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The Gay Science

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THE GAY SCIENCE

Of all of Nietzsche's texts, *The Gay Science* (or *Joyful Wisdom* [*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*]) is probably his most important. Nietzsche not only came to think of it in later years as his most congenial and personal work, but he often referred to it as his "most *medial* book," the one that stood at the midpoint of his life and served as a fulcrum for his subsequent thought. Indeed, shortly after completing the first edition in 1882 (an additional chapter would be added in 1887, together with a preface and an appendix of poems), Nietzsche stressed the crucial importance of the work in a letter to Franz Overbeck, perhaps his closest friend at the time:

> If you have read the "Sanctus Januarius" [i.e., book 4], you will have remarked that I have crossed a tropic. Everything that lies before me is new, and it will not be long before I catch sight also of the terrifying face of my more distant life task. . . . This whole interim state between what was and what will be, I call "in media vita."[1]

"*In media vita*" (in midlife) is the title of a section near the end of book 4, and the "interim state" it implies aptly described the author's own frame of mind. Furthermore, the section indicates how Nietzsche came to achieve this state, and in its exuberance, it echoes the tone of the book and reproduces the entire range of the book's subject matter:

> *In Media Vita.*—No! Life has not disappointed me! On the contrary, I find it truer, more desirable and mysterious every year—ever since the day when the great liberator came to me: the idea that life could be an experiment of the seeker for knowledge—and not a duty, not a calamity, not trickery.—And knowledge itself: let it be something else for others; for example, a bed to rest on, or the way

> to such a bed, or a diversion, or a form of leisure—for me it is a world of dangers and victories in which heroic feelings, too, find places to dance and play. "*Life as a means to knowledge*"—with this principle in one's heart, one can live not only boldly but even gaily, and laugh gaily, too.[2]

For Nietzsche, this medial book was both intensely personal and all-pervasive in its import: personal, since Nietzsche claimed that, through having written it, he was able to formulate the means for his own liberation, that is, to devise a "Gay Science," or "Joyful Wisdom."[3] The text was all-pervasive in the import of its subject matter, since his liberation was a direct response to what he discussed throughout the book as the greatest single event in world history, the event that inaugurated modernity itself: the "death of God." Thus moved, Nietzsche recognized that the life of the individual could no longer be believed, bound by, or even be understood in terms of the demands of an absolute moral order, one that had its basis in the authority of a transcendent God. Since it was through the authority of just such a transcendent, divine order that the *human* world was traditionally thought to have any meaning or value at all—that existence itself was believed to have a purpose or destiny—the passing away of that divine authority would, as Nietzsche suggested, be "terrifying" indeed. In fact, the death of God would itself bring about an "interim state" par excellence—the point between a comprehensible moral world order and something else: perhaps, a world of unexampled chaos and nihilism. What remained in the balance and what the middle position thus implied, therefore, far outweighed any consideration of one individual's personal disposition. Rather, what was announced by the death of God—and Nietzsche hardly hesitated to dramatize this (e.g., in section 125)—was an irrevocable age in human history, one to be measured in eons. "It is not inconceivable that I am the first philosopher of the age, perhaps even a little more, something decisive and doom-laden standing *between* two millennia."[4]

One could easily say that the main concern of *The Gay Science* is precisely to understand and to address the problem of the "between": to focus on the medial state, to question the position and significance of human existence within an age that no longer seemed to have a discernible center. Thus, by emphasizing the all-too-apparent loss of this center (i.e., what traditionally served as a supreme—and divinely sanctioned—source of meaning, value, and purpose), Nietzsche commenced his task of establishing a "joyful wisdom." He claimed to do this by investing human existence with the active desire to desire itself, to serve itself in its own name—to joyfully legislate its own human values,

vocations, and ends. With this in view, Nietzsche set out to formulate a proposal for an entirely immanent human future, one he conceived under the enigmatic title "the eternal recurrence." The medial state of *The Gay Science* thus unfolded, as he pointed out in his letter to Overbeck, from what was to what would be: from his initial analysis of the so-called "purposive existence" to his concluding remarks on the doctrine of eternal recurrence.

Five years would separate the publication of the last section of *The Gay Science*, book 5, from the earlier chapters. During the intervening years, Nietzsche continued to explore the consequences of the "death of God" and his conception of the "eternal return"—most notably, in the dramatic prose of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883–85). In the following work of 1886, *Beyond Good and Evil*, he would draw upon the methodological insights he achieved in *The Gay Science* to further examine the deeper origins and underlying motivations—psychological, cultural, social, philosophical—that found expression in the traditional metaphysical worldview, together with its accompanying moral system. He would explicitly focus on the origins and dynamics of morality as the main concern of his next work, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, in 1887. Nonetheless, he had already raised these closely intertwined issues, at the very beginning of book 1 in *The Gay Science*—section 1, "The Teachers of the Purpose of Existence."

The first five sections in book 5 strongly reassert the major themes of the earlier chapters, and they point to his growing concern with how the deeply rooted, traditional religious values serve to limit the individual's freedom and autonomy and to weaken, if not destroy, the individual's sense of self-worth. In such circumstances, all of human pain and suffering is interpreted in religious terms, under the form of sin and guilt, and this burden results in even more suffering for the individual: it creates an impossible situation of humiliation and shame, a state of impoverished despair—wherein the individual comes to despise himself and is driven to exact revenge upon the very conditions of human existence as psychological compensation for this suffering.[5] By the time Nietzsche completed book 5 and the introduction to the second edition, he would address this complex problem of suffering, guilt, and shame—he considered it a pathology—analyzing the means by which it is induced, as well as perpetuated. He would then go on to propose how it could be overcome: through the cultivation of a critical awareness, through a sense of generosity and self-respect, and by learning how to become well-disposed to oneself. Looking back on *The Gay Science* in 1888 in the brief section devoted to it in

Ecce Homo, he would point to the "granite words in which a destiny finds for the first time a formula for itself"[6] in the last three aphorisms of book 3:

> *Whom do you call bad?*—Those who always want to put to shame.
> *What do you consider most humane?*—To spare someone shame.
> *What is the seal of liberation?*—No longer being ashamed in front of oneself.

This would correspond, at least in part, to what Nietzsche wrote to Heinrich von Stein, concerning "what I have never yet revealed to anyone—the task which confronts me, my life's task": namely, that "I would like to *take away* from human existence some of its heartbreaking and cruel character."[7]

Oddly, there is no mention of the "eternal return" in book 5 nor in the introduction. When Nietzsche developed this theme at length in *Zarathustra*, he cast it under the aura of a myth, hoping to find in the resources of myth an antidote to the metaphysical doctrines of religious belief. While such an approach served him well in *The Birth of Tragedy*, it seems Nietzsche felt these resources—myth, music, drama, and so forth—had become by now inappropriate and inadequate to the task.

STYLISTIC CONCERNS IN NIETZSCHE'S WORKS

It is hardly an overstatement to say that Nietzsche writes with a certain extravagance of style, even with hyperbole and excess—or, as he says, "in blood." His thought issues forth in what seems to be almost an abandonment of conventional philosophical form and constraint. That the style of the book was meant to be poetic in nature is indicated by its very subtitle, "La Gaya Scienza," which refers to the tradition of chivalric poetry of the French Provençal courts, dating back to the early Middle Ages. Indeed, Nietzsche's style of composition is profuse in the variety of expressive and rhetorical techniques it draws upon, and this tends to render his thought extremely resistant to systematic elaboration, even by his most generous reader. As he would say in *Zarathustra*, "It is not easily possible to understand the blood of another."[8]

To begin to examine this unsystematic character of expression and the difficulties this entails for understanding, much less interpreting, the text of *The Gay Science*, the reader must first attend to Nietzsche's peculiar style of thought and to his complex style of writing. While Nietzsche often claimed many literary and philosophical antecedents, it is arguable whether one could find a stronger single example of a thinker from the Western tradition whose

distinctive style of expression so forcefully reflects the content of his concerns. What he says and how he says it are so much the same: both his own style and the world he writes about confront us as a dynamic play of multiple and continually changing appearances. It is precisely this dynamic play of successively experienced events, a world understood as the active insurgence of all process and change, that he would later term "the will to power." He conceives this to be the expression—the self-articulation—of all force, energy, life: of nature itself as a dynamic process of teeming and recurrent metamorphosis.[9] To see the confluence of Nietzsche's style and the content it so forcefully expresses, we look at paragraph 310, where he explicitly addresses this dynamic "will to power." The image or metaphor he uses to describe it is the *wave*. Not only does he explicitly identify *himself* with the wave, with its surging foam and thunder, its infinite capacity to transform itself and to recur, once again, bearing its emerald crest of elemental nature, but he also *writes* in waves—investing a rhythmic and pulsatile flow to the very composition of his prose. Read, or better still, speak aloud, the following passage:

> How greedily this wave approaches . . . but already another wave is approaching, still more greedily and savagely than the first, and its soul, too, seems to be full of secrets and the lust to dig up treasures. Thus live waves—thus live we who will. . . . Carry on as you like, roaring with overweening pleasure and malice—or dive again, pouring your emeralds down into the deepest depths, and throw your infinite white mane of foam and spray over them: everything suits me, for everything suits you so well, and I am so well-disposed toward you for everything; how could I think of betraying you? For—mark my word!—I know you and your secret, I know your kind! You and I—are we not of one kind? You and I—do we not have one secret?[10]

The vibrant expressiveness of Nietzsche's prose, the fertility and suggestiveness of its content, refuse to be systematized; it resists the imposition of static categories, of rule governance—whether logical or linguistic. The dynamic flow of the experienced events he evokes cannot be easily articulated: it bears no simple definition, it claims no essence or distinctive form. In this respect, Nietzsche's discourse declines reliance upon strict definition, upon the single, unchanging, univocal meaning of a term, upon the rigorous logical argument, and most forcefully, upon the principle of identity, which certifies that one thing is only one thing—and nothing else. Nietzsche turns away from all this, on the level of *style*, toward the more poetic, *figurative* use of language: the aphorism, the apothegm, the image, the simile, the metaphor, all of which

are essentially unstable, imbalanced means of expression. For the predominant tradition of Western thought, these figures of language have been rigorously set apart from philosophic expression proper, figurative (i.e., nonliteral) language having been deemed imprecise, and worthy only for "art" or rhetorical "distortion," for the "impure" domain of poetic obscurity, confusion, and nonsense.

