reason, an ornamenting of moral precepts, for example; or it can become entertainment. Philosophical thinking, reason, overgrows art.

In conclusion let me return then to the question: what place is there for art in a Socratic culture?

A first answer is given by Nietzsche's description of Euripides.

A second answer is given by his reference to Aesop's fables, the Platonic dialogue, and to the novel.

A third answer is given in section 19, which begins with the suggestion that Socratic culture is best characterized as the culture of **opera**. What is striking about Nietzsche's characterization of opera is that in some ways it recalls what Nietzsche himself had said of tragedy, not surprising when one keeps in mind that Nietzsche is thinking of Wagner when he is speaking of the rebirth of tragedy and Wagner would seem to belong to the history of opera. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche seeks to detach Wagner from this history.

Let me call attention here to the way Nietzsche links opera and **entertainment**.

Closely observed, this fatal influence of the opera on music is seen to coincide exactly with the universal development of modern music; the optimism lurking in the genesis of opera and in the culture thereby represented, has, with alarming rapidity, succeeded in divesting music of its Dionysian-cosmic mission and impressing on it a playfully formal and pleasurable character; a change comparable to the metamorphosis of the Aeschylean man into the cheerful Alexandrian. (119)

I want to underscore "playfully formal and pleasurable." Once more the aesthetic appears here as a covering. What is covered up is the poverty that Nietzsche associates with Socratic-Alexandrian culture. The aesthetic comes to be understood as essentially *Ersatz*, opera *Ersatz* for the lost tragic myth. And as the modern age could be called the age of opera, it could be called the age of decoration. Nietzsche thus discusses opera as the art of the **decorated word**, analogous to an understanding of architecture as the art of the decorated building.

Nietzsche reminds us that the founders of modern opera understood their work as a recovery of the music of the ancients in which the good natural human being in whom

reason and emotion harmonized found his natural expression. When one reads such a passage one has to ask to what extent Wagner's *Musikdrama* does not also stand in this tradition. And what about Nietzsche himself? How will he distinguish his music making Socrates, and that is to say himself, from the creators of such opera? What music will he produce?

22. Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Wagner

1

The Birth of Tragedy is a book that belongs to its time, the second half of the nineteenth century. Two worlds had collapsed, and not only for Nietzsche. The first is that of the Lutheran faith in which he was raised. Nietzsche was the son of a Lutheran minister, although his father died when he was not quite five of a brain ailment. And when Nietzsche began his university studies he chose theology and classical philology for his subjects. But he soon lost whatever faith he still had. This is not only of biographical significance: the disintegration of the Christian world view is inseparably bound up with the formation of our modern world, with the Enlightenment, which hoped to put reason in the place of God. But Nietzsche had not only lost his faith in God, but also his faith in reason, where, as we saw, he credited Kant and Schopenhauer with demonstrating that such faith was misguided. But by undermining the faith in reason that had allowed modern man to find his place, Kant and Schopenhauer created the need for a reestablishment of that place. But what was to take the place of the two worlds that had collapsed? For an answer Nietzsche looked to the tragic age of the Greeks, hoping for a rebirth of tragedy that would usher in a postmodern culture. In Richard Wagner, he thought, he had found the genius who could fashion, not a mere imitation of Greek tragedy, but an equivalent work that would do for this age what Aeschylus did for the Greeks. Nietzsche hoped that the work of Wagner would meet the challenge posed by Schopenhauer's destruction of the tradition. *The Birth of Tragedy* is thus among other things also a pamphlet for Wagner. Wagner, to be sure, was to disappoint him and the task Nietzsche had assigned to him Wagner he came to claim as his own.

2

Wagner and Nietzsche met for the first time in November 1868 in Leipzig. Nietzsche was 24, Wagner 55. Before that meeting Nietzsche had not been particularly fond of Wagner's music. Schumann had been his hero. But on October 27 of that year the overture to the *Meistersinger* and the Prelude to *Tristan* made a deep impression. Never, he writes, had he experienced such a joy of *Entrücktheit*, transport. The meeting had been arranged by Wagner himself, who had wanted to meet the young man who was

considered the brightest hope of the classical philologists at Leipzig. Much of that first meeting was spent discussing the philosophy of Schopenhauer.

Wagner had discovered Schopenhauer late in his life and what he had discovered was quite different from what Nietzsche had found: Nietzsche had experienced Schopenhauer as a liberation —Schopenhauer sets us free. By denying God, by denying the whole dimension of what is higher, Schopenhauer calls on us to assume responsibility for ourselves.

Wagner on the other hand found in Schopenhauer a metamorphosis of the Christian doctrine of redemption from the rule of the individual will. In Wagner's Siegfried Nietzsche saw an attempt on Wagner's part to furnish us with an ideal image of the godless, free man. This is indeed in keeping with how Wagner had conceived of Siegfried. In him ideas of freedom mingled with communist or socialist dreams. Wagner had hoped that socialism would triumph in the presidential election of 1852 in France and realize the ideal that Siegfried was meant to represent, a revolutionary, and as such as the enemy of Wotan, who symbolized the old established order.

Freedom did not gain the hoped for victory. Louis Napoleon seized power instead. With this December coup Wagner seems to have lost most of his political interests and at the same time much of his interest in Siegfried. It was at this time that Wagner began to be interested in Schopenhauer. Wotan seemed to him now more interesting than Siegfried. In a letter he describes Siegfried as the man we desire for the future (Nietzsche might have spoken of the Overman), Wotan as a description of man as he exists now, who stands in the way of Siegfried. The new world can be fashioned only by the destruction of our world.

Wagner came across Schopenhauer while working on the Ring. He tells us that it was Schopenhauer who first taught him to understand the depth of his own creation, and more especially of Wotan. Wagner was to write later that he had first understood the *Götterdämmerung* as the collapse of a particular form of order; Schopenhauer taught him to see more deeply and to recognize that what he had presented was the essence of the world itself, which must reach the point when the will, tired of itself, turns back against itself. Wotan becomes a follower of Schopenhauer. Listen to his words in *Die Walküre*:

I must forsake what I love,
murder the man I cherish,

deceive and betray someone
who trusts me.
Away, then
with lordly splendour,
divine pomp
and shameful boasting!
Let it fall to pieces,
all that I built.
I give up my work.
Only one thing I want now:
the end.

Using power, Wotan tires of power, disgusted with it, desires its destruction, desires peace and rest.

The *Gotterdammerung* can be seen as a sign of the darkening of European, and more especially German culture. The optimism that had marked much of the first half of the century was rapidly fading. 1848 and 1851 were key years in this history of disillusionment. More and more despaired of the possibility of a new reconstruction. The destruction of the established order had to precede it. We sense something of this longing for chaos in Nietzsche, especially in *The Birth of Tragedy*. The young Nietzsche still dreams of revolution, if not in a political sense, dreams of a refashioning of the world out of the ruins of the old. Wagner had long since surrendered his hope for revolution and turned to resignation and accommodation. He had joined the establishment. At issue are two very different conceptions of tragedy.

3

In the April following his meeting with Wagner in November 1868 Nietzsche moved to Basel. A few weeks later he visits Wagner for the first time in his house in Tribtschen on Lake Lucerne. It is Wagner more than Nietzsche who insists on these visits. In a note from the first months, Wagner pleads: "save my not altogether unwavering belief in, what I, with Goethe and some others —call, German freedom." (June 3, 1869) The note is significant: it suggests what Wagner saw in Nietzsche: his own Siegfried in whom he had already lost faith. Nietzsche, on the other hand, calls

Wagner his Jupiter. In a letter to his friend Rohde he writes about the days spent at Tribschen: "Dearest friend, what I learn and see, hear and understand cannot be described. Schopenhauer and Goethe, Aeschylus and Pindar are still alive, believe me."

The Birth of Tragedy in its final form is the result of this friendship. Nietzsche had first wanted to write a more comprehensive work on the Greeks. In 1871 the first part of the work is finished. He called it *Griechische Heiterkeit*, Greek serenity or cheerfulness. The book included much of the material later published as the *The Birth of Tragedy*, but it included far more, especially reflections on the Greek state.

Wagner is disappointed that in the manuscript there is so much talk about the Greeks and so little about Wagner. Nietzsche listens to the complaint. The manuscript was changed and given the title "Musik und Tragödie." But now the original publisher is no longer interested. He objected especially, as Nietzsche himself was to do in his later prologue, to the mixture of Wagner and the Greeks. In that prologue Nietzsche also wonders whether there is not too much Schopenhauer in the book, too little dance, too little laughter.

What separates Nietzsche from Schopenhauer is apparent in their very different understanding of art. Nietzsche wants art to save us from the very self-negation Schopenhauer desires. Already in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche suspects a Buddhist streak in Schopenhauer and Wagner. Just this separates them from the so intensely political Greeks. Nietzsche's Greeks are not at all Schopenhauerian saints. They do not make the impossible demand that they be redeemed and Schopenhauer, despite his insistence that God is dead, is a philosopher of redemption. And redemption, as Nietzsche so scathingly shows, was a theme that never was to leave Wagner: Here is what he later was to write on Wagner and redemption:

There is nothing about which Wagner has thought more deeply than redemption; his opera is the opera of redemption. Somebody or other always wants to be redeemed in his work: sometimes a little male, sometimes a little female —this is *his* problem. — And how richly he varies his leitmotif! What rare, what profound dodges! Who if not Wagner would teach us that innocence prefers to redeem interesting sinners? (The case in *Tannhäuser*.) Or that even the Wandering Jew is redeemed, settles down, when he marries? (The case in the *Flying Dutchman*.) Or that old

corrupted females prefer to be redeemed by chaste youths (The case of Kundry.) Or that beautiful maidens like best to be redeemed by a knight who is a Wagnerian (The case in *Die Meistersinger*.) Or that married women, too, enjoy being redeemed by a knight? (The case of Isolde.) Or that "the old God," after having compromised himself morally in every respect, is finally redeemed by a free spirit and immoralist? (The case in the *Ring*.) Do admire this final profundity above all! Do you understand it?—I beware of understanding it. (*The Case of Wagner*, 160)

To be sure, what Wagner and Schopenhauer had in mind was not quite the same thing. If Schopenhauer secularized the theme of redemption, Wagner eroticized it. By linking redemption to the love of a man and a woman Wagner took a step Schopenhauer could not have accepted. But keep in mind the way the way themes of redemption and satisfaction belong together. And how both have to turn against reality as we live it. Given his interest in redemption, it is not at all surprising that Wagner should have joined the themes of love and death. All his life Nietzsche fought against such world-weary self- and world-negation, even as he, too, experienced the seductive power of the call for redemption from the ills of this world. But the Greeks he dreamed of did not demand a final satisfaction, nor did they demand redemption.

4

In view of the tensions that separated Nietzsche and Wagner even at the time of their first meeting, one may well wonder how it was that they could ever become friends. What is remarkable is not so much that their friendship should eventually break up, but that it should ever have begun.

An answer is suggested when we ask ourselves what each sought in the other. I have already suggested that Nietzsche's understanding of the modern situation brought with it a call for reconstruction. Nietzsche looked for a spiritual leader, who could assign to him and others their place. He found no one more qualified to play that part than Wagner.

When Wagner finally reads *The Birth of Tragedy* he is so excited that he can hardly write; Cosima writes that there is only one individual who knows all about Wagner; who this is I won't tell, she adds rather coyly.

In 1872 Wagner moved to Bayreuth. He chose Bayreuth rather than Munich for political reasons: the continued support of king Ludwig II was insufficient to overcome the hostility of the Bavarians. But Wagner may have welcomed the fact that Bayreuth was a rather insignificant town without a very developed artistic tradition of its own. Wagner now hoped to draw Nietzsche closer to himself by making him the educator of his son. Nietzsche resisted. Indeed one senses a growing resistance, a need not to get too close. He needed the distance to preserve his own freedom.

Wagner is hurt by what he takes to be Nietzsche's lack of interest in him. But something else bothered him. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche had expressed a willingness to serve Wagner's art. The priority of art was recognized. It was not the philosopher, but the artist who was to assign the new man his place. But increasingly Nietzsche came to see it as his task to sketch the image of the new ideal man. And to the extent that he took that task seriously, he had to appear not as the servant, but as the rival of Wagner, the philosopher-poet as rival of the composer-poet, all the more so since his conception of the great man and Wagner's moved increasingly apart, or rather, Wagner was no longer as interested in the great man as he was in the theme of redemption.

Meanwhile Wagner is preoccupied with financial worries, worries about Bayreuth, upset that Nietzsche is dealing with something as removed from the realities of the present as ancient Greece. When Nietzsche finally does come to Bayreuth to pick up where they left off at Tribschen he finds Wagner uninterested in the Greeks, uninterested in abstract ideas, worried about the mundane problems of the present. Nietzsche leaves Bayreuth after this Easter visit of 1873 depressed. Yet Wagner's hold on him is still strong enough to make him feel ashamed for having served the Greeks instead of Wagner.

The *Untimely Meditations* (*Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*) owe their origin to Wagner's suggestion that he turn away from the past and dedicate himself to the present, to Bayreuth. In 1874 Nietzsche is not yet ready to break with Wagner. He still wants to see in Wagner the genius who will give us a new ideal image of man and by doing so will give a new health to the modern world.

And yet—the price of this health seemed to be **illusion**. "Only when he loves, when he is surrounded by the illusion of love, does man create, that is only where he has

an unwavering faith in what is perfect and right."¹² The traditional absolute is still demanded here, even if the human being suspects that what he worships is an illusion. But is this not to settle for some golden calf or other. Nietzsche at this point still does not possess the strength to lead himself. So he demands the leader in whom he can believe. And yet he recognizes in Wagner too much that destroys the illusion: Wagner is human, all too human.

This lets us see the friendship between Nietzsche and Wagner in a different light. Precisely because Nietzsche never let Wagner be himself, but idealized him, created him in his own image, did his friendship with him have to come to an end. This illusion could last in Tribschen, this island of the blessed, as Nietzsche called it, but in Bayreuth Nietzsche was confronted with sides in Wagner that made such idealization impossible. Bayreuth opened Nietzsche's eyes to the real Wagner; at the same time it opened his eyes to what he had made of Wagner, to the role illusion, his own will to illusion, had played in this, too.

Beginning with this disillusionment we find Nietzsche becoming increasingly suspicious of all illusion. There are writings from 1874, when in public Nietzsche still appeared as a servant of Wagner, in which Nietzsche tells how distant Bayreuth had become, how uninterested he had become in its success or failure. Wagner, Nietzsche suggests, is an actor who creates an illusion. He likens Wagner to the demagogue who has a good ear for what the people want and caters to them. By giving them the illusion they want he gains power over them.

But is Nietzsche writing about Wagner and his audience or about Wagner and himself? What he accuses Wagner of doing is not so very different from what he had advocated in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Or had illusion a different meaning then?

5

In August 1874 Wagner and Nietzsche did meet again. Again it was a disappointing encounter. This time it was Nietzsche who courted disaster by carrying a copy of Brahms's *Schicksalslied*, leaving it conspicuously on the piano. Wagner gets the hint and blows up. In 1875 Wagner begins with rehearsals for the *Ring*. He wanted to

¹² *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben*, 7, *Sämtliche Werke*, KSA, vol.1 p. 296.

gather his followers and disciples around himself to witness the great event. Nietzsche excuses himself for being ill. There is an increasing stress at this time on faithfulness to oneself.

How does this agree with the illusions that may be necessary if we are to exist? We could say that more and more Nietzsche waged within himself a battle between Socrates and Wagner. "Socrates, I have to confess, is so close to me I almost never stop fighting with him."¹³ But in 1875 Wagner is once more triumphant. Nietzsche writes the 4th of the *Untimely Meditations, Wagner in Bayreuth*. Privately he expresses the wish that Bayreuth might fail, that only such a failure would allow Wagner to liberate himself. And Wagner, too, speaks of the whole Bayreuth business as a morass and as nonsense and yet he wants Nietzsche to serve it. At this time Nietzsche becomes once again more interested in Plato, especially in Plato's conception of the state. In *Wagner in Bayreuth* he denies art the right to assign us our place; it is only a liberating preparation, it imparts a blessing, a consecration. There are hints of a state where Wagner would no longer be necessary, a state of the future. Socrates gives way to the politician Plato, to Plato as the founder of a polis. In the present age we need Wagner to liberate us.

But is Wagner's music a liberation, a setting free? Is it not rather an opiate that makes us incapable of decisive action? Nietzsche now looks beyond Wagner to someone who could create the needed ideal.

Wagner himself was not interested in this ideal. But when he read *Wagner in Bayreuth* he liked it. He saw many flattering pages and invited Nietzsche to the grand opening. Nietzsche left for Bayreuth the end of July 1876. Kaiser Wilhelm, King Ludwig, and the Emperor of Brazil were present. The interest of those present focused as much on these celebrities as on what was happening on the stage. At one point, when Valhalla was supposed to appear, the mechanism did not work: a gaping void opened up instead and in the middle one could see the stage manager with rolled up sleeves. The illusion unmasked itself.

¹³ Nietzsche, "Nachgelassene Fragmente," Anfang 1874–Frühjahr 1874, *KSA*, vol. 8, p. 97

6

In Bayreuth Nietzsche had still hope for a genuine conversation that would allow him to renew his friendship with Wagner. Nothing came of it. He found the whole scene insufferable and fled to Klingenberg in the Bavarian Forest. Here he wrote the aphorisms of *Human, All Too Human*.

He met Wagner only once more, on October 1876, in Sorrento. He is told of the Parsifal idea and of Wagner's sympathies with Christian ideas, especially the last supper. Wagner, too, had been conquered by the dead God.

To understand the importance of their encounter, one has to keep in mind how symptomatic Wagner's development had been: Wagner had begun as an atheist. He felt himself to possess and was intoxicated by a **new freedom**. This filled him with the hope for a **new society**. Gradually that hope was shattered. No doubt events contributed to this, but that the idea could thus be shattered, suggests something about the weakness of the idea.

But where do we get an idea to put in the place of the dead God? We cannot simply invent a new ideal image of man. All such inventions have to seem arbitrary. The old God is dead and no new God appears. When this is recognized, what is to be done? Do we not need God and his prophets to assign us our place? When human beings have experienced the death of God, they are likely to seek refuge in illusion. Is all that is left to us then an existence in **bad faith**? Are all prophets not false prophets, actors who alienate us from ourselves?

Nietzsche contra Wagner? What is at stake is the problem of bad faith. What stands in the way of the victory of Wagner is Socratic faithfulness to oneself. In this sense we can perhaps say that the Socrates of *The Birth of Tragedy* finally forces Dionysus to acknowledge his rights. But Nietzsche knows, as Plato knew, that Socrates and Socratic honesty make sense only if there is some reality that assigns human beings their place, a place that they can occupy in good faith. But does Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God allow for such a place? What then are we to do, having to live with the death of God? What leaders is the future to know? Leaders like Wagner or like Nietzsche's Zarathustra? Or is Zarathustra perhaps himself a poet-leader of the Wagner type? The *Führer* as *Verführer*, the leader a seducer? We shall have to return to such questions.

To put what is essentially the same question more simply: How is good faith possible if God is dead? And a today perhaps more seductive question: why is good faith good? Why not bad faith? Why not illusion? Nietzsche suggests that honesty has a claim on us that we cannot deny. This made Wagner finally unacceptable. Nietzsche came to see him as paradigm of the dishonest artist, the false prophet.

7

Let me briefly sketch the end of the relationship between Wagner and Nietzsche. In 1878 Nietzsche received Wagner's *Parsifal*; at the same time Wagner received *Human, All Too Human*. Wagner attacks Nietzsche in an essay, *Publikum und Popularität*.¹⁴ Cosima, his wife, joins in. They describe Nietzsche as a kind of traitor who has joined the many against the noble few, although Nietzsche had by this time become lonely as never before. They suggest mental illness, also that a treatment of that illness could occur only should Nietzsche return to Bayreuth. In 1879 Nietzsche asks to be relieved of all teaching duties: physical and psychical ailments make it impossible for him to continue. On February 14, 1883 Wagner dies. The first part of *Zarathustra* had just been finished. In January 1889 Nietzsche goes insane. He dies in 1900.