Nietzsche's use of the aphorism or apothegm is fully crucial to his dynamic engagement of style and content of thought and the world it bespeaks. In fact, it is surely one of his most distinctive features of expression.[11] The aphorism—the short, terse, witty, and incisive remark that expresses a far wider truth than the strict meaning of the terms it employs—is itself alive, animate: that is to say, open-ended in its possible significance. It *responds* to the genius and inspiration of a critical mind, an inquisitive reader, but it resists formalism and catechism. In this regard, it is a "turn" or "trope" of phrase and thought, a *movement* of expression, that by means of its distinctive agency, directs us beyond a fixed idea, beyond a simple corresponding meaning or referent in a static system of rules or definitions. The aphorism destroys the possibility of such a fixed, literal system because it is essentially *incomplete* in its significance. It demands that an interpretive operation be performed upon it by the reader for its very intelligibility. The aphorism demands that the reader give it meaning, for it does not possess a single, discrete meaning *in itself*. You, the reader, are immediately involved, enamored, intertwined with the aphorism, with the proverb or parable. You invest it with meaning by *interpreting* it, by inserting it into ever-new contexts, by directing its words to ever-new occasions, associations, events—and what follows? The aphorism itself changes, it assumes a new reference, situation, context, appropriateness, valence—and hence, a *new* meaning. This dynamic property of expressiveness renders the aphorism essentially *metaphorical*: as such, it induces the reader to gather resemblances, to cull differences, to collect similarities, to compare and contrast markedly different cases, and to assemble all these, however briefly, and to thereby exhibit, to make manifest, the very movement of thought. In this sense, the metaphor is an instrument *for* thinking and not an end-point or terminus of thought. The term metaphor itself comes from the Greek *meta-pherein*, to carry or to transport across a distance. So understood, the metaphor is neither static nor complete. Rather, it brings together scattered semantic elements of meaning in a movement of thought, in a shifting process of displacement and transference.[12]

Active, incomplete, manifold, and alive, the metaphor not only characterizes a movement of thought, it also stands as an analogy, or an analogue, for what exists. The very structure of the metaphor serves as an analogical expression

for the dynamic flow of appearances themselves, for the constant motion, mutation, and change of objects, events, situations—what we earlier saw Nietzsche come to call "the will to power." For Nietzsche, the metaphor enjoys a very real privilege, in fact the metaphor serves to structure cognitive and semantic processes and at the same time it is the most apt means of expressing reality itself. How we think, therefore, is basically understood by Nietzsche to be a metaphorical process. The meanings of those things we in fact experience or think about likewise result from these metaphorical processes. Finally, the fact that the world itself is mobile, dynamic, fluid, changeable—understood as shifting arrangements, as constellations, or as factored groupings of force or energy—demands a dynamically conceived means of expression, of representation, of language, to adequately portray it. For Nietzsche, the metaphor is the most appropriate means.

With this admission, however, we come to a most crucial point for understanding Nietzsche. According to his account, the *real* is no longer what tradition formerly held it to be. That is, Nietzsche no longer conceives reality according to the model of a stable, essentially static, or even law-governed, order. Nor does he claim that the real is itself rational or logical, much less that the natural order is reasonable or purposive. For Nietzsche, there is no enduring, fixed, absolutely stable form of reality either outside ourselves, in the world, outside our own thought, or even within the confines of our thought. Neither is there a stabilizing logic to reality itself, nor is there an absolutely governing form of reason naturally inherent or ingredient in our own thought that would strictly conform to the real.

Approaching Nietzsche's texts—especially those written after *The Birth of Tragedy*—we seem to encounter a dramatically new frame of reference. Here is indeed a world, but one of "appearances" only, of insubstantial pulsions of energy, or what Nietzsche often terms "will"—again, in the sense of "force"—a perplexingly chaotic state that seems to reflect the anarchic world of the pre-Olympian gods—before creation—a state of primordial strife, warfare, and force, whose only reality is the dynamics of its appearance, of its perpetual conflict and mutation. The world *is* as it presents itself to us: motile, dynamic, in flux, in constant metamorphosis and change.

Against this newly conceived, dynamic frame of reference, the stable notions of logic itself seem weak and inadequate. Nietzsche, for example, denies the heretofore unquestioned authority of the very first principle of logic, that is, the simple principle of identity that *A* is *A*. For the employment of language or thought, therefore, Nietzsche's account charges that there is no strictly identi-

cal word, thought, or meaning—that strict self-identity could never, in principle or in fact, occur to human experience.[13] Words, terms, meanings, propositions, and concepts, for Nietzsche, are generalized constructs of human invention—they merely serve as momentarily agreed-upon fabrications, as the conventional fictions of a given culture and its language. In no way are they taken to be simple, single, and unchanging definitions, forms, or essences. In the absence of a strict sense of logical identity, the subsequent issue of contradiction fails to arise, since there is, literally, nothing to contradict. For Nietzsche, then, logical contradiction itself gives way to frenzy, identity to chaos. As he would say in his essay of 1873, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense":

> Every word immediately becomes a concept inasmuch as it is *not* intended to serve as a reminder of the unique and wholly individualized original experience to which it owes its birth, but must at the same time fit innumerable, *more or less* similar cases—which means, strictly speaking, *never* equal—in other words, a lot of unequal cases. Every concept originates through *our* equating what is *unequal*. No leaf ever wholly equals another, and the *concept* "leaf" is formed through an arbitrary *abstraction* from these individual differences, through forgetting the distinctions. . . . What, then, is *truth*? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: *truths are illusions* about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power . . . to be truthful means using the customary metaphors—in moral terms: the obligation to *lie* according to a fixed convention, to lie herd-like in a style obligatory for all.[14]

Given this warning as to the impossibility of precise logical expressiveness and the impossibility of any strictly truthful content, Nietzsche nonetheless goes on to write some sixteen major works. Precisely for whom, though, is not immediately evident. Nonetheless, that he does seem to have a particular audience in mind is strongly suggested by his employment of a stylistic device well known to the philosophic and rhetorical tradition: namely, the use of what is often termed "hidden" or "concealed" writing. According to the concerns of such a tradition, an author, for a variety of reasons, may choose to employ some stylistic element of indirection, of silence, of a low-profile sort of encoding a message, which provides certain "clues" or gives a certain nonapparent "consistency" to the text that would enable sympathetic readers to properly grasp his message. While what the author intends to say to his own select audience is thereby "concealed" or "hidden" to a more general, and perhaps unsympa-

thetic, audience, the latter will grasp the text on a surface or manifest level, which to all general appearances, is simply a straightforward exposition or narrative. The author quite literally presents two faces of himself, each of which answers to a specific objective and is addressed to a different audience. The objectives and different audiences, in turn, warrant the author's use of different stylistic strategies and tactics, such that he might ensure the effective concealment of one message (i.e., the restriction of what is important and what must be said to those who can understand it), to conceal that important message from the other, inappropriate, audience.

Why an author should choose to compose his text in such a fashion is, of course, an extremely complex issue. The author may be subject to popular disapproval or persecution for his views. He may wish not to upset or to needlessly offend an otherwise well-disposed general public. He may wish not to provoke public opinion over issues he considers to be important, but which are necessarily restricted to a particular, selected audience of like-minded readers, of sympathizers and intellectual collaborators, whose identity might be better kept secret, or discretely hidden from view.[15] Alternatively, the author may well wish to provoke a negative or emotional response in the wider audience, precisely to deter those individuals from examining his text too closely, and thus, to prevent them from being unduly influenced, and perhaps harmed, by his text. Stylistic and rhetorical excess, in this case, can well serve a prophylactic function. In some cases, then, the author may well wish to close the reader's ears beforehand, precisely in deference to their own best interests.[16] Nietzsche discusses this distinction of audience in section 381 of *The Gay Science*, the section entitled "On the Question of Being Understandable":

> One does not only wish to be understood when one writes; one wishes just as surely *not* to be understood. It is not by any means necessarily an objection to a book when anyone finds it impossible to understand: perhaps that was part of the author's intention—he did not want to be understood by just "anybody." All the nobler spirits and tastes select their audience when they wish to communicate; and choosing that, one at the same time erects barriers against "the others." All the more subtle laws of any style have their origin at this point: they at the same time keep away, create a distance, forbid "entrance," understanding, as said above—while they open the ears of those whose ears are related to ours.[17]

Elsewhere, in a letter to one of his friends, Malwida von Meysenbug,[18] Nietzsche elaborates this distinction of audience and shows how he will use certain parts of the text (e.g., the preface) to communicate different messages and to provoke different responses, accordingly:

> The long prefaces which I have found necessary for the new edition of my complete works tell with a ruthless honesty some curious things about myself. With these I'll ward off "the many" once and for all. . . . I've thrown out my hook to "the few" instead, and even with them I'm prepared to be patient. For my ideas are so indescribably strange and dangerous that only much later (surely not before 1901) will anybody be ready for them.[19]

Finally, and again from *The Gay Science*, paragraph 381, Nietzsche offers us an explanation as to *why*, at least in the case of the present work, he chose to maintain this clear distinction of audience:

> Being an immoralist, one has to take steps against corrupting innocents—I mean, asses and old maids of both sexes whom life offers nothing but their innocence. Even more, my writings should inspire, elevate, and encourage them to be virtuous. I cannot imagine anything on earth that would be a merrier sight than inspired old asses and maids.