What is at stake in their relationship goes beyond their private lives. The story of their early friendship and their later struggle still concerns us. At stake is our own future.

¹⁴ Richard Wagner, "Publikum und Popularität," *Bayreuther Blätter*, August and September 1878, *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, vol 10, p. 140 ff.

23. *Incipit Tragoedia*

1

As we turn to Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, first two questions: What are we to make of the fact that the first section of the prologue also appears as par. 342 of *The Gay Science* (1882), virtually identical. In *The Gay Science* this is the paragraph that follows the one (341) that presents the doctrine of the eternal recurrence in subjunctive form:

The greatest stress. How, if some day or night a demon were to sneak after you in your loneliest loneliness and say to you, "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything immeasurably small or great in your life must return to you — all in the same succession and sequence — even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over and over, and you with it, a dust grain of dust." Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or did you once experience a tremendous moment when you would have answered him, "You are a god, and never have I heard anything more godly." If this thought were to gain possession of you, it would change you, as you are, or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, "Do you want this once more and innumerable times more?" would weigh upon your actions as the greatest stress. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life *to crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate confirmation and seal? (101-102)¹⁵

This first section is called in the *Gay Science Incipit tragoedia*: the tragedy begins. The beginning of *Zarathustra* is the beginning of tragedy. But what is the relationship between *Zarathustra* and tragedy? The relationship is emphasized once again

¹⁵ References in the text are to Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1954).

in *The Twilight of the Idols*, in the section called the history of an error, which concludes with the words, *Incipit Zarathustra*:

6. The true world — we have abolished. What world has remained? The apparent one perhaps? But no! *With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one.*

(Noon; moment of the briefest shadow; end of the longest error;
high point of humanity; INCIPIT ZARATHUSTRA

The error whose history is discussed in this section is the mistaken belief in a true world. That world is a cerebral construction, a fable of sorts, which obscures its being only a fable. The history described how that supposedly true world became increasingly more inaccessible, emptier, until finally it disappeared altogether and with it the devaluation of our world into a world of mere appearances. Platonism comes to an end in nihilism. The nihilist still operates with the conception of a true world that should justify becoming, but he can no longer give a content to this conception. The place has become empty. God is dead. The question for us moderns is, according to Nietzsche, how to meet this fact of the death of God. It is precisely tragedy that here provides the answer, as it had already in the *Birth of Tragedy* provided the answer to the nihilistic wisdom of Silenus. Tragedy is understood as an art of affirmation, precisely because it does not deny the negativity of life.

Any distinction between a "true" and an "apparent" world — whether in the Christian manner or in the manner of Kant (in the end, an underhanded Christian) — is only a suggestion of decadence, a symptom of the *decline of life*. That the artist esteems appearance higher than reality is no objection to this proposition. For "appearance" in this case means reality once more, only by way of selection, reinforcement, and correction. The tragic artist is no pessimist: he is precisely the one who says Yes to everything questionable, even to the terrible — he is Dionysian.¹⁶

Tragedy here appears as an alternative to Christianity.

¹⁶ *Twilight of the Idols*, 484 – 2. References in the text are to Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann, Viking paper.

In *Ecce Homo* tragedy is similarly defined as the highest art of saying yes to life. Nietzsche describes himself as the first tragic philosopher. In that same place in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche also writes that wherever he wrote Wagner in *The Birth of Tragedy* work he should have written Nietzsche or Zarathustra. This makes clearer how Nietzsche understood his Zarathustra. The work would seem to be not so much a tragedy as a fictional presentation of a teacher of tragedy. We may of course want to ask whether the work in turn is also a tragedy, the tragedy of Zarathustra's *Untergang*. Or is it perhaps a comedy? Zarathustra at any rate belongs together with Wagner and that means also with Aeschylus. With his teaching Zarathustra projects a tragic ethos. He teaches to affirm life despite the negativity on which tragedy insists. To affirm ourselves fully we have to understand ourselves tragically.

One question remains: art also makes apparent so much that is ugly, hard, and questionable in life; does it not thereby spoil life for us? And indeed there have been philosophers who have attributed this sense to it: "liberation from the will" was what Schopenhauer taught as the over-all end of art; and with admiration he found the great utility of tragedy in its "evoking resignation." "But this, as I have already suggested, is the pessimist's perspective and 'evil eye.' We must appeal to the artists themselves. What does the tragic artist communicate of himself? Is it not precisely the state without fear in the face of the fearful and questionable that he is showing?"¹⁷

2

This brings me to my second question: given Nietzsche's recognition that Wagner was in fact not the new Aeschylus, but had to be interpreted as a phenomenon of decadence, why turn to Zarathustra (ca. 630 - ca. 553)? Where did Nietzsche get the idea? Zarathustra after all is said to be the first one to have fallen into the error of oppositional thinking: opposing light and darkness, good and evil, Ormuzd and Ahriman. A posthumously published fragment gives the answer:

I had to give the honor to Zarathustra, to a *Persian*; Persians were the first to *think* of history as something having unity and greatness. A sequence

¹⁷ *Portable Nietzsche*, 529-30

of developments presided over by a prophet. Every prophet has his *hazar*, his empire of a thousand years.¹⁸

One could perhaps also point to Emerson's *Essays*, where there is mention of a wise man from China who, looking at the prophet Zarathustra, is so impressed by his appearance and gait that he proclaims that these cannot lie and that nothing but truth could issue from them.¹⁹ In the margin Nietzsche wrote *Das ist es!* Perhaps we should also point to St. Augustine who in *The City of God* mentions Zarathustra as the one person who was born laughing instead of crying, but this is taken by Augustine as an unnatural and therefore bad omen: Zarathustra came to a bad end.

Zarathustra is often mentioned in Nietzsche's unpublished notes from the very beginning. In the fall of 1881 he appears as author of aphoristic sayings that later became part of *The Gay Science*, without his name, with the exception of 342.²⁰

3

The first section ends with the words:

Zarathustra wants to become man again. Thus Zarathustra began to go under.

Did he then live an inhuman life? What is Zarathustra's relationship to Plato's philosopher? How do they relate to the sun? The sun is described as ascending to Zarathustra's cave. Zarathustra is thirty when he leaves the lake of his home to go into the mountains, the same age as Christ when he began his ministry; but Zarathustra stays in the mountains for ten years without getting tired, enjoying his solitude. And yet he descends "to become man again." This suggests that human beings are fully human only when they communicate with others. Note the general theme of return. Why does the philosopher king in the *Republic* return to the cave? How is that cave related to Zarathustra's?

Note in this section and throughout, how landscape function as a metaphor. Lake of his home — mountain — forest — city — forest. Times of day have a similar function.

¹⁸ KSA 11, 53 - 25

¹⁹ KSA 14, 279

²⁰ KSA 14, 279

The process of individuation, of becoming a self, demands of Zarathustra, as it demands of us, that he leave the lake of his home, but in this departure he has also lost something important that needs to be recovered.

4

Coming down from his mountain Zarathustra meets a holy man, like Zarathustra someone who has left man behind. This holy man left human beings because he loved them too much. Schopenhauer's asceticism is brought to mind. He loved man and yet measured man by an ideal of perfection no human being can meet. What remains to the hermit are God and the animals.

Zarathustra also loves human beings, but this love is quite different from that of the saint in the forest. It is tied to the bringing of a present; that present is his vision of the overman, his version of Wagner's Siegfried. Yet this present also implies a taking away. For to accept this present one has to acknowledge first that God is dead. The old man asks Zarathustra to stay:

Do not go to man. Stay in the forest! Go rather even to the animals! Why do you not want to be as I am— a bear among bears, a bird among bird?"
(123)

Living simply, as but another animal, the saint praises the god who is his god.

Zarathustra takes his leave:

What could I have to give you? But let me go quickly lest I take something from you! And thus they separated, the old one and the man, laughing as two boys laugh.

But when Zarathustra was alone he spoke thus to his heart: "Could it be possible? This old saint in the forest has not yet heard anything of this, that *God is dead!*" (124)

4

The next four sections are set in the city. People are gathered in the marketplace, waiting for a performance of a tightrope walker. And while they are waiting Zarathustra attempts to give them his gift, the overman: man is something that must be surpassed. Zarathustra speaks of the need to create beyond oneself. Important here is the distinction

between a narcissistic and a procreative eros. But it is not just man that must be surpassed, but more especially a particular conception of man:

“All beings so far have created something beyond themselves; and do you want to be the ebb of this great flood and even go back to the beasts rather than overcome man? What is the ape to man? A laughing stock and a painful embarrassment. And man shall be just that for the overman: a laughing stock or a painful embarrassment. You have made your way from worm to man. Once you were apes, and even now, man is more ape than any ape.

Whoever is the wisest among you is also a mere conflict and cross between plant and ghost. But do I bid you become plants or ghosts?”
(124)

The word "ghost" here suggests that process described in the "History of an Error," which lets the dimension of what is higher become ever emptier. Schopenhauer had inverted that picture and that inversion informs Zarathustra's message: what is put in the place of God is "the meaning of the earth."

“Behold, I teach you the overman. The overman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the overman shall be the meaning of the earth! I beseech you, my brothers, remain faithful to the earth, and do not believe those who speak to you of otherworldly hopes! Poison-mixers are they, whether they know it or not. Despisers of life are they, decaying and poisoning themselves, of whom the earth is weary: so let them go.” (125)

The overman is Zarathustra's attempt to articulate the meaning of the earth.

The human being who has overcome that human being caught between plant and ghost has also overcome the shame he feels before himself, a shame that speaks in the words of the old saint who finds man far too imperfect. Such shame can be raised to disgust and contempt:

“Once the soul looked contemptuously upon the body, and then this contempt was the highest: she wanted the body meager, ghastly, and starved. Thus she hoped to escape it and the earth. Oh, this soul herself was still meager, ghastly, and starved: and cruelty was the lust of this soul. But you, too, my brothers, tell me: what does your body proclaim of your

soul? Is not your soul poverty and filth and wretched contentment?"

Verily a polluted stream is man. One must be a sea to be able to receive a polluted stream without becoming unclean. Behold, I teach you the overman: he is this sea; in him your great contempt can go under."

(125)

In the overman such contempt is drowned. This does suggest that the tragic vision grows out of a nihilistic one. Schopenhauer must come before Nietzsche.