Even granting the distinction of audience—and the correlative observation that a text may be *understood* in quite different ways, that one text may sustain markedly different interpretations and, thus, markedly different meanings—once we commence reading such a work as *The Gay Science*, particularly when we read what Nietzsche has to say about the subject of ethics and morality, we are struck by the excess, the hyperbole, and the evocative force of his pronouncements. What, one is tempted to ask, could conceivably account for the apparent extremism of his views? How does one plausibly accept, for example, his assertions that Eastern religion dwells on rice and indolence? Or, that the founding fathers, the Patristic saints, of the Christian church are "holy epileptics"? That Judeo-Christian values are merely "slave values," that they foster a "slave mentality"? That what is important to a statement of knowledge or belief is not so much its "truth" but, rather, that it is a "coherent" pattern of lies? That the German spirit has been ruined by a diet composed entirely of beer, newspapers, and Wagnerian music? That human pride and national patriotism are but simple forms of obstinacy and ignorance?

These seemingly intemperate remarks are not just random assertions, scattered and ill-humored passing observations, however. We have already suggested how the reader might better view the style and purpose of Nietzsche; that is, he must be read properly, the mechanics of the metaphor and aphorism must always be kept in mind and taken seriously. A properly responsive thought, then, must be alive and attentive to the nuances and provocations of his style. This is done, at least in part, by being *impatient*, by refusing to stop

with a simple definition, some fixed term or meaning, or with a purportedly "complete" explanation; by never ceasing to be incited by the ruse or play of the text, by its emotionally charged solicitation of the reader, even if at first sight this appeal seems unusual or excessive or dramatically exaggerated. All these considerations point to the fact that Nietzsche writes to the heart as well as to the mind. He wants to draw upon all the resources through which we come to understand, value, and feel things. The complexity—and often enough, the audacity—of his style is thus attuned to the fullest range of our cognitive and affective capabilities.

Just as importantly, Nietzsche repeatedly insists that the reader exercise his own independence and generosity and that the reader recognize that a stated position, viewpoint, or claim is in fact merely the statement of its author—that it is partial, provisional, and limited to the concerns of its author, as well as to the circumstances of its utterance. In this sense, Nietzsche would claim that his writings were "perspectival," that they assumed the meaning or significance they did by virtue of occupying a certain *perspective* and by having a particular context. Each statement, then, occupies a position with regard to other statements, to a particular set of references and concerns, to the author's stated or implied intentions, to the nature of their rhetorical formulation, and to the specific place, time, history, and culture that subtends them—all this multiplied and factored by the respective context of the reader who interprets them, in short, with regard to the equally particular interlocutor, who constitutes but one of many possible audiences, each with its own unique and distinctive formation.[20] Doubtless, these considerations are complex, and they tend to make any claim upon Nietzsche's final judgments equally complex.

What the reader should keep in mind to aid in sorting out these complicating factors of interpretation is the predominant concern Nietzsche has with ethics and morals, understood in the broad sense as the Greek *ethos* (character) and as the Latin *mores* (customs and manners), which is to say, ethics and morals seen as those conventional patterns of action, judgment, value, and behavior that govern the life of an individual and structure the society within which the individual lives.

It should be noted that Nietzsche generally writes *against* the prevailing tradition, and in doing so he is fully sensitive to the properties or principles that define the tradition *as* a coherent system. For this reason, Nietzsche will often *employ* the most traditional oppositions within the reservoir of its significant codes, to question, criticize, contradict, and *fracture* the coherence of the system itself—and thereby, also, the hold, the constrictive purchase, that the

traditional system exercises upon both the individual and his or her culture. Nietzsche would later thematize this task, and, in an ironic turn of phrase, lend its name as a subtitle to his work of 1888—*Twilight of the Idols; or, How to Do Philosophy with a Hammer.*[21] Furthermore, and we should keep this on the horizon, such a task will raise the strongest question—for Nietzsche and for a tradition—the question of totality, the very possibility of an exhaustive, totalizing understanding of human and natural existence.[22]

Let us anticipate the kind of subject matter Nietzsche wished to criticize in traditional ethics and moral theory by constructing a brief grid or taxonomy, a system of classification for identifying the possible content of these ethical and moral systems. In doing so, we want to see the outlines and contours of the various concepts that form a set of oppositions—oppositions of meanings, terms, and concepts—within *any* reflection on human activity, individual or social. This shall serve as a key or guide to a reading of *The Gay Science* and as an aid in recognizing the broad themes that will emerge from it. What are these basic, foundational oppositions of meanings and concepts? One risks embarrassment in mentioning them, since they constitute the very vocabulary of our own speech; without them, little makes sense. Nonetheless, when the terms of these oppositions are directed back against themselves, back against similarly paired oppositions in the system of our reflection on ethical and moral concepts, they can assume a terrifying agency of critique. Gilles Deleuze, for example, likens Kafka's use of his adopted language (i.e., from Yiddish to German) to Nietzsche's critical employment of these defining categories of thought and action: "To confound all codes is not easy, even on the simplest level of writing and thought. The only parallel I can find here [i.e., to Nietzsche] is with Kafka, in what he does to German, working within the language of Prague Jewry; he constructs a battering ram out of German and turns it against itself."[23]

Among the many consenting pairs of concepts which, together and systematically, fuse to form the general subject matter of ethical and moral reflection, at least the following should be noted:

absolute / relative	gain / loss
action / reaction	give / receive
body / soul	good / evil
cause / effect	immanent / transcendent
conscious / unconscious	intent / deed
faith / knowledge	life / death

male / female	strength /weakness
nature / culture	subject / predicate
origin / goal	substance / accident
pleasure / pain	success / failure
positive / negative	theory / practice
pretended / actual	time / eternity
public / private	true / false
rational / irrational	utility / truth
sensible / immaterial	

If one adds to these terms all the conceptual and logical oppositions formed by the prefixes a-, un-, im-, in-, non-, super-, supra-, infra-, para-, meta-, and so on, much less those oppositions governed by such grammatical concerns as gender, tense, case, voice, and so forth, one begins to sense the enormous scope of such an underlying, systematic character to human reflection. This inventory or vocabulary of opposed concepts will constitute what Nietzsche termed the unconscious "grammar" of thought, and it serves as the very code, the very system, of philosophical intelligibility.[24] As such, it is by the involution, the recursive function of the code (i.e., when he turns certain elements of the code back upon the whole system of ethics and morality) that Nietzsche first starts his own distinctive analysis. By means of this code, we can understand the major themes or motifs in any system of ethics—we can view the stresses and predominant structures that inhabit any such system. By criticizing one set of oppositions from the standpoint of another and by analyzing the result from the perspective of a third or fourth set, we can begin to ask the kinds of questions that Nietzsche typically poses and begin to see the organic character claimed by, or implicit in, any particular system.[25]

One can demand of a particular assertion or judgment, drawn from a particular ethical system, that it answer as to its stated origin, as to its pretended or actual origin. One can continue to locate the effective agency of such issues in the conscious intentions of that doctrine's founder, or, on the contrary, in the subconscious habits of its quotidian propagators, its followers, and adherents. What purpose or good, for example, does the particular ethical or moral position serve? What are its organizing principles? Who, in fact or in principle, derives benefit from the particular ethical code in question? Does it largely serve to benefit its followers?—the public at large?—the founder of the religious sect or of the political party?—its priests and agents?—the secular rulers?—the prince?—anyone?

It may be objected that many of Nietzsche's analyses thus stated are psychological, if not even pathological, in origin, in that they tend to stress the motivational patterns of concept formation or of ethical justification. In this sense, it is often said that Nietzsche defends those conditions that serve to establish a position rather than the validity of the claim or the truth of the position itself. Nietzsche's counter? That veracity—truth itself—is *also* motivated, as is consistency, as are the very norms of verification and justification themselves.[26] Moreover, they, too, constitute part of the systematic coherency claimed by the larger code. Each presumed "ground" or "origin" or "final account" or "in the beginning" or "original intent" testifies to a vertiginous spiral of presuppositions, prejudices, and agendas beneath it, prior to it—caves behind caves, as he would say in *Zarathustra*.

Such a tendency to stress the deep motivational aspects of statements or positions acknowledges a mechanics of action and reaction on the level of the individual and the group. A set of oppositions like the one Nietzsche proposes seeks in many cases to explain the deeper, underlying system of *needs* that gives rise to the construction and elaboration of particular ethical or moral codes, which would in turn govern the course of our action. Such deep-seated origins clearly result in more than a particular set of rules. Unconscious and unstated drives also incline the individual to interpret his culture and his world in congruence with his needs or desires, and this in turn gives rise to particular evaluations of reality—and these evaluations (i.e., ethical and moral values) are subsequently reflected in the higher-order constructions of literature, mythology, religion, philosophy, politics, and the sciences.[27] That this tendency may often lend itself to the informal fallacy of ad hominem argumentation does not seem to be one of Nietzsche's principal concerns. In fact, he seems to welcome its "supplementary" value: "I'm not afraid to cite *names*: one illustrates one's point of view very quickly when, here or there, one argues *ad hominem*. For me, all this enhances clarity."[28]

NIETZSCHE'S PSYCHOHISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF MORALITY AND RELIGION

Perhaps more strikingly than any other determining factor, morality finds its distant origins in *fear*, that is, in human weakness and despair, in a terrible sickness of the will—at least, this is one of Nietzsche's most frequently stated hypotheses, throughout the entire span of his writings.[29] Of course, Nietzsche

was not alone in this view; the English philosopher of the seventeenth century Thomas Hobbes, for example, saw this general human fear as the condition for a social contract, for the origin of the civil state, the state he called the ugly beast Leviathan. Hobbes postulated that the state was initially constructed by means of a majority consent or contract, namely, a mutual agreement, a covenant, that would serve to combine the several weak and dispersed agencies of the many in order to combat the excesses of the powerful few. The majority of individuals, each on his own, might well desire to take charge of his own life, possessions, and situation and to conquer his opponents by force of arms. Unfortunately, as individuals, they are effectively powerless to do so in the face of those few *other* individuals who are naturally strong. The solution to such a state of natural inequality—a natural state of war, as Hobbes expressed it—was for the weak to gather themselves together for their mutual security and to construct a political state so as to collectively safeguard what little they did possess, rather than to lose all of it to the rapacity of those few individuals who were readily capable of violent conquest.[30]