The ending of this section is interesting:

"Behold, I teach you the overman: he is this lightning, he is this frenzy."

When Zarathustra had spoken thus, one of the people cried: Now we have heard enough about the tightrope walker; now let us see him, too!" And all the people laughed at Zarathustra. But the tightrope walker, believing that the word concerned him, began his performance. (PN 126)

What is the similarity between the tightrope walker and the overman? The tightrope walker dances above other men. He lives a life of danger. He makes danger his profession, living with the constant threat of falling to his death: a metaphor for the human condition that is spelled out in the next section:

"Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman — a rope over an abyss. A dangerous across, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and stopping.

"What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that he is an overture and a going under." (126-127)

Man is said to be "a rope between animal and overman." This formulation takes the place of the two that preceded it and placed man

1. between animal and God.
2. between plant and ghost.

2 retains the basic anthropology of 1. It could be illustrated by turning back to Schopenhauer.

Man is a going beyond himself, going to something else, but this something else is not an ideal for the sake of which he is acting. That ideal has its foundation in the going beyond.

Why does Zarathustra say that he loves "those who cast golden words before their deeds and always do more than they promise"? (127-128)

In *The Genealogy of Morals Nietzsche* was to suggest that the human being is truly human only when he calls himself to account, when he can make promises. The human being needs to act according to principles. These principles are not given to him. He must himself create them. They are part of the human being's attempt to articulate the meaning of the earth. But being just conjectures they should retain their measure in the earth. It is for this reason that we should allow our actions to overflow our principles. Again we meet with the tension between the Apollinian and the Dionysian.

"I love him who justifies future and redeems past generations: for he wants to perish of the present." (128)

The man who justifies the future cannot appeal to the future to give a meaning to his life. Neither can he appeal to an after-life or a millennium. The present has priority over the future. In what we are and do we should justify the future. We must live in such a way that our life demands a future.

Why is the past in need of redemption? In itself the past has no meaning, no more than does human being. But we can give the past a meaning by providing it with a meaningful end, the present, and by interpreting the past as leading to that end. What Hegel does with history we, too have to do, only with more open eyes, keeping in mind that all such interpretations are but human creations.

But what are we to make of:

"I love him who chastens his god because he loves his god; for he must perish of the wrath of his god." (128)

Has Zarathustra not said that God is dead? Here, however, he speaks not of God, but of "his god." The gods are human creations. But this does not mean that they are therefore arbitrary. They are, we can say, natural illusions. Think of Apollo and Dionysus, or of Hera and Aphrodite. In them the meaning of the earth finds expression. They are themselves Apollinian images. In them the Dionysian ground of our existence has been chastened.

But notice that in the second part of the sentence there is the suggestion that the god has a quite independent reality. What does "chasten" mean here? *Züchtigen, in die Zucht nehmen*, sublimation, to give Apollinian form to the divine, as we do when we

articulate or fashion an image of it? But by so doing, we also do violence to the divine. Consider the insistence in many religions that God not be named or imprisoned in an image. In chastening god we do violence to him and he revenges himself. And yet we cannot do without such violence. In the anger of the god the divine reasserts itself. Nietzsche's earth is numinous in Otto's sense, a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. What is meant here by earth invites comparison with Schopenhauer's will.

5

Zarathustra does not succeed in reaching the people in the marketplace. Addressing their pride Zarathustra speaks of what is "most contemptible," of the last man. Overman and last man belong together. Zarathustra wants to bring both to the people—a new love and something they should despise.

"The time will come for man to set himself a goal. The time has come for man to plant the seed of his highest hope. His soil is still rich enough. But one day this soil will be poor and domesticated, and no tall tree will be able to grow in it. Alas, the time is coming when man will no longer shoot the arrow of his longing beyond man, and the string of his bow will have forgotten how to whirl!

"I say unto you: one must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star. I say unto you: you still have chaos in yourselves.

"Alas the time is coming when man will no longer give birth to a star. Alas the time of the most despicable man is coming, he that is no longer able to despise himself. Behold, I show you the *last man*.

"What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?" Thus asks the last man, and he blinks. (129)

How are we to understand this blinking of the last man?

"One still works, for work is a form of entertainment. One no longer becomes poor or rich: both require too much exertion. Who still wants to rule? Who obey? Both require too much exertion.

"No shepherd and one herd! Everybody wants the same, everybody is the same: whoever feels different goes voluntarily into a madhouse.

"Formerly, all the world was mad," say the most refined, and they blink.

...

"One has one's little pleasure for the day and one's little pleasure for the night: but one has a regard for health.

"We have invented happiness,' say the last men, and they blink." (130)

The last man lives as one lives. The last man no longer has ideals, nor does he seem to miss them. He is happy with his little pleasures. The overman just interferes with such happiness.

6

The next section is perhaps the most puzzling. A fellow in motley clothes appears. He is also a tightrope walker:

Then something happened that made every mouth dumb and every eye rigid. For meanwhile the tightrope walker had begun his performance: he had stepped out of a small door and was walking over the rope, stretched between two towers and suspended over the market place and the people. When he had reached the exact middle of his course the small door opened once more and a fellow in motley clothes, looking like a jester, jumped out and followed the first one with quick steps. (131)

What do we make of the fact that this person is said to be a fellow in motley clothes? Patchwork. Eclecticism. In Book 4 the old magician will be described as another such fellow dressed up in motley fashion. But the old magician is, among other things, a figure of Wagner. And we should keep in mind that there is much about Zarathustra that reminds one of this jester. Consider these words:

"To my goal I will go — on my own way; over those who hesitate and lag behind I shall leap. Thus let my going be their going under." (136)

Is he, like Wagner, another such jester? Think back to the later preface to *The Birth of Tragedy*, where Nietzsche suggests that it is just a piece of German music. Nietzsche, Wagner, and Zarathustra intertwine. The magician, the poet who traffics in the tatters of former myths, patches them together—is this not what Nietzsche criticizes as romanticism? But is not this the collage style of *Zarathustra*—a patchwork of the New Testament, Goethe, Heine, Plato, Schopenhauer? Is Nietzsche therefore like the old magician?

"Foreward, lamefoot!" he shouted in an awe-inspiring voice.

"Foreward, lazybones, smuggler, pale-face, or I shall tickle you with my heel! What are you doing here between towers? The tower is where you belong. You ought to be locked up; you block the way for one better than yourself." And with every word he came closer and closer; but when he was but one step behind, the dreadful thing happened which made every mouth dumb and every eye rigid, he uttered a devilish cry and jumped over the man who stood in his way. This man, however, seeing his rival win, lost his head and the rope, tossed away his pole, and plunged in to the depth even faster, a whirlpool of arms and legs. The market place became as the sea when a tempest pierces it: the people rushed apart and over one another, especially at the place where the body must have hit the ground.

The tightrope walker loses his head, the rope, falls and dies. Zarathustra promises to bury him with his own hands. What are we to make of this?

7

Musing over the dead tightrope walker. Zarathustra offers us yet another description, but now not of human being in general, but of himself as he appears to the many, rather like a jester, someone in between a fool and a corpse. (132) The corpse belongs to what has been: Zarathustra has found real companions only among the dead. This has to refer to the Greeks and to their tragic way of life. The jester, I suggested, stands for Wagner. Zarathustra here thus figures Nietzsche, standing in between Wagner and the Greeks.

Warnings by the jester, Wagner, and the jeers of the gravediggers, the philologists, accompany Zarathustra as he leaves town. He is tolerated only as long as he

is put in the role of someone like Wagner, a poet, not to be taken too seriously; or as someone serving a dead past. And yet, the nature of Zarathustra's service distinguishes him from society's gravediggers.

After some journeying Zarathustra and his dead companion are offered bread and wine by a hermit at whose house Zarathustra knocks. Important is that the same food is served to the dead and the living, important also that this food is bread and wine. That food, especially the wine, suggests not only the Christian sacrament, but also Dionysus.

After a long sleep Zarathustra decides that he needs living, not dead companions, but he also realizes that that he cannot speak to the people on the marketplace. He is going to look for a few companions, for disciples who will spread his word. *Zarathustra* proposes an elitist conception of education.

The last section returns to Zarathustra's two animals, eagle and serpent, which now appear joined in an emblem soaring in the sky. Note how the succession of landscape images and references to times of day suggest a spiral:

mountain — forest — city — forest
 morning — evening (death of the tightrope walker)— night
 (carrying the corpse) — morning (Zarathustra sleeping) — noon
 (Zarathustra awakens)

Noon: INCIPIT ZARATHUSTRA

24. The Problem of Time and the Eternal Recurrence

1

The first part of *Zarathustra* implies a twofold critique of the established Platonic-Christian value system. It is on one hand attacked for its form: by absolutizing values in such a way that they prevent a genuine openness to claims, they cut values off from their, if Nietzsche is right, inevitably temporal foundations, or better, deny values the soil from which they arise and in which they must retain their roots to live. Thus cut off from their affective ground values have to become hollow shells.

But that value system is also criticized for its content. The values central to Platonism and Christianity seem to Nietzsche to be born of a rancor against time and thus against the body. But perhaps these two points are related: the investment in timeless form is itself governed by a rancor against time.

2

There is a more fundamental question: why do human beings need values at all? Key here is the problem of decision: Suppose I have lost my way. When several possibilities beckon and we need to make a decision, we have to take a stance towards our desires or whatever claims us; we begin to look for some guidepost, some authority to which we can appeal to make that decision. But if that decision is not to be experienced as something imposed on us, but as something we really choose, that authority has to be understood in such a way that it issues from within us. In the end authority must rest with the self. That is to say, we require something like our own ideal image, an image that we recognize as our measure. The traditional understanding of human being as created in the image of God gave one answer to this need, an answer that Zarathustra challenges with his teaching of the overman, or, more generally with his insistence that all such measures, all values and gods be understood as human creations. They are only parables. In them we recognize, if only obscurely, the meaning of our own existence.

The overman is another such conjecture, a human creation. Zarathustra likens it to a sculpture.

But my fervent will to create impels me ever again toward man;
thus is the hammer impelled toward the stone. O men, in the stone there
sleeps an image, the image of my images. Alas, that it must sleep in the

hardest, the ugliest stone! Pieces of rock rain from the stone: what is that to me? I want to perfect it; for a shadow came to me — the stillest and lightest of all things once came to me. The beauty of the overman came to me as a shadow. O, my brothers, what are the gods to me now? (199-200)

3

How does Zarathustra understand beauty? We are given an answer in the section *On Those Who Are Sublime*. Note that beauty is opposed here to the sublime, where beauty is the positive term:

One who was sublime I saw today, one who was solemn, an ascetic of the spirit; oh, how my soul laughed at his ugliness! With a swelled chest and like one who holds in his breath, he stood there, the sublime one, silent, decked out with ugly truths, the spoil of his hunting, and rich in torn garments; many thorns too adorned him — yet I saw no rose. (228- 229)

But let me focus on the important definition of beauty we are given in that sermon:

His arm placed over his head: thus should the hero rest; thus should he overcome even his rest. But just for the hero the *beautiful* is the most difficult thing. No violent will can attain the beautiful by exertion. "A little more, a little less" precisely this counts for much here, this matters most here.

To stand with relaxed muscles and a harnessed will; that is most difficult for all of you who are sublime.

When power becomes gracious and descends into the visible — such descent I call beauty (230)

What does it mean for power to become "gracious" (*gnädig*) and to descend into the visible? What is "grace"? Nietzsche understands human being as willing power, lacking power. And all too often the human being finds it impossible to forgive himself his own lack of power. It is just this that fills him with the spirit of revenge. It is this spirit that lets us resent the greater power of others.

Consider the sermon *On the Tarantulas*:

There it comes willingly: welcome, tarantula! Your triangle and symbol sits black on your back; and I also know what sits in your soul. Revenge sits in your soul: wherever you bite, black scabs grow; your poison makes the soul whirl with revenge. (211)

Note that the tarantula is characterized in two ways: the symbol of the Trinity is tied to the spirit of revenge. The overcoming of the spirit of revenge is a presupposition of the creation of the overman:

For *that man be delivered from revenge*, that is for me the bridge to the highest hope, and a rainbow after long storms. (211)

Interesting is the ending of this sermon, which suggests that Zarathustra himself is not free from the spirit of revenge.

Alas: then the tarantula, my old enemy, bit me. . . .

Indeed, it has avenged itself. And alas, now it will make my soul too, whirl with revenge. (214)

Zarathustra himself will become weary and long for the night.

'It was' — that is the name of the will's gnashing of teeth and most secret melancholy. Powerless against what has been done, he is an angry spectator of all that is past. That the will cannot will backwards; and that he cannot break time and time's covetousness, that is the will's loneliest melancholy." (251)

With this we have returned to the topic of time.

That time does not run backwards, that is his wrath; 'that which was' is the stone he cannot move. And so he moves stones out of wrath and displeasure, and he wreaks revenge on whatever does not feel wrath and displeasure as he does. Thus the will, the liberator, took to hurting; and on all who can suffer he wreaks revenge for his inability to go backwards. This, indeed this alone, is what revenge is: the will's ill will against time and its 'it was.' (251)

In the **spirit of revenge** Nietzsche locates the deepest source of all self-alienation. It is the power that cripples. It is also the power that lets us long for **redemption**. What we want to be redeemed from is time, mortality.

But how can we affirm all that is dreadful in the past, past suffering, pointless death, torture, murder? By telling a story about it? By emphasizing something like reason in history? To overcome the spirit of revenge we have to learn to will the past, to will backward. And this is what is most difficult:

But has the will yet spoken thus? And when will that happen? Has the will been unharnessed yet from his own folly? Has the will yet become his own joy-bringer? Has he unlearned the spirit of revenge and all gnashing of teeth? And who taught him reconciliation with time and something higher than any reconciliation; but how shall this be brought about? Who could teach him also to will backwards? (253)

The rhetorical question startles Zarathustra. He stands on the threshold of the thought of the eternal recurrence, even as he still shies away from this threshold.

4

I said that it is in the **spirit of revenge**, the ill will against time, that Nietzsche locates the deepest source of all self-alienation. It lets us long for **redemption**. What we want to be redeemed from is time, mortality. Nietzsche knows this desire all too well. Consider the section "The Soothsayer," which precedes the sermon in which Zarathustra teaches his version of redemption.

"And I saw a great sadness descend upon mankind. The best grew weary of their works. A doctrine appeared, accompanied by a faith: 'All is empty, all is the same, all has been!' And from the hills it echoes: All is empty, all is the same, all has been!'" (245)

Zarathustra, too, who has already been bitten by the tarantula, is touched by this Schopenhauerian faith and becomes weary.

Thus grieved in his heart, Zarathustra walked about, and for three days he took neither food nor drink, had no rest, and lost his speech. At last he fell into a deep sleep. But his disciples sat around him in long night watches and waited with great concern for him to wake and speak again and recover from his melancholy. (246)

Sleeping, he dreams.

"Listen to the dream which I dreamed, my friends, and help me guess its meaning. This dream is still a riddle to me; its meaning is concealed in it and imprisoned and does not yet soar above it with unfettered wings.

"I had turned my back on all life, thus I dreamed. I had become a night watchman and a guardian of tombs upon the lonely mountain castle of death. Up there I guarded his coffins: the musty walls were full of such marks of triumph. Life that had been overcome looked at me out of glass coffins. I breathed the odor of dusty eternities: sultry and dusty lay my soul. And who could have aired his soul there?

"The brightness of midnight was always about me; loneliness crouched next to it; and as a third, death-rattling silence, the worst of my friends. I had keys, the rustiest of all keys; and I knew how to use them to open the most creaking of all gates. Like a wickedly angry croaking, the sound rang through the corridors when the gate's wings moved: fiendishly cried this bird, ferocious at being awakened. Yet still more terrible and heart constricting was the moment when silence returned and it grew quiet about me, and I sat alone in this treacherous silence.

"Thus time passed and crawled, if time still existed — how should I know? But eventually that happened which awakened me. Thrice, strokes struck at the gate like thunder; the vaults echoed and howled thrice; then I went to the gate: 'Alpa,' I cried, 'who is carrying his ashes up the mountain? Alpa! Alpa! Who is carrying his ashes up the mountain?' And I pressed the key and tried to lift the gate and exerted myself; but still it did not give an inch. Then a roaring wind tore its wings apart; whistling, shrilling, and piercing, it cast up a black coffin before me.

"And amid the roaring and whistling and shrilling the coffin burst and spewed out a thousandfold laughter. And from a thousand grimaces of children, angels, owls, fools, and butterflies as big as children, it laughed and mocked and roared at me. Then I was terribly frightened; it threw me to the ground. And I cried in horror as I have never cried. And my own cry awakened me — and I came to my senses." (246-247)

His favorite disciple offers an interpretation that identifies Zarathustra with the wind and the coffin. Zarathustra rejects it.

5

The first and the second book had both closed with Zarathustra taking leave from his friends. At the end of Part One this leave-taking is said to be for the sake of his disciples who have to learn to walk alone, learn to resist Zarathustra, to even deny him, so that they may become themselves and his friends in higher sense. The leave-taking from his friends at the end of the Second Part is for the sake of Zarathustra himself, who knows "it", and yet resists what he knows and does "not want to say it" (257).

"The pride of youth is still upon you; you have become young late; but whoever would become as a child must overcome his youth too." And I reflected for a long time and trembled. But at last I said what I had said at first: "I do not want to."

Then laughter surrounded me. Alas, how this laughter tore my entrails and slit open my heart! And it spoke to me for the last time: "O Zarathustra, your fruit is ripe, but you are not yet ripe for your fruit. Thus you must return to your solitude again; for you must yet become mellow." (259)

The theme of homecoming is raised explicitly in the very beginning of the Third Part, in the section called "The Wanderer."

I am a wanderer and mountain-climber he said to his heart; I do not like the plains, and it seems I cannot sit still for long. And whatever may yet come to me as destiny and experience will include some wandering and mountain climbing: in the end, one experiences only oneself. The time is gone when mere accidents could still happen to me; and what could still come to me now that was not mine already? What returns, what finally comes home to me, is my own self and what of myself has long been in strange lands and scattered among all things and accidents. And one further thing I know: I stand before my final peak now and before that which has been saved up for me the longest. Alas, I have begun my

loneliest walk! But whoever is of my kind cannot escape such an hour — the hour which says to him:

"Only now are you going your way to greatness! Peak and abyss — they are now joined together."

Homecoming is described here as a homecoming of the self to the self. This homecoming is also a self-integration, where we should keep in mind the traditional Platonic understanding of recollection as a kind of homecoming. What comes home, Zarathustra tells us, is that of himself that had long been in strange lands and scattered among all things.

Note that the integration that here is placed in the future is described as also a return to the origin, to what was. Homecoming means an appropriation of the past that is inseparable from full self-affirmation: "The time is gone when mere accidents could happen to me." This raises the question of what is required so that a human being may understand him- or herself in such a way that accidents can no longer happen to him or her? Was the fact that I was born at a particular time, of a particular sex, into a particular family, an accident? The integrating love of self requires *amor fati*.

But at this stage Zarathustra has not yet achieved such self-integration. It still awaits him as a task, requires further journeying.

6

In the very next section Nietzsche first presents the thought of the eternal recurrence. Important is to whom he tells his vision:

To you, the bold searchers, researchers (*Versucher*), and whoever embarks with cunning sails on terrible seas — to you, drunk with riddles, glad of the twilight, whose souls flutes lure astray to every whirlpool, because you do not want to grapple along a thread with cowardly hand; and where you can guess, you hate to deduce — to you alone I tell the riddle that I saw, the vision of the loneliest. (267-268)

The German is important there—*Versucher* means first of all tempter, also someone who has lost his way seeking, who is intellectually at sea—as is the reference to seafaring.

Nietzsche liked to think himself in the image of Columbus, as a Genoese.²¹

Zarathustra describes a journey.