In very general terms, Nietzsche's account of the origin of religion may be said to be constructed by analogy to Hobbes's account of the state.[31] For Nietzsche, religion especially begins in fear of the gods. In fact, Nietzsche maintains that man himself *invented* the gods out of a more primordial fear. The initial fear of an unbridled and destructive nature gave rise to the invention of the gods as a controlling force and countermeasure. Such a presumed divine omnipotence, however, gave rise to a second fear, namely, a fear of the gods themselves. This in turn resulted in mankind's voluntary submission to the divine, that is, in the formation of religions. Nietzsche's account of the origin of religion and the system of ethics and morality it entails, may thus be briefly summarized: awestruck by the force and violence of nature, by the cataclysmic upheavals of the world that are far beyond man's effective control, early man postulated a *unifying cause and origin* to them, one that was *also* beyond his control. He did this, Nietzsche argues, by a rather rude analogy, by supposing there was some kind of *will or intention behind* these natural events:

> Every thoughtless person supposes that will alone is effective. . . . The will is for him a magically effective force; the faith in the will as the cause of effects is the faith in magically effective forces. Now man believed originally that wherever he saw something happen, a will had to be at work in the background as a cause, and a personal, willing being. Any notion of mechanics was far from his mind. But since man believed, for immense periods of time, only in persons . . . the faith in cause and effect became for him the basic faith that he applies wherever anything happens . . . it is an atavism of the most ancient origin.[32]

In the same way that primitive man demanded gratification from his immediate family or from his own community and subjected them to abuse when they failed to please his slightest whims, so he postulated that there was, likewise, a *higher* cause beyond these *natural* events, some *cause* behind these natural *effects*, these terrifying spectacles of nature—volcanic eruptions and earth-rending quakes, frightfully destructive hurricanes and ravaging floods, lightning-generated firestorms, uncontrollable outbursts of disease and plague—in short, some cause or intention that *also*, like man himself, seemed to demand a kind of gratification or appeasement, a particular duty or obligation, some praise or pleasure from mankind, and, it should be added, at mankind's expense. Primitive peoples thus initially invented the divine and continued to live in fear of its wrath. By analogy, the primitive ancestor projected his own rancorous spirit upon the whole of nature and supposed that there was a far more powerful agent who exercised a similarly perverse will upon the world at large and upon humanity in particular. Not only, then, is there held to be a god, but it is a god whose motives and intentions dramatically reflect man's own weak and impotent psyche: a god who demands obeisance, fear, and capitulation—or, as Judaism and Christianity will say, a jealous god, a vengeful god.

> The Christian presupposes a powerful, overpowering being who enjoys revenge. His power is so great that nobody could possibly harm him, except for his honor. Every sin is a slight to his honor, a *crimen laesae majestatis divinae*—and no more. Contrition, degradation, rolling in the dust—all this is the first and last condition of his grace: in sum, the restoration of his divine honor. Whether the sin has done any other harm, whether it has set in motion some profound calamity that will grow and seize one person after another like a disease and strangle them—this honor-craving Oriental in heaven could not care less! Sin is an offense against him, not against humanity. Those who are granted his grace are also granted this carelessness regarding the natural consequences of sin. God and humanity are separated so completely that a sin against humanity is really unthinkable: every deed is to be considered *solely with respect to its supernatural consequences*, without regard for its natural consequences.[33]

God, who is invented *by* man, thus appears (through retrospective inference, Nietzsche would say) as the very cause and ordering principle of natural existence.[34] Moreover, a god so conceived demands a particular course of action and behavior from his subjects, in accordance with his purposefully crafted universe. This is the origin of what Western religion and philosophy will call *natural law*, the order and rule within the design of God's universe. In further

agreement with human pride, Nietzsche notes, it is supposed, in Europe and the West at least, that the universe is rational, logical, because this trait reflects the highest capacity of human nature. It is this human nature, or self, that is now *projected to godhead*: man differs from the brutes, the "lesser" animals, in that he possesses speech, reason, and logic. That is, mankind displays its very essence—rationality—in its thoughts and actions. Cherishing this distinctive possession of rationality out of overweening pride, because, after all, it is the only property that truly elevates humanity above the beasts, mankind then projects it onto the divine. With this projection, God henceforth becomes understood as the *source* of rationality, the overbounding source of rational order—as is manifest in turn, throughout the created world. The ordered seasons, the regular growth of plants and animals, the ordered movements of the heavenly spheres themselves, all have been traditional testimony to a universe of divine, rational creation.[35]

According to the traditional account, people have come to understand themselves as products of this grand creation. For millennia of Western thought, the rational individual occupied a unique and privileged place in what Arthur Lovejoy has termed "the great chain of being"—a rationally ordered universe that extends from the godhead and the angelic natures down to the lowliest organism, down to the dust itself. By the same token, mankind is also subject to an absolute *morality*, a system of absolute commandments that are promulgated by the creator god. The authority of this divine lawgiver is absolute, and so is its extent. As payment, as compensation, for our dutiful travail of obedience to the divinely ordained moral law, it is supposed, or at least hoped, that we will be rewarded with an afterlife—an eternal life in heaven—in this *otherworldly* region we only get intimations of in our dreams, the one area *outside* of life, where our impoverished wishes and hopes are to be fulfilled, once and for all, where our tedium with *this* human life of suffering will be miraculously relieved and our sore afflictions remedied. In this sense, the afterlife, as conceived in the religions of the West, serves as a longed-for escape *from* pain and dissatisfaction, a desperate flight from this world. The afterworld, the otherworld—heaven itself—thus stands as an anesthetic balm of Gilead for our all-too-real existence in this world.

After this whole progression of the argument, Nietzsche goes one step further to point out the moment of greatest deceit: like the civil servant or the corporate executive who attains recognition and self-respect according to his position in the managerial hierarchy, our own personal existence *now*, for the *first time*, is understood to be objectively meaningful.[36] We now *belong* to the

well-ordered universe and become what we are, who we are, precisely in function of the divine order. *We* are rational because *he* is. We properly and religiously guide ourselves by universal, rational principles. Our destructive passions are guided and channeled by our so-called "higher faculties," and all this reflects and enhances the glory that is the divine.[37]

But more and more, the whole system of religious conviction and practice evolves into habit and passive belief in the system. This order of universal purpose and meaning has, for millennia, been so thoroughly invested into our very psyches and societies that personal understanding, self-respect, and esteem become wholly dependent upon the explanations of religion or, what for Nietzsche is the same thing, frightened superstition. We continually crave that our existence be rendered objectively meaningful and morally justified by the Almighty—that it be reaffirmed and approved time and again—but, for Nietzsche, when *God dies* and a *secular* age begins, our long-held religious beliefs and the needs that have been so deeply formed by those beliefs will *still* have to be fulfilled and reaffirmed. For a secular age, however, such fulfillment will be henceforth performed through *another* agency, whether this be politics, science, moral causes, or something else in turn.

Given the history and provenance of this entire epoch, Nietzsche effectively poses the subsequent questions: "Why maintain *this* system? Why not another?"[38] Perhaps we should experiment with an infinitude of possible systems to find a morality that does not inculcate shame, guilt, impotence, fear, and superstition in its adherents—not to speak of suppressed rage and boundless greed. Aren't all the conflicting moralities, not only within the traditions of the West but throughout history and worldwide, themselves readily *explained* by observation, by hypothesis and empirical verification? Perhaps the ancient Greek religious poet Hesiod simply *drank* too much and merely conjured up the Olympian gods. Perhaps Abraham and St. Paul were themselves victimized early on in life, bereft of love and instruction—stranger things have been known to happen. Can't we easily see how the ideals of a society are themselves generated from its work habits, its expectations, anticipations, and dreams?[39] Isn't the Viking Valhalla different from the Elysian Fields of Greek bucolic poets? Isn't the corporate banker's god different from that of the Central European peasant, or of mountain tribesmen in Persia, or of the Eritrean mystic?

Nietzsche's response to these issues is relatively succinct. By inventing—by constructing—this world of God's design and rational order, mankind has quite simply made two mistakes: First, overvaluing his own worth and projecting this

to the status of creative godhead, and second, taking his own thought too seriously, overvaluing his own rationality. Nature, therefore, becomes fixed on the model of man himself: it becomes *anthropomorphized*, cast in the form of man—and rationalized. In truth, it is quite independent of man (and of God) and indifferent to any human order. Mankind *imputes* purpose and causality to something that is inherently *indifferent* to reason, morality, or motivation. He imputes unity and order when in fact there is only relative chaos and complete lack of rationality. As Nietzsche would say at the very beginning of his 1873 essay, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense,"

> In some remote corner of the universe, poured out and glittering in innumerable solar systems, there once was a star on which clever animals invented knowledge. That was the haughtiest and most mendacious minute of "world history," yet only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths the star grew cold, and the clever animals had to die. . . . There is nothing in nature so despicable or insignificant that it cannot be blown up like a bag by the slightest breath of this power of [human] knowledge; and just as every porter wants an admirer, the proudest human being, the philosopher, thinks that he sees the eyes of the universe telescopically focused from all sides on his actions and thoughts.[40]

These are fundamental errors for Nietzsche. But, at the same time, they are necessary errors, necessary illusions. They are human abstractions or fictions that are nonetheless useful for life: we impute concepts such as strict causality, moral purposiveness, rational order, and logical unity when there are none. Across the teeming profusion of particulate and subparticulate activity, we very grossly impute the fictions of unity, enduring substance, and names that point to a supposedly identical thing. In fact, there is largely confusion and difference.[41]

Our identifying, unifying, and expressing a *verbal* similarity are only a convenient fiction imposed from without, and we do this out of biological necessity: we *need* to describe, categorize, and identify if we are to find and cultivate food, exchange information, and provide for the necessities of human life. It is the necessary function of the intellect to lie, and therefore to abstract, generalize, idealize, conceptualize. The whole conceptual order, the whole religious order, the whole conventional moral, ethical, and religious, not to mention philosophical, order is precisely a fabric of lies. What is important is not so much the truth of these concepts, but rather, the effects and beliefs that are engendered by them. Truth is a construction, an arbitrary fiction, that is agreed upon and valued, as long as it remains plausible and necessary for the continuance of life. There could be better ways.