Not long ago I walked gloomily through the deadly pallor of dusk — gloomy and hard, with lips pressed together. Not only one sun had set for me. A path that ascended defiantly through stones, malicious, lonely, not cheered by herb or shrub — a mountain path crunched under the defiance of my foot. Striding silently over the mocking clatter of pebbles, crushing the rock that made it slip, my foot forced its way upward. Upward, defying the spirit that drew it downward toward the abyss, the spirit of gravity, my devil and archenemy. Upward—although he sat on me, half dwarf, half mole, lame, making lame, dripping lead into my ear, leaden thoughts into my brain. (268)

Who is the dwarf: the spirit of gravity? The question is important, because it is the dwarf who first announces the doctrine that time is not a straight line.

This is not the first mention of this dwarf. Earlier he had been introduced as Zarathustra's devil:

I would believe only in a god who could dance. And when I saw my devil I found him serious, thorough, profound, and solemn: it was the spirit of gravity — through him all things fall." (153)

The dwarf returns in the "Dancing Song":

"Do not cease dancing, you lovely girls! No killjoy has come to you with evil eyes, no enemy of girls. God's advocate am I before the devil: but the devil is the spirit of gravity." (219, G 364)

A fuller explanation is given later in the section entitled "The Spirit of Gravity."

We are presented with grave words and values almost from the cradle: "good" and "evil" this gift is called. For its sake we are forgiven for living.

²¹ See Karsten Harries, "The Philosopher at Sea," *Nietzsche's New Seas. Explorations in Philosophy, Aesthetics, and Politics*, ed. Michael Allen Gillespie and Tracy B. Strong (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988), pp. 21-44.

And therefore one suffers little children to come unto one—in order to forbid them betimes to love themselves: Thus the spirit of gravity orders it. (305-306, G 441)

The spirit of gravity, who imposes grave words and values, is thus the God that gave Moses the law. Zarathustra has recast the old God as his devil because he presents us with a law that is brought to us from without, as Moses carried God's tablets down from Mount Sinai. Thus he stands in the way of Zarathustra's commandment: love thyself, which commands also *amor fati*.

The spirit of gravity mocks Zarathustra:

"O Zarathustra," he whispered mockingly, syllable by syllable; "you philosopher's stone! You threw yourself up high, but every stone that is thrown must fall. O Zarathustra, you philosopher's stone, you slingstone, you star-crusher! You threw yourself up so high; but every stone that is thrown must fall. Sentenced to yourself and to your own stoning—O Zarathustra, far indeed have you thrown the stone, but it will fall back on yourself." (268)

The dwarf here speaks of the futility of the attempt to place our creations, to cast ourselves in such a way ahead of ourselves that our work can take the place of God, speaks of the futility of the overman.

Then the dwarf fell silent, and that lasted a long time. His silence, however, oppressed me; and such twosomeness is surely more lonesome than being alone. I climbed, I climbed, I dreamed, I dreamed, I thought; but everything oppressed me. I was like one sick whom his wicked torture makes weary, and who as he falls asleep is awakened by a still more wicked dream. (268-269)

The dwarf falls silent: God has become silent. God's silence is nihilism. This silence recalls the melancholy that seized Zarathustra after he had heard the soothsayer, where the German is important, the *Wahrsager*, i.e. he who says the truth: the truth that there is no God. But even this truth burdens us. So our identification of the spirit of gravity with the old God would seem not to have been quite right. The spirit of gravity is rather the spirit of the place that God occupied and that now has become empty. But the spirit of that place is the spirit of revenge.

Zarathustra confronts the spirit of gravity with a courage that lets him pronounce an either-or: Either God is the author of meaning or Zarathustra, that is to say the human being, that human being whose beginning was said to be the beginning of tragedy.

"Stop dwarf!" I said. "It is I or you! But I am the stronger of us two: you do not know my abysmal thought. That you could not bear. (269)

We should note the reversed order: I and you. The dwarf is now confronted with Zarathustra's abysmal thought. The spirit of gravity weighs on us only as long as we are possessed by the spirit of revenge. But just this the thought of the eternal recurrence is to overcome.

"Behold this gateway, dwarf!" I continued. "It has two faces. Two paths meet here; no one has yet followed either to its end. This long lane stretches back for an eternity. And the long lane out there, that is another eternity. They contradict each other, these paths, they offend each other face to face; and it is here at this gateway that they come together. The name of the gateway is inscribed above: "moment." But whoever would follow one of them, on and on, farther and farther—do you believe dwarf, that these paths contradict each other eternally?" (269-270/G408)

Zarathustra presents his thought as a question or a riddle. But the spirit of gravity seems quite unimpressed. He gives his answer rather quickly and contemptuously.

"All that is straight lies," the dwarf murmured contemptuously.

"All truth is crooked; time itself is a circle." (270)

Why is the dwarf able to move so easily to the thought that time is a circle. Why does the spirit of gravity have so little difficulty thinking the thought of the eternal recurrence? The answer becomes obvious once we understand the spirit of gravity as a mask of the old God. For the old God dwells in eternity. Try now to think the relationship of this eternal God to time. God must be thought of as equidistant from every point of time. God is the center of that circle which is creation. I would thus suggest that the thought of the eternal recurrence had to suggest itself to Christian theologians, as indeed it did.²²

The question then is: **why does Zarathustra reject the dwarf's reply?**

²² See Georges Poulet, *The Metamorphoses of the Circle*, trans. Carley Dawson and Elliott Coleman in collaboration with the author. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967).

In Zarathustra's formulation the thought is different in that it accepts the linearity of time and does not attempt to think it from an external vantage point. Eternity here seems to mean something like endlessness. The problem is: how are we to think this endlessness.

But let us look carefully at Nietzsche's text: "must not whatever can walk have walked down this lane before?" How are we to think: whatever can walk, whatever can happen? We are asked to think a totality of possibilities. If you wish, we are to think logical space as a limited whole. Some propositions from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*²³ come to mind:

6. 45 The contemplation of the world *sub specie aeterni* is its contemplation as a limited whole.

The feeling of the world as a limited whole is the mystical feeling.

6. 522. There is indeed the inexpressible. This *shows* itself; it is the mystical.

Nietzsche might be said to attempt say what is *inexpressible*, but nevertheless shows itself. It has its base in an experience.

But what kind of experience are we talking about? An aesthetic experience? Is Zarathustra a poet rather than a philosopher? But has Zarathustra himself not said that "the poets lie too much?" And did he not call himself a poet? I shall try to finish up the discussion of *Zarathustra* next time.

²³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge, 1922).

25. Tragedy and Redemption

1

I would like to begin this session by returning to the section *On the Vision and the Riddle* and to the difference between the spirit of gravity's statement that time is a circle and Zarathustra's statement of the eternal recurrence.

I suggested that the spirit of gravity can be understood as a figure of the old God. His standpoint is that of eternity. Looking at time from that standpoint, it closes into a circle. Georges Poulet, in his *Metamorphoses of the Circle*, quotes a number of medieval thinkers who express a rather similar point of view. We must see how traditional, indeed unavoidable from the standpoint of the spirit of gravity, this thought is. Nor does it depend on the assumption of the Christian God. It suggests itself also when we assume, with Schopenhauer, e.g., the eternity of the will and attempt to think the realm of representations as an expression of that will. The difficulty is of course with the idea of eternity. What right do we have to think the temporal world as an expression or the work of some eternal being?

Zarathustra's own explanation appears different from the dwarf's in that it takes time more seriously. Crucial to his reflection is the thought of *whatever can walk*, of *whatever can happen*. Whatever can possibly be is here thought as a totality, as a limited whole. This to say, the substance of the world, say the number of fundamental elements, say atoms, is assumed to be finite. From this it would follow that the number of possible world states would also be finite. Given the endless regress that Zarathustra invites us to think we necessarily get the thought of recurrence.

This is essentially the argument that Nietzsche gives in a remark that came to be included in *The Will to Power*.²⁴

1066. If the world may be thought of as a certain definite quantity of force and as a certain definite number of centers of force—and every other representation remains indefinite and therefore useless—it follows that in the great dice game of existence, it must pass through a calculable number of combinations. In infinite time, every possible

²⁴ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, translated by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, (Random House: New York, 1967).

combination would at some time or another be realized: moreover, it would be realized an infinite number of times. And since between every combination and its next recurrence all other possible combinations would have to take place, and each of these combinations conditions the entire sequence of combinations in the same series, a circular movement of absolutely identical series is thus demonstrated.

Note that the thought is expressed in the subjunctive. The only useful way of thinking the world is said to be to think it as definite. But is it more than a mere thought?

Note that this thought defeats contingency. And to do so, it would seem, it does not have to assume the dwarf's vantage point and posit an eternal being outside time.

And yet, it should be obvious that here the idea of determination is inseparable from that of eternity. The elements that enter into different combinations have to preserve their distinct character through time. **They take the place of eternal being.** But, as Kant points out, the world is not given to us as a whole. Our thought of it as such a whole remains a mere idea of reason. It is thus significant that Nietzsche speaks of the eternal recurrence most often in the subjunctive, although he also suggests that science will support that thought. Thus he writes:

WP 1063. The law of the conservation of energy demands eternal recurrence.

But we must keep in mind that for Nietzsche the truths of science are not truths at all, if by truth is meant the congruence with things as they are. They are conjectures that give us power. The standpoint of thought is not understood here as one that allows access to things as they are. Quite the opposite:

WP 516. Suppose there were no self-identical "A", such as is presupposed by every proposition of logic (and of mathematics), and the "A" were already mere appearance, then logic would have a merely apparent world as its condition, ... The A of logic is, like the atom, a reconstruction of the thing... Logic is the attempt to comprehend the actual world by means of a scheme posited by ourselves; more correctly, to make it formulable and calculable for us —

The will to power that finds expression in logic triumphs in technology.

Remember that the reconstruction of things on which the will to power depends presupposes the power of reason to subsume a multiplicity of particulars under a concept. Implicit in this generality of the concept is its timelessness. But if Nietzsche is right, such determination does violence to what it determines. This is to say that the Cartesian idea of a fully determinate, clear and distinct perception rests on a confusion. Note what Descartes has to say about the distinct:

Principle XLV. But the distinct is that which is so precise and different from all other objects that it contains within itself nothing but what is clear.²⁵

The distinct is all present to the regarding eye. It is clearly marked off from all other objects. It is thus essentially a whole. But we are never given such wholes. As Nietzsche puts it: we have no organ for the truth. Truth is a construct born of the will to power.