THE GAY SCIENCE: THE DEATH OF GOD

Doubtless, the most striking theme introduced by *The Gay Science* is what Nietzsche termed "the Death of God." That, and its purported consequences, best serve to open up the broad concerns of the present work. Let us first attend to the "event" of God's death, as Nietzsche formulates it in paragraph 125, surely one of the most dramatic passages in his entire corpus:

> Have you ever heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place and cried incessantly: "I seek God! I seek God!"[42]—As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has he got lost? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? emigrated?—Thus they yelled and laughed.
>
> The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Whither is God?" he cried; "I will tell you. *We have killed him*—you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.
>
> "How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was the holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us—for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto."
>
> Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out. "I have come too early," he said then; "my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder require time; the light of the stars requires time; deeds, though done, still require time to be

seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars—*and yet they have done it themselves*."

It has been related further that on the same day the madman forced his way into several churches and there struck up his *requiem aeternam deo* [requiem for the eternal God]. Led out and called to account, he is said always to have replied nothing but: "What after all are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God?"[43]

An assertion of such magnitude requires at least the following clarification, in the form of a question: namely, "Who is this God?" Or, stated somewhat differently, we must first establish his divine provenance, his paternity, his origin and identity. Certainly, such a God is not merely the image or figural representation of a personally conceived deity—rendered particular by experience, faith, or doctrine. Rather, what Nietzsche is concerned with in this polemic is the God of the West, of Europe and Persia, of Rome and Athens. It is first of all the God of Being, of all that is real, all that exists: "I am He who am," the Old Testament tells us. Such a God is the creator, the source of Being and of all things. He is the first cause, the material cause, the efficient cause, the formal cause, and the final cause. This is what we have come to know as the God of Genesis.[44]

Yet such a God is also the God of *truth*, he is the neo-Platonic inspiration for St. John the Divine. In this sense, he speaks across the New Testament: "I am the *word*," the word made "flesh." Let us not be mistaken: the word in question, of course, is the *logos*, the philosophical pattern of rationality and intelligibility that theologians and philosophers, like St. Augustine, will find reflected and incarnated everywhere throughout the universe. To see nature in this fashion is literally to recognize the traces of God therein. Nature itself and human nature stand as the very signature and substance of his rational creation. It is precisely in this way that Western morality, philosophy, and theology are essentially united. The Judeo-Christian tradition repeats the founding doctrines of Plato and of Greek antiquity, and this is to be echoed at every period and from every thinker in philosophy and religion for the next two millennia—across Plotinus, Eriugena, Bonaventura, the medieval theologians to Descartes, Kant, Hegel, and right down to the present day. The study of nature and man is essentially one with that of religion. It is this totality which Martin Heidegger has called the Western tradition of ontotheology, that is, the study of being as such, of what is, or, metaphysics.[45]

The Good, the Beautiful, and the True for Plato and Greek philosophy become the Way, the Light, and the Truth for two thousand years of Western

thought. The source of Being is also the source of value and truth. Our rational *concepts* ultimately find their true referent in the *mind* of God. *Being* finds its source in the *grace* of God, and *values* find their strict justification and vindication in the *will* of God.[46]

The *death* of God, then, does not just mean that a social or political revolution will simply choose to dispense with the organized practice of a particular religious faith. Rather, what is at stake—and this is why the malingerers and idlers in the marketplace do not fully comprehend the *magnitude* of God's death—is the rejection, the toppling, of metaphysics: the very demise of onto-theology. The event of God's death, therefore, signifies the passing away of religion, philosophy, and morality as we have come to know them—as we have come to know it—across the history of Western thought. What this passing away ultimately means for Nietzsche will have to be patiently assembled throughout the course of his various works. Here in *The Gay Science*, however, he says that the death of God is the "Lucifer-match," the spark that ignites the whole of our all-too-volatile tradition.

In view of Nietzsche's extraordinary assertion about the death of God, the subsequent question quickly ensues: namely, "how did God's death occur?" Even more perplexing, how is this death, even now, continuing its reverberation, its death-rattle or *rigor mortis*? Perhaps the image of a bloody murder is too strong and violent for this *deicide*. Elsewhere, Nietzsche suggests that, one day, God simply found himself locked out of the church, temple, and mosque. In this sense, we could say that God simply died of atrophy, that there was no longer felt to be a need for the old God.[47] His function as creator, confessor, balm, judge, and accountant was replaced by another agency, namely, by *science*, and by another faith—the faith and belief in an omnipotent *technology*. If fear and weakness generated the need for a God, for a divine alter ego, those original wellsprings are now far better gratified by something new, by something whose worth and efficacy are more easily demonstrable. The death of God in the narrower sense (i.e., the specifically theological and doxological office of the divine) is thus really an exchange, a substitution, of one belief system for another. The Judeo-Christian God eventually comes to be replaced by the new marvel of a universal scientific order of creation, production, and rationally consistent explanation—in which case, there is little need any more for the modern citizen to sacrifice the first-born child or to pull out his or her own hair in remonstration or atonement. Plagues and pests are more readily subdued by insecticides. Droughts and inundations are more easily calmed by dams and irrigation networks.

Not only does the rise of the new sciences, beginning with the Enlightenment, serve to kill the traditional God, but another, related, factor arises from within the development of Western theology itself to aid in this deicide. Nietzsche locates this second contributing factor to the death of God in the appearance of Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation. What theological functions were previously performed by the Roman Catholic priest—the very real, psychological functions of confession and consolation, the absolution of sin and guilt—now become the superfluous trappings of an obsolete ecclesiastical hierarchy, due to Luther and the Reformation, and to figures such as John Calvin, John Knox, and Huldrych Zwingli.

> We Europeans confront a world of tremendous ruins. A few things are still towering, much looks decayed and uncanny. . . . The church is this city of destruction: we see the religious community of Christianity shaken to its lowest foundations; the faith in God has collapsed. . . . An edifice like Christianity that had been built so carefully over such a long period . . . naturally could not be destroyed all at once. All kinds of earthquakes had to shake it, all kinds of spirits that bore, dig, gnaw, and moisten have had to help. But what is strangest is this: Those who exerted themselves the most to preserve and conserve Christianity have become precisely its most efficient destroyers—the Germans.
>
> The Lutheran Reformation was, in its whole breadth, the indignation of simplicity against "multiplicity" or, to speak cautiously, a crude, ingenuous misunderstanding in which there is much that calls for forgiveness. One failed to understand the expression of a *triumphant* church and saw nothing but corruption. . . . Luther's . . . work, his will to restore that Roman work became, without his knowing or willing it, nothing but the beginning of a work of destruction. He unraveled, he tore up with honest wrath what the old spider had woven so carefully for such a long time. . . . He destroyed the concept of the "church" by throwing away the faith in the inspiration of the church councils; for the concept of the "church" retains its power only on condition that the inspiring spirit that founded the church still lives in it, builds in it, and continues to build its house. . . . Luther, having given the priest [sexual intercourse with] woman, had to *take* away from him auricular confession; that was right psychologically. With that development the Christian priest was, at bottom, abolished, for his most profound utility had always been that he was a holy ear, a silent well, a grave for secrets. "Everyone his own priest"—behind such formulas and their peasant cunning there was hidden in Luther the abysmal hatred against "the higher human being."[48]

All the practical and psychological functions of the priest thus became internalized under the Reformationist doctrine of a personal *conscience*: they be-

came subject to one's *own* alter ego, which now answers *for itself*, which finds its spiritual strength within. Moral duty now becomes a function of the individual's personal thought and labor. The public spectacle of confession becomes internalized in the form of a private meditation; namely, the cultivation of a conscience through personal prayer and atonement.

Despite Nietzsche's personal distaste for Luther's "peasant revolt of the spirit," he nonetheless conceded that Luther's doctrine of a personal dialogue with the Divine—through personal prayer and atonement—was a stroke of unexampled genius. For, after all, it was the individual and the value of his or her own thought and labor that was for centuries suppressed. Luther saw that it was only under the impersonal office of an ecclesiastical institution that the church was able to impose itself as mediator, interpreter, judge, and foremost, spiritual authority. As an impersonal institution, it was responsible to no one save itself. By its own office of authority, any attempt to question theological orthodoxy was seen not as a simple difference of opinion or belief, of heterodoxy, but rather as heresy. Let us not forget that one prohibition of the Old Testament: "Thou shalt not eat of the tree of knowledge." That kind of knowledge or wisdom (Latin *scientia*) is not joyous; it will reap the whirlwinds of pain, suffering, divine wrath, and death.

The wind had nonetheless shifted by the time of the New Testament. It then blew from Athens: "*Know the truth* and the truth shall make you *free*." This is the God of Plato, the God who demands inspection and answers, for he is the source of all truth. Nietzsche asserts that *this* doctrine of seeking the *truth*, which has both moral and metaphysical dimensions of enormous proportions, was a mistake. In it lay the seeds of God's own death, a death which first becomes evident, we saw, in the rise of the New Sciences and in the Protestant Reformation. As Nietzsche would remark:

> The most fateful act of two thousand years of discipline for truth . . . in the end forbids itself the *lie* in faith in God. You see what it was that really triumphed over the Christian god: Christian morality itself, the concept of truthfulness that was understood ever more rigorously, the father confessor's refinement of the Christian conscience, translated and sublimated into a scientific conscience, into intellectual cleanliness at any price.[49]

The tension between authority and knowledge, belief and truth, or revelation and reason had, of course, been developing ever since the early church began. The problem was essentially that God is held to be the source of universal intelligibility, but he himself is *unknowable*, inscrutable. To know the world

and to understand its divinely wrought order, one must first pass by the mediation of faith and belief. The how and why of things, the explanation of the meaning and purpose of nature, had thus traditionally been the exclusive province of theology.[50] Forced to explain the irrational and divine elements of the rational universe, medieval theologians such as St. Thomas Aquinas and Moses Maimonides attempted to give an account of the divine nature itself, which would ideally clarify matters—by means of *analogy*. To know the world completely we must first know God: precisely, because God is the world's rationally creative source and ordering principle of truth. But we can only know God analogically. How, then, is this analogical knowledge of God at all possible?