Our thought of things as wholes in this sense is always only an idea. Perception does not offer us totalities. Like the idea of the world whole, I have elemental wholes only as ideas. They are never given. To insist on a perception of the whole and that includes also insistence on a perception that is in the Cartesian sense clear and distinct is not to take seriously enough the finitude of the human situation.

But must we then not say the same of the thought of the eternal recurrence? Is it more than a mere thought, a transcendent idea in Kant's sense, meaningless rather than demonstrably true or false, an idea at any rate than can never be given adequate support?

2

But before going on with this train of thought, let me continue with *On the Vision and the Riddle*. The thought of the eternal recurrence is found frightening.

Thus I spoke, more and more softly; for I was afraid of my own thoughts and the thoughts behind my thoughts. Then suddenly I heard a dog howl nearby. Had I ever heard a dog howl like this? My thoughts raced back. Yes, when I was a child, in the most distant childhood: then I heard a dog howl like this. And I saw him, too, bristling, his head up, trembling, in the

²⁵ René Descartes, *The Philosophical Works*, trans. Elizabeth Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (New York: Dover, 1955), vol.1, p. 237.

stillest midnight when even dogs believe in ghosts—and I took pity: for just then the full moon, silent as death, passed over the house; just then it stood still, a round glow—still on the flat roof, as if on another's property—that was why the dog was terrified, for dogs believe in thieves and ghosts. And when I heard such howling again I took pity again. (270)

The dog's howling leads to pity, which had been called the deepest abyss. Note here the fusion of past and present.

A new image follows:

Where was the dwarf gone now? And the gateway? And the spider? And all the whispering? Was I dreaming then? Was I waking up? Among wild cliffs I stood suddenly alone, bleak, in the bleakest moonlight. But there lay a man. And there—the dog, jumping, bristling, whining—now he saw me coming; then he howled again; he cried. Had I ever heard a dog cry like this for help? And verily, what I saw, I had never seen the like. A young shepherd I saw. Writhing, gagging, in spasms, his face distorted and a heavy black snake hand out of is mouth. Had I ever seen so much nausea and pale dread on one face? He seemed to have been asleep when the snake crawled into his throat, and there bit itself fast. My hand tore at the snake and tore in vain; it did not tear the snake out of his throat. Then it cried out of me: "Bite! Bite its head off! Bite!" thus it cried out of me—my dread, my hatred, my nausea, my pity, all that is good and wicked in me cried out of me with a single cry. (271)

Later, in the section *The Convalescent*, we are given an interpretation.

The great disgust with man—this choked me and had crawled into my throat, and what the soothsayer said: 'All is the same, nothing is worthwhile, knowledge chokes.' A long twilight limped before me, a sadness, weary to death, drunken with death, speaking with a yawning mouth. 'Eternally recurs the man of whom you are weary, the small man'—thus yawned my sadness and dragged its feet and could not go to sleep. Man's earth turned into a cave for me, its chest sunken; all that is living became human mold and bones and musty past to me. My sighing

sat on all human tombs and could no longer get up; my sighing and questioning croaked and gagged and gnawed and wailed by day and night:

'Alas, man recurs eternally! The small man returns eternally! (331)

To someone who cannot affirm life, someone filled with Schopenhauerian pity, the thought of the eternal recurrence has to appear as a negative thought, which just compounds the burden character of life. It only serves to make that burden infinite.

And consider how negative that thought is: it suggests a process without either goal or purpose, just the opposite of the Christian conception of time, which is future oriented: life is here given a goal that is placed beyond life, a contradictory goal: eternal life.

How should we understand the biting off of the head of the snake? The thought of the eternal recurrence has its foundation in the affirmation of life in all its negativity. But this is the mood of tragedy. This is why **tragedy and the doctrine of the eternal recurrence belong together**. Tragedy is to provide an alternative to religion.

3

But Zarathustra suggests that this thought is more than just an idea. It has its foundation in a particular mode of perceiving what is, one governed by courage and *amor fati*. Such love transfigures, perfects our perceptions. The doctrine of the eternal recurrence thus has its foundation in something like an aesthetic, perhaps we should say mystical or religious experience. We could indeed try to define aesthetic experience as the experience of something as a whole. I would insist that this whole is imaginary, a product of the *Einbildungskraft*.

Nietzsche describes the thought of the eternal recurrence as the thought that allows for the fullest self-affirmation. The mood that accomplishes such gathering is *amor fati*. That love so completely embraces the self that it must also embrace the world. And like all love it idealizes what it embraces, that is to say, makes it whole.

I have suggested that this idealizing love gives birth to the thought of the eternal recurrence. But is such idealization really compatible with full affirmation? The thought of the eternal recurrence is to allow for the most complete affirmation of all that is. As a teacher of the eternal recurrence Zarathustra is to play the part of the great tragic poets. But does that thought really allow us to embrace reality; does it not rather, precisely

because it attempts to embrace **all** of reality, **overleap reality**? — is it a thought born of the spirit of revenge?

5

The story that Nietzsche tells in the Third Part of *Zarathustra* is no doubt one that shows *Zarathustra* struggling with and seeming to overcome the spirit of revenge. But does he really succeed? Consider *The Other Dancing Song* and the *The Seven Seals* with which the third book concludes.

The first shows *Zarathustra* between his two loves, life and wisdom.

Then life looked back and around thoughtfully and said softly: "O *Zarathustra*, you are not faithful enough to me. You do not love me nearly as much as you say; I know you are thinking of leaving me soon. There is an old heavy, heavy growl-bell that growls at night all the way up to your cave; when you hear this bell strike the hour at midnight, then you think between one and twelve—you think, O *Zarathustra*, I know it, of how you want to leave me soon."

"Yes" I answered hesitantly, "but you also know—"and I whispered something into her ear, right through her tangled yellow foolish tresses.

"You know that, O *Zarathustra*? Nobody knows that."

And we looked at each other and gazed on the green meadow over which the cool evening sun was running just then, and we wept together. But then life was dearer to me than all my wisdom ever was. (221)

Is it life *Zarathustra* loves or his wisdom?

Every section of *The Seven Seals* ends with the same words?

For I love you, O eternity!

But is this not an old Platonic theme: we find it impossible to make peace with time and so we retreat from time to eternity. Must the thought of the eternal recurrence not bring with it a downgrading of all that ties us into time? Of care, anticipation, suffering, — and human love, that love that looks beyond itself, beyond the beloved, to the offspring of that love, to children. *Zarathustra* and Nietzsche himself confess that they never found the woman of whom they want children. But what kind of child can eternity give birth to? The dwarf has already hinted at the answer: the thought that time is a circle.

Inseparable from the thought of the eternal recurrence is the thought of the cosmically expanded self. But this expansion of the self is imaginary, is only poetry. The love of Zarathustra would seem to be a barren, narcissistic love.

To test that interpretation, consider the *Drunken Song* of the Fourth Part, which offers an interpretation of the *Dancing Song*.

You vine! Why do you praise me? Did I not cut you? I am cruel,
 you bleed; what does your praise of my drunken cruelty mean?
 "What is perfect, all that is ripe—wants to die"—thus you speak. Blessed,
 blessed be the vintager's knife! But all that is unripe wants to live: woe!
 Woe entreats: Go! Away, woe! But all that suffers wants to live, so that it
 may become ripe and joyous and longing—longing for what is farther,
 higher, brighter. "I want heirs"—thus speaks all that suffers, "I want
 children, I do not want myself!"
 Joy, however, does not want heirs or children—joy wants itself, wants
 eternity, wants recurrence, wants everything eternally the same.
 Woe says, "Break, bleed, heart! Wander, leg! Wing, fly! Get on! Up! Pain!
 Well then, old heart! Woe implores, "Go!" (434 - 435/ 556)

The desire to have children would seem to be subordinated here to the theme of self-affirmation, as woe is subordinated to joy. And in a very traditional way joy wants eternity, wants eternal recurrence. The desire to have children is subordinated to a different kind of self-affirmation.

What then are we to make of Zarathustra's *Yes and Amen Song*, this hymn to the eternal recurrence, to this nuptial rings of rings? What kind of wedding is this? The wedding of eternity and life, where the offspring is the eternal recurrence? Does this offspring have the same status as the traditional idea of eternal life, it too a contradiction? Is Zarathustra, too, just an inventor of another afterworld born of the spirit of revenge? Does he too not cover up reality with the imaginary? Is he, too, only fool, only poet, as the Old Magician sings of himself? (409) But in that song it is not really the old magician who mocks himself, but life that mocks the old magician. Is it mocking Nietzsche? That is to suggest that genuine self-affirmation requires an overcoming of the narcissistic eros, requires something like a looking beyond the self to the children. The end of *Zarathustra* gestures uncertainly in this direction:

“Am I concerned with my happiness? I am concerned with my work.”

"Well then! The lion came, my children are near, Zarathustra has ripened. My hour has come: this is my morning. My day is breaking: rise now, rise now, rise though great noon!"