Aquinas formulates the analogy in the following way:

(1)		(2)
man	:	God
his products	:	his products (i.e., creation, the world)

Based on the causal "model" of the "craftsman," this is an analogy that is itself composed of two relations. It is called a four-termed analogy, or the analogy of proper proportionality, and it seeks to express a relation between relation (1) and relation (2).[51] The real problem, of course, is that we cannot know relation (2) until we know the principal term (God) that is needed to construct the relation in the first place. Analogy, in short, gets us nowhere. It only appeared to work on the assumption that the four items mentioned in the analogy belonged to the same order, the order of continuous magnitude (as Euclid used the analogy in book 2 of his *Elements*). But this is precisely the difficulty to be resolved: the relation of the finite to the infinite is not continuous; the two orders are different in kind, so the relation cannot be finitely fixed. The infinite term, God, cannot be simply extrapolated from the other three finite terms, since, by definition, the infinite—whatever it is—is precisely that which *transcends* the finite.

What fatally compromises any attempt to know the divine nature is that to know God is to reduce him to the level of human understanding and finitude. To know God is, in this sense, to kill him. In fact, it was this classic medieval debate, between realism (the *via affirmativa*: one can have a positive knowledge of God) and nominalism (the *via negativa*: one can only have a negative understanding—i.e., only in name), which generated the unsuccessful attempt at a middle way, or an analogical understanding (the *via analogia*), in the first place, namely, the possibility of an indirect knowledge of the divine nature.

Hopelessly blocked by these mutually exclusive positions, the historical fig-

ure who resolves the impasse of analogy—of direct and indirect knowledge of God—is also the figure who ushers in the humanism of the Renaissance, the shift from a God-centered universe to one that is man-centered. This figure is the fifteenth-century mystic Nicholas of Cusa.[52] Cusa (or Cusanos) reasoned in a somewhat negative way in his work of 1440, *Learned Ignorance*: if God is what exceeds our knowledge, then it is sufficient for us to apprehend the greatest possible extent of our own finite, human knowledge. Once we reach the frontier of our own, positive human knowledge, we will have, by definition, attained the *delimitation* of God. Or, as Voltaire well knew, to be at the French frontier is, at the same time, to see Switzerland. Of dramatic importance here is that the general focus of intellectual concern is, for once, directed away from the attempt to grasp the divine nature as such and is turned toward an understanding of the finite domain of human nature and human experience. What becomes important for Cusanos and for the whole of the subsequent period of Renaissance humanism, then, is human thought (*scientia*) and humanity's productive labor, its human creativity (*techné*). These two human formations, *science* and *technology*, effectively seal God's coffin.

Nicholas of Cusa opens the breach: man now becomes "man the maker"—*homo faber*—for Marsilio Ficino and the Italian Renaissance, man "the maker of politics and nations" for Niccolò Machiavelli, man "the master and possessor of nature" for Francis Bacon, René Descartes, Isaac Newton, and for a modern age. For Nietzsche, quite simply, the god of traditional theology is dead because he is useless, superfluous. He has been displaced by the products of man's own knowledge, by science and technology. Moreover, what he was can now be explained by this new science, by the universal mathematics and mechanics of Descartes and the Enlightenment, and ultimately, by Nietzsche himself: God was a fiction all along, a psychological construct and fabrication.[53] Useless and a fiction, he is left to decay—for, as Nietzsche remarked, "even Gods decompose."

CONSEQUENCES OF THE DEATH OF GOD

What does Nietzsche recognize as the consequences of God's death? Initially, we can enumerate at least four—and here we see the wider meaning Nietzsche ascribes to this event. Certainly, the *first* effect of God's death is *to remove the universal foundations of morality.* A dead God no longer has the power and authority to determine values. There is no longer an absolute or

transcendent ground for ethics and morality, since there is no ground of authority or justification beyond the merely human actions and habits of those who live. All of which is to say that morality enters into history and that its claims are strictly conditioned by that history. Religion, ethics, and morality are merely historical and relative codes for organizing, regulating, and determining human activity. They are evanescent configurations of a society, a culture, which vary according to time and place. No longer, then, can one point beyond life to determine the value of life. Likewise, there can no longer be any universal and absolute moral precepts, maxims, or laws, once the human and natural orders are understood to be essentially historical. In a striking passage, Nietzsche remarks, "How much must collapse now that this faith has been undermined, because it was built upon this faith, propped up by it, grown into it; for example, the whole of our European morality."[54]

A second and immediate effect is that we will continue to live under the shadow of the dead God, we will continue to display his raiments and trappings for some time. There will begin an age of metaphysical nostalgia that will last for hundreds of years, a period where we shall be carried along by the mere inertia and habit of theology and metaphysics. Thus, what powers were formerly granted to the godhead are now given over to the unbounded belief in science. Indeed, one often speaks about the "religiosity" of scientism and the "messianic" appeal of modern technological growth and progress. Nietzsche even remarks about the "evangelical" character of nihilism and positivism, the patent rejection of and opposite to Western ontotheology.[55] Even if the Western tradition has generated and sustained a system of artificial needs and beliefs, an articulated project of weakness, to Nietzsche's mind, it is nonetheless a system of such comprehensiveness and persistence that it continues to exercise its authority at a distance, even as the secular age has lost faith in the foundational principles of faith.

A third consequence of God's death is that we enter an age of ambiguity and transition, characterized precisely by that nostalgia for the earlier age. He calls it an impending age of "breakdown, destruction, ruin, and cataclysm." God's death, we remember, is called the greatest, the most momentous event in history, yet one whose reverberations are just now beginning to be felt: "This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder require time." Nietzsche goes on to observe:

> Even we born guessers of riddles who are, as it were, waiting on the mountains, posted between today and tomorrow, stretched in the contradiction between

> today and tomorrow, we firstlings and premature births of the coming century, to whom the shadows that must soon envelop Europe really *should* have appeared by now—why is it that even we look forward to the approaching gloom without any real sense of involvement and above all without any worry and fear for *ourselves*? Are we perhaps still too much under the impression of the *initial consequences* of this event—and these initial consequences, the consequences for *ourselves*, are quite the opposite of what one might perhaps expect: They are not at all sad and gloomy but rather like a new and scarcely describable kind of light, happiness, relief, exhilaration, encouragement, dawn. Indeed, we philosophers and "free spirits" feel, when we hear the news that "the old god is dead," as if a new dawn shone on us; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, premonitions, expectation. At long last the horizon appears free to us again, even if it should not be bright; at long last our ships may venture out again, venture out to face any danger; all the daring of the lover of knowledge is permitted again; the sea, *our* sea, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an "open sea."[56]

The title of the section just quoted—"The Meaning of Our Cheerfulness"—is itself crucial to understanding the importance the event of God's death will have for Nietzsche and for his own doctrine of a "gay science," a "joyful wisdom." The sea, in any case, is now opened: boundless and infinite. It is upon this open sea of an infinite future that we, of an ambiguous age, are to wander. Like young Oedipus, we have each killed our father and we are condemned to leave our father's home:

> We who are homeless.—Among Europeans today there is no lack of those who are entitled to call themselves homeless in a distinctive and honorable sense; it is to them that I especially commend my secret wisdom and *gaya scienza*. For their fate is hard, their hopes are uncertain; it is quite a feat to devise some comfort for them—but to what avail? We children of the future, how *could* we be at home in this today? We feel disfavor for all ideals that might lead one to feel at home even in this fragile, broken time of transition; as for its "realities," we do not believe that they will *last*. The ice that still supports people today has become very thin; the wind that brings the thaw is blowing; we ourselves who are homeless constitute a force that breaks open ice and all other too thin "realities." We "conserve" nothing; neither do we want to return to any past periods.[57]

To answer the question posed by Schopenhauer (the philosopher who perhaps most influenced Nietzsche in his early years), the question that must now be asked—"Has existence, then, any significance at all, any meaning whatsoever?"—Nietzsche responds that the fourth consequence of God's death is the

recognition of man's birth. Like Cusanos, without God's support, we become divine. We now become the responsible bearers of world and history. Our existence will embrace this whole, and no other, world; it will invoke no sanction or salvation outside the world. For Nietzsche, we shall embrace the thought of the "eternal return" and this will be our newly found significance, a significance that will transfigure reality, humanity, and history as we now know them. Indeed, this shall be our "gay science."

OVERCOMING AND AFFIRMATION

Let us briefly summarize our reading of *The Gay Science*. We recall that it is one of Nietzsche's most central works—he called it his "most medial [central] work"—since it contains, in varying degrees of explicitness, almost all of his major philosophical themes, his most celebrated teachings: the death of God, the eternal return, the will to power, and his general critique of morality.