Thus spoke Zarathustra, and he left his cave, glowing and strong as a morning sun comes out of dark mountains. (439)

26. Conclusion

1

In my first lecture I suggested that the thought of the thinkers we studied in this course continues to preside, often in unacknowledged ways, over the way we still think today. The nineteenth century is still with us. But it is an ambiguous heritage. What the 19th century has bequeathed to us is anything but a strongly unified, timeless image of man. Indeed we can speak of a basic split, although on one point all the thinkers we studied are in agreement: the objectifying reason that presides over our science is unable to render our life meaningful. Descartes' promise that his method would render us the masters and possessor's of nature was by no means vain. He did indeed put science on the right track. Our technology testifies to the power of the Cartesian project. Any philosophy that is to be taken seriously has to recognize and understand the legitimacy of objectifying reason. But it also needs to recognize its limits. The progress of objectifying reason is shadowed by the specter of nihilism. Fichte showed this with great clarity in the first book of *The Vocation of Man*. And Schopenhauer, despite his vehement critique of Fichte, made what is essentially the same point in the first book of *The World as Will and Representation*. Nietzsche's philosophy in its entirety may be understood as an attempt to cope with the specter of nihilism. Consider the parable of the madman he tells us in *Gay Science* (125):

Have you ever heard of the madman who on a bright morning lighted a lantern and ran to the marketplace calling out unceasingly: "I seek God! I seek God!" As there were many people standing about who did not believe in God, he caused a great deal of amusement. "Why! is he lost?" said one. "Has he strayed away like a child?" said another. "Or does he keep himself hidden?" "Is he afraid of us?" "Has he taken a sea-voyage?" "Has he emigrated?" the people cried out laughingly, all in a hubbub. The insane man jumped into their midst and transfixed them with his glances. "Where is God gone?" he called out. "I mean to tell you! We have killed him—you and I! We are all his murderers! But how have we done it? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the whole horizon? What did we do when we loosened this earth from its

sun? Whither does it now move? Whither do we move? Away from all suns? Do we not dash on unceasingly? Backwards, sideways, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an above and below? Do we not stray, as through infinite nothingness? Does not empty space breathe upon us? Has it not become colder? Does not night come on continually, darker and darker? Shall we not have to light lanterns in the morning? Do we not hear the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we not smell the divine putrefaction? For even gods putrefy! God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him! How shall we console our selves, the most murderous of all murderers? The holiest and the mightiest the world has hitherto possessed, has bled to death under our knife, who will wipe the blood from us? With what water could we cleanse ourselves? What lustrums, what sacred games shall we have to devise? Is not the magnitude of this deed too great for us? Shall we not ourselves have to become gods, merely to seem worthy of it? There never was a greater event, and on account of it, all who are born after us belong to a higher history than any history hitherto!"

Here the madman was silent and looked again at his hearers; they also were silent and looked at him in surprise. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, so that it broke in pieces and was extinguished. "I come too early," he then said, "I am not yet at the right time. This prodigious event is still on its way, and is traveling, it has not yet reached men's ears. Lightning and thunder need time, the light of the stars needs time, deeds need time, even after they are done, to be seen and heard. This deed is as yet further from them than the furthest star, and yet they have done it!" It is further stated that the madman made his way into different churches on the same day, and there intoned his *Requiem aeternam deo*. When led out and called to account, he always gave the reply: "What are these churches now, if they are not the tombs and monuments of God?"

According to Nietzsche, we post-Copernican moderns live today in the ruins of a world that once had it center in and received its meaning from God. Of the thinkers we have studied Marx, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche have no place for God in their philosophies.

Fichte and Hegel attempt to hold on to the place God once occupied, where both, in different ways, attempt to put reason in His place, although this is no longer the objectifying reason of Descartes. That reason knows nothing of God. Fichte turns to Kant's practical reason.

Reason is not for the sake of existence, but existence for the sake of Reason. An existence which does not of itself satisfy Reason, and solve all her questions, can not possibly be the true being. (114; 91)

According to Fichte, I have to act in accord with what reason demands to find life meaningful. But in order to do so I have to have a sense that my actions are not in vain and so morality leads necessarily to what looks like a return to something rather like the old faith. To cite Fichte once more:

It seems that the Highest Good of the world pursues its course of increase and prosperity independently of all human virtues or vices, according to its own laws, through an invisible and unknown Power, just as the heavenly bodies run their appointed course, independently of all human effort, and that this Power carries along with it, in its own great plan, all human intentions good and bad, and, with overruling wisdom, employs for its own purpose that which was undertaken for other ends. (115; 92)

Fichte's Highest Good here occupies the place left vacant by the dead God.

And the same can be said of Hegel's Absolute.

This Idea or Reason is the True, the Eternal, the Absolute Power and it and nothing but it, its glory and majesty, manifests itself in the world (11)

This divine Reason provides our reason with its measure and presides over the progress of history. Reason is put in the place of God.

But is it reason that allows us to secularize the idea of God in this fashion? Marx, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche dismiss such attempts. Reason, they might point out, becomes here something like golden calf, an all too human construction put in the place of the absent or dead God. And Kierkegaard's judgment would not be all that different, although he refuses to let go of Christianity, fully aware that this requires a leap of faith that has to leave all reason behind. But only such a leap, he insists, can cure us of the despair that is the sickness unto death.

2

As these remarks should have suggested, if one theme that ran through this course is the problem of nihilism, another is the problem of faith, which is also the problem of bad faith. The Enlightenment had thought that reason was sufficient to provide our lives with the needed measure and meaning. Fichte and Hegel are in this respect heirs of the Enlightenment. But as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche showed, reason has itself undermined this faith in Reason. Kierkegaard opposed to such faith in Reason a faith centered on Christ, fully aware how difficult it is for us moderns to reconcile such a faith with our understanding of reality, a reality shaped by objectifying reason. The incarnation was understood as the descent of the divine. God became man and hereby provided humanity with meaning and measure. Hegel assigned an analogous role to the state which he called "The divine idea as it exists on earth," where he was thinking especially of the Prussian state of his day. (53) Not surprisingly, this is a thought that threatens to lift the state above all criticism, a thought that was therefore eagerly appropriated by totalitarian regimes on the right and the left. Or, we can say, it is a thought that threatens to make the state into a golden calf, a process that becomes even more sinister when we substitute, as the Nazis did, for the state race.

As we know and as Hegel recognized, in the course of world history states have come and gone, themselves the creations of human beings. In this process of the realization of what Hegel called the divine Idea on earth what he called world historical individuals or heroes are given a special significance. An especially dangerous part of our inheritance from the 19th century is this glorification of the hero, who is supposedly privileged to suspend the existing moral common sense. The dissatisfaction with the established common sense that animates the hero is, according to Hegel itself born of a premonition of what the Idea demands, a premonition that must also be felt in some way by those who respond to his call for change and become his followers. Such world-historical figures are in a way prophets, seers, and their actions are the vehicle by which history advances.

We encountered such hero worship again in a very a very different key with Nietzsche, who in the *Birth of Tragedy* casts Richard Wagner into the role of a culture hero able to inaugurate a new tragic culture and thus to lead us to a new health. Soon he came to see what part wishful thinking had played in his glorification of Wagner. A

Socratic honesty and faithfulness to oneself prevented Nietzsche from becoming a blind follower of Wagner. But Nietzsche also knew that Socratic honesty makes sense only if there is some reality that assigns human beings their place, a place that they can occupy in good faith. But does Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God still allow for such a place? What then are we to do, having to live with the death of God? What leaders is the future to know? Leaders like Wagner or like Nietzsche's Zarathustra? Or is Zarathustra perhaps himself a poet-leader of the Wagner type? The *Führer* as *Verführer*, the leader as seducer? How is good faith possible if God is dead? And there is the perhaps more seductive question: why is good faith good? Why not bad faith? Why not illusion?

In the 20th century Heidegger was to become a spokesman for a similar glorification of a leader, although now not Wagner, but Hitler. He, too, came to recognize soon how disastrously he had erred.

But let me return to Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*. Zarathustra's myth of the eternal recurrence presents itself to us as another construct meant to replace the New Testament, a myth for the modern age. But is it a myth born of the spirit of revenge, of the ill will against time? And once again a Socratic honesty and faithfulness to oneself should put us on guard when confronted with such a myth. Once more let me read you these lines from the *Drunken Song* of the Fourth Part of Zarathustra.

Woe entreats: Go! Away, woe! But all that suffers wants to live, so that it may become ripe and joyous and longing — longing for what is farther, higher, brighter. "I want heirs" — thus speaks all that suffers, "I want children, I do not want myself!"

Joy, however, does not want heirs or children — joy wants itself, wants eternity, wants recurrence, wants everything eternally the same.

Woe says, "Break, bleed, heart! Wander, leg! Wing, fly! Get on! Up! Pain!

Well then, old heart! Woe implores, "Go!" (434 - 435/ 556)

The desire to have children would seem to be subordinated here to the theme of self-affirmation, as woe is subordinated to joy. And in a very traditional way joy wants eternity, wants eternal recurrence. The myth of the eternal recurrence is tied to joy. But such joy is not our human lot.

What then are we to make of Zarathustra's *Yes and Amen Song*, this hymn to the eternal recurrence, to this nuptial rings of rings? What kind of wedding is this? The wedding of time and eternity, where the offspring is the eternal recurrence? Does this offspring have the same status as the traditional idea of eternal life, it too a contradiction? Is Zarathustra, too, just an inventor of another afterworld born of the spirit of revenge? Does he too not cover up reality with the imaginary? Is he, too, only fool, only poet, as the Old Magician sings of himself? (409)

In the section *On the Blessed Isles* Zarathustra had said:

All that is permanent — that is only a parable. And the poets lie too much. (198)

And since Nietzsche is referring here to Goethe, let me conclude with a few lines from a poem by Goethe, a poem that Schopenhauer refers to in par. 54 as expressing the world view of someone really able to affirm life. Significantly it bears the title *Grenzen der Menschheit, Limits of Humanity*

What distinguishes
Gods from Men?
That many waves
Pass before them
An eternal stream:
Us the wave lifts;
Devours us,
And we drown.

A small ring
Limits our life,
And many generations
Continuously join,
To form their existence's
Endless chain.
(Trans. Emily Ezust, corrected)

"Ein kleiner Ring begrenzt unser Leben" — "A small ring/ Limits our life." Our life is limited. What limits it is first of all death. With Heidegger we can say that the anticipation of death is inseparable from an understanding of my life as my own. Death lets us understand our life as a whole, as a *kleiner Ring*, a small ring. But granted that it is possible to gather life together into such a whole in this way, should we do so? We are part of ongoing humanity and can find measure and meaning only when we affirm

ourselves as such. That requires openness and care for those who are with us and those who will come after us. Goethe suggests that the small ring that limits our life must be understood as member of a *Kette*, an endless chain. That chain is not given to us as a whole. Self-affirmation in the fullest sense demands that we affirm ourselves on one hand as limited by death, by the small ring that encloses our life, and yet at the same time as joined in the chain of generations. That is to say, it requires an overcoming of the narcissistic eros that seeks joy in the present, requires us to look beyond the self to coming generations, to the children. The very end of *Zarathustra* gestures uncertainly in this direction:

“Am I concerned with my happiness? I am concerned with my work.”

"Well then! The lion came, my children are near, Zarathustra has ripened. My hour has come: this is my morning. My day is breaking: rise now, rise now, rise though great noon!"

Thus spoke Zarathustra, and he left his cave, glowing and strong as a morning sun comes out of dark mountains. (439)