We initially specified the nature of that God, which Nietzsche alleges to have died: First, He is, or was, the object of conventional worship in the West. But second, and perhaps more importantly, such an eminent divine was also the God of Being and of Truth (i.e., the god of traditional metaphysics). We made the comparison between the god of Plato and that of the Judeo-Christian tradition and found them to be essentially the same. The Platonic Unity, the supraessential One, of the Good, the Beautiful, and the True, this is also the Way, the Light, and the Truth for two millennia of Christendom. Specifically, the creative God of being is also the source of all value and truth. For the tradition, all concepts find their highest referent in the mind of God, all being is created by the grace of God, and all value finds its origin in the will of God. The realms of being, truth, and value are thus fundamentally united for our tradition, and this unity, which is our tradition, can be summarily characterized by the term *ontotheology.*

We also saw that the death, the passing, of this God was explained by the development of two historical trends, two historical events: the rise of science and technology, beginning with Renaissance humanism and extending throughout the Enlightenment; and the Protestant Reformation. It was the latter that replaced the mediating authority of the priest, the church's ecclesiastical hierarchy, with the doctrine of an internalized conscience (i.e., a moral and intellectual self-responsibility exercised by the individual). In short, the Enlightenment and the Reformation present us with the historical beginnings

of a rigorous personal autonomy, of personal and practical independence. God's death, of course, is hardly a simple affair: "After Budda was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave—a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown.—And we—we still have to vanquish his shadow."[58]

Following God's death, we become both his executors and legatees: it remains for us to administer this—his—divine estate. We already specified four consequences of this "greatest event in history": (1) Absolute morality has passed away. (2) We shall continue to live, inertially, under the effects of the old god. His agency will be transferred, however, to a variety of substitutes: science and technology, but also moral causes, political movements, and ideologies—all having an implicit eschatological or redemptive, salvational function to them. (3) We thereby enter an age of transition and ambiguity. Nothing is sure, nothing certain, although we may desperately—nostalgically—wish something were. (4) Finally, we become only gradually, progressively, aware of the effects of our newly found freedom—in such a way that the old ontotheological beliefs are seen to belong to a past era; the belief in a divine creation, the concept of rational causation, or the belief in any universal moral purpose and destiny now appears to be simply a vestige of the old faith, the leftover shards or shrouds that still linger about the coffin of the dead god. The world no longer appears as a purposive or rational order, nor does it plausibly reflect any aspect of the divine:

> The astral order in which we live is an exception; this order and the relative duration that depends on it have again made possible an exception of exceptions: the formation of the organic. The total character of the world, however, is in all eternity chaos—in the sense not of a lack of necessity but a lack of order, arrangement, form, beauty, wisdom, and whatever other names there are for our aesthetic anthropomorphisms . . . it is neither perfect, nor beautiful, nor noble, nor does it wish to become any of these things; it does not by any means strive to imitate man. None of our aesthetic and moral judgments apply to it.[59]

Nonetheless, even *we*, whom Nietzsche terms the "firstlings and premature births of the coming century," still remain bound by these old shrouds, by these lingering shadows on the walls of the Platonic cave. We still have to *overcome* the old morality—or at least this is what Nietzsche sees as our immediate task:

> If one would like to see our European morality for once as it looks from a distance, and if one would like to measure it against other moralities, past and fu-

> ture, then one has to proceed like a wanderer who wants to know how high the towers in a town are: he *leaves* the town. "Thoughts about moral prejudices," if they are not meant to be prejudices about prejudices, presuppose a position *outside* morality, some point beyond good and evil to which one has to rise, climb, or fly—and in the present case at least a point beyond *our* good and evil, a freedom from everything "European," by which I mean the sum of the imperious value judgments that have become part of our flesh and blood.[60]

As a result of such an overcoming, such a distancing from all that which constitutes our present natures, Nietzsche envisions the emergence of a transformed human subject, one who would find joy in this new prospect:

> One could conceive of such a pleasure and power of self-determination, such a *freedom* of the will that the spirit would take leave of all faith and every wish for certainty, being practiced in maintaining himself on insubstantial ropes and possibilities and dancing even near abysses. Such a spirit would be the *free spirit* par excellence.[61]

But would this appeal be merely *one more* exhortation for us to act in a particular way? Is Nietzsche simply following the structural pattern in turn—filling in the "old God" dictates, the litany of the "thou shalt"—with the precepts, rules, and moral exhortations of the "new man"? Is Nietzsche one more preacher, yet another didactic at best or authority figure at worst? Is this text meant to convey, to inspire, an evangelism for the new Calvinist elect? Is he a zealot? Another Luther or Zwingli in atheist disguise?[62] And just as Zwingli's followers threw the Bavarian Catholic emissaries out of the Prague town hall window in 1618, shall Nietzsche himself be "defenestrated" in turn, only to await the next prophet of yet another new world order?[63]

In any case, Nietzsche surely does not pose himself as one more replacement prophet: this would be to profoundly misunderstand Nietzsche's own, that is, a positive, conception of morality. His expression is not meant to gratify the fearful weak—for he urges no desultory escape from pain, from life, into a fictional world of imaginary compensation. Nor is his work simply meant to be a palliative or tonic for the confused spirit of a troubled Europe. Why, then, does he write? To surround himself with followers? Clearly not!—and if he did, he failed dramatically. Indeed, Nietzsche continually chides his readers: he asks to be criticized, not to be adulated. Nietzsche knows full well that the large majority of followers and converts bear only the resentment and helplessness that ceaselessly search out the next command, the next dictate, the next authority to whom they would willingly submit.[64] While Nietzsche does tell us that he

writes as a way of "getting rid of my thoughts,"[65] this may well be an act of grace, but it is certainly not to proselytize nor to institute a new sect—in the fashion of, for example, the French positivist, Auguste Comte. He writes only *for* those who have already become matured: "We are, in one word . . . *good Europeans*, the heirs of Europe, the rich, oversupplied, but also overly obligated heirs of thousands of years of European spirit. As such, we have also outgrown Christianity, and are averse to it—precisely because we have grown out of it."[66]

As for the others, those individuals who have not yet matured, Nietzsche remarks, "What can it matter to us with what tinsel the sick may use to cover up their weaknesses? . . . We know full well the hysterical little men and women who need this present religion and morality as a cloak and adornment."[67] To these people, Nietzsche implores, one simply must be generous. Believers, he says, invariably have a profound need to believe, a need that in one way or another, testifies strikingly to their own infirmity:

> Metaphysics is still needed by some; but so is that impetuous *demand for certainty* that today discharges itself among large numbers of people in a scientific-positivistic form. The demand that one *wants* by all means that something should be firm (while on account of the ardor of this demand one is easier and more negligent about the demonstration of this certainty)—this, too, is still the demand for a support, a prop, in short, that *instinct of weakness* which, to be sure, does not create religious, metaphysical systems, and convictions of all kinds but—conserves them.[68]

In a very concrete sense, therefore, Nietzsche seems to be writing for those people who don't need to read him. His audience is calculated to be precisely those for whom the old order is already beginning to gray, and for whom such beliefs are beginning to appear as empty shells, stale fodder, lifeless conventions, whether these beliefs be of God or are directed to his modern placeholders or surrogates. That modern science is such a preeminent surrogate for Nietzsche is clear:

> We see that science also rests on a faith; there simply is no science "without presuppositions." . . . From where would science then be permitted to take its unconditional faith or conviction on which it rests, that truth is more important than any other thing, including every other conviction? . . . But you will have gathered what I am driving at, namely, that it is still a *metaphysical faith* upon which our faith in science rests—that even we seekers after knowledge today, we godless anti-metaphysicians still take our fire, too, from the flame lit by a faith

> that is thousands of years old, that Christian faith which was also the faith of Plato, that God is the truth, that truth is divine.—But what if this should become more and more incredible, if nothing should prove to be divine any more unless it were error, blindness, the lie—if God himself should prove to be our most enduring lie?[69]

According to Nietzsche's analysis, then, we are prepared to confront, to appraise, and to evaluate the entire tradition. For a modern secular age, there is no longer the universally felt need to be constrained by the ancient morality of God and religion, or by its more recent surrogates—totalizing ideologies of the left or right, extremist forms of nationalism, utopian economic or moral movements, ethnic and political irredentism, and so forth.[70] If the possibility of overcoming this tradition is prepared by our newfound maturity, then Nietzsche's own agency is, indeed, but emblematic; he is only the Orpheus, the "Lucifer match." With no divine impediments or pedigrees, mankind for the first time becomes "liberated" by the awareness of "this greatest event of history," the death of God.

Where does Nietzsche suggest we commence such an undertaking? Where does one situate oneself for such an impending transformation? With the admission of a godless universe, there is no longer an opposition between human and divine, between immanent and transcendent, not to speak of the opposition between what is absolute and what is historical or relative. In a strict sense, the death of God *is* the greatest event in history: it is the beginning of a resolutely autonomous human history as such. No longer are we but a dim reflection or a "moving image" of eternity. With the death of God, we have fallen into time.

The beginning of this undertaking already lies "beyond good and evil," beyond the ancient values and the purportedly "eternal" truths. Humanity, for Nietzsche, is no longer fixed as a divinely ordained measure in the whirlpool of things. The human individual is no longer bound by his supposed divinely given essence, that of being essentially rational. Rather, humanity is now to be conceived of in purely natural terms. The individual is to be situated—and understood—on the ontological plane of nature itself. But, realize that now, for Nietzsche, nature is itself undeified: it is not a created product that finds its source elsewhere. For a modern age, nature is both created and creative: it affects itself and continually transforms itself. It is no longer conceived simply as created—much less in the divine image of an eternal and rational God.

What, then, is nature? For Nietzsche, nature is at once chaos and necessity; it is profuse, luxuriant, teeming with excess and superabundance. Yet, nature

is also cold, exact, bound to its sempiternal rhythms. The natural order continually transforms itself, neither increasing nor diminishing overall. It is, in this sense, a "finite" but "open" economy. All of which is to say that Nietzsche conceives nature to be fixed in its quantity of matter, energy, or force. In this respect, nature is finite. But, by the same token, this finite nature continues to operate dynamically in an infinite time. Thus a balance of sorts is attained; with neither absolute growth nor absolute diminution, nature both conserves its energy absolutely and expends it continually in the natural processes of organic and inorganic metamorphosis. Nature never simply *is*, in the sense that it could attain a final or terminal state of fixed *Being*. Rather, it continually "changes," it continually "evolves" or "becomes." What characterizes nature's economy, then, is a vicious Malthusian rigor. Its economy demands continual reinvestment and churning: quanta of forces fuse, stress, contract, and factor out to the next series and chain of impulses, into the next self-transformation, the next metamorphosis.

This is a kind of "order" if you will, and as natural beings, we are already part and parcel of it. In the absence of any transcendent order, nature for once becomes our human dominion. Upon God's death, we become naturalized citizens. We are no longer to be thought of as Gnostic exiles from an "otherworld," since there is no eternal country of origin or reprieve. There is no resting place of the soul, either, by the still waters, nor is there even an alien substance, or counter-substance, called the *soul*, that could somehow stand by impassively, unnaturally. It is in this sense Nietzsche would assert:

> The living being, moreover, is only a species of dead being, and a very rare species at that—let us be on our guard against thinking that the world eternally creates the *new*. Moreover, there are no eternally enduring substances: matter and soul are just such errors as the God of the Eleatics. But when shall we be at an end with our foresight and precaution? When will all these shadows of God cease to obscure us? When shall we be permitted to naturalize ourselves by means of the pure, newly discovered, newly redeemed nature?[71]

Just how is this naturalization possible, then, and how do we "wanderers" become *at home*, in nature, and what is the economics of this relation between man and nature, man and world? It is misleading to think that a traditional scientific account of nature would be called for at this point, precisely because "natural" science effectively *denatures* this relationship. It interprets nature, first of all, in the light of man, in light of purely subjective abstractions.[72] The traditional view thus gives a subjective, anthropomorphic account of nature and calls this *idealizing construction*, this series of *images*, "objective."[73]

For Nietzsche, there would be a double fault: science conceives nature in terms of our quite human abstractions, generalizations, and idealizations. Nature, therefore, is seen in the image of man—just as God was, according to Nietzsche's account of the origins of religion. Second, it is claimed by science that this construction has nothing to do with subjectivity, that it is in fact the exact opposite. The scientific account, we are told, is the paradigm of objectivity. Hence, the individual human subject is necessarily pitted against the world and occupies a place that could only be termed unnatural. At best, humanity seems to occupy and rule from some sort of refugee camp.

> The whole pose of "man *against* the world," man as a "world-negating" principle, of man as the measure of the value of things, as judge of the world who in the end places existence itself upon his scales and finds it wanting—the monstrous insipidity of this pose has finally come home to us and we are sick of it. We laugh as soon as we encounter the juxtaposition of "man *and* world," separated by the sublime presumption of the little word "and."[74]

In order to *become naturalized*, in Nietzsche's sense, the individual must embrace nature, ultimately, by an act of will. He must willingly accept the natural order on its own terms. For Nietzsche, this means we must *affirm* its chaos and necessity, and, by the same token, we must *destroy* the little "and" that *separates* us from nature. Destruction, here, consists in a denial of that tradition-bound intellectual and ideological filter, that smoke-screen mediation of all the images, beliefs, projections, fictions, and shadows that are the vestiges of the "dead God," of ontotheology. Specifically, this calls for a knowing denial of the "second nature" that, over the course of millennia, had become our "first nature."[75] This task would amount to a critical deconstruction of our tradition: it would consist in a critique of those historically derived notions of causality, unity, substance, identity, divisible time, rationality, logic, truth, soul, and God. As Nietzsche would recount, *this critique of the fundamental axioms of tradition* might well entail unsuspected consequences of dramatic proportions:

> This long plenitude and sequence of breakdown, destruction, ruin, and cataclysm that is now impending—who could guess enough of it today to be compelled to play the teacher and advance proclaimer of this monstrous logic of terror, the prophet of a gloom and an eclipse of the sun whose like has probably never yet occurred on earth?[76]

This work of critique or destruction, of course, is not merely the product of one thinker. Against the commanding edifice of metaphysics, we recall, "every

sort of spirit which perforates, digs, gnaws, and moulders had to assist in the work of destruction."

We must also remember that this kind of critical "destruction," or "deconstruction," is not merely negative: its results are positive, that is, it rids us of two millennia of withered pieties, of sanctimonious shrouds. Its intentions are also positive—they are not motivated by the desire to avoid pain, to seek peace and repose in the anesthetic balm of religion, or in the smug confidence and arrogance of a self-consistent logic. Rather, the motivation to destroy comes about as a gift of fullness, an expression of overflowing power that wills to create, to quicken the pace, to invoke the future—as a further contest to create and to affirm a newly understood human order.[77]

Oddly enough, the kind of nature that Nietzsche affirms is remarkably similar to an ancient, archaic Greek conception, the pre-Homeric understanding, in which nature was symbolized by the two-headed ax of fertility: nature destroys, lays waste, but also harvests. The fields are made to lie fallow such that they may in turn nurture and produce. The reaper makes way for the new crop, the new generation. To affirm such a nature is to do so totally and unreservedly, to affirm its often unpleasant consequences for us, but also to commit ourselves to its splendor, to will that our human destinies be one with nature—with no escape, no flight from nature so conceived.

Nietzsche views the affirmation of nature, of natural existence (i.e., an entirely de-deified nature, wholly amoral, without any transcending purpose, direction, or end: an "innocent" nature) as nothing less than the prospect of an entirely new and different destiny for the whole of mankind—a destiny that is at once *terrifying* and *rich* with the prospect of an infinite future. Here is a future with no possibility of transcending nature, no possibility of any human reality other than that of the natural order itself. Nietzsche expresses this concept of naturalization by the *image* or *metaphor* of what he calls the "eternal return," an image that is both terrifying and liberating to the extent that it *infinitizes* humanity and makes it aware of its newly found infinitizing destiny:

> What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you—into 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 unutterably small or great in your life will have to *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 upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust."

> Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and *curse* the demon who spoke thus? Or have you *once* experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him, "You are a *God*, and never have I heard anything more *divine*." *If* this thought *gained possession* of you, it would *change* you as you are or perhaps *crush* you. The question in each and every thing, *"Do you desire this*, once more and innumerable *times* more?" would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. *Or how well disposed* would you have to become *to yourself and to life* [so as] to *crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate, eternal, confirmation and seal?[78]

This first statement of the eternal return *appears* to be another evangelical invocation. It reawakens the call of Cusanos with astonishing *psychological* force. In effect, it demands the *conditional*: it asks us, "What if?" This is an appeal to our resoluteness and steadfastness, perhaps. But it also asks *us* to be ratified in the eternal cycle.[79] Not only would *our* lives be repeated to infinity, therefore, but the very cycle of past and future—from antediluvian eons to the final cataclysm—would be ceaselessly, interminably, relived. But second, and more importantly, if we grant the finite and open economics of this natural order, we also grant the untold myriad permutations this finite order, this finite system, could endure, and our present dust-speck existence would be taken as one micro-instant of one set of atomic arrangements. This would be a system of crypto-incarnations, of insemination and dissemination of our own subparticulate matter. Like Leibniz's celebrated little monads, we would reflect a universe at all times, we would literally inhabit an infinitude of worlds. We would find our homes deep under the waves that careen and smash headlong into Portofino's cliffs—and we would indeed know their secret.

Would not the *fear* of a vengeful God and the guilt-inspiring reprobation from a host of priests disappear like a sweet aftertaste in the light of such a conception, to be buried—only to rise once again—and yet again pass away, disposed, metamorphosed by another wrinkle or fold in the crystalline vaults?

Not only would this eternal return be an incentive, a psychological affirmation to strengthen our human resolve, but it would itself be the highest expression of the will to *live*. It—the eternal return itself—would be the grandest, the most complete and total expression of the *will to power*.[80] Its very conception would bring us to humanity and history. Here, it is not so much a question of projecting ourselves onto the world from without, as if we, once again, were claiming hegemony over it. Rather, it is quite the reverse; it would rather be as if nature, world, history, and humanity *became us*, became transformed and included—introjected—into *our* history, as if *they* constituted precisely what

we are! All this unfolds itself through us. We would become the heirs and possessors of this titanic dance, which would be the blood that courses through our veins to the Dionysian strains of this Joyful Wisdom. This Gay Science, which replaces the traditional doctrines of transcendence and fearful dependence with a teaching of total immanence and a newfound autonomy, would infuse us, humanity, with a transfigured vitality, an entirely new kind of emotion and feeling, one that would enable us to identify with, and thus celebrate, the entirety of natural existence:

> This is actually one aspect of this new feeling: Anyone who manages to experience the history of humanity as *his own history*, will feel in an enormously generalized way all the grief of an invalid who thinks of health, of an old man who thinks of the dreams of his youth, of a lover deprived of his beloved, of the martyr whose ideal is perishing, of the hero on the evening after a battle that has decided nothing but brought him wounds and the loss of his friend. But if one endured, if one *could* endure this immense sum of grief of all kinds while yet being the hero, who as the second day of battle breaks, welcomes the dawn and his fortune, being a person whose horizon encompasses thousands of years past and future, being the heir of all the nobility of all past spirit—an heir with a sense of obligation, the most aristocratic of old nobles and at the same time the first of a new nobility—the like of which no age has yet seen or dreamed of; if one could burden one's soul with all of this—the oldest, the newest, losses, hopes, conquests, and the victories of humanity; if one could finally contain all this in one soul and crowd it into a single feeling—this would surely have to result in a happiness that humanity has not known so far: the happiness of a god full of power and love, full of tears and laughter, a happiness that, like the sun in the evening continually bestows its inexhaustible riches, pouring them into the sea, feeling richest, as the sun does, only when even the poorest fisherman is still rowing with golden oars! This godlike feeling would then be called—humaneness.[81]

What, then, is this cosmic vitality that eternally repeats itself—that eternally recurs, and us with it and through it? What is this "will to power"? The will to power is the will to live, the pulsions of instinct and impulse, the continually transforming and transfiguring energy of excess and superabundance that constitutes the whole of organic and inorganic existence. Seen in this way, life—vitality itself—is not mere endurance, it is not merely a question of some will to persist, to strive for mere continuation, to hope to bear the next moment, to sustain the next fetid breath. Rather, it is to create, to build, to wreak havoc doing so, possibly, but to augment and ever increase itself, out of force, youth, energy, and will—to assemble and build, to ingest, and to *overcome again*, out

of surfeit, abundance, and health. As Nietzsche expressed this dynamic and affirmative conception of life:

> The wish to preserve oneself is the symptom of a condition of distress, of a limitation of the really fundamental instinct of life which aims at *the expansion of power* and, wishing for that, frequently risks and even sacrifices self-preservation. . . . But a natural scientist should come out of his human nook; and in nature it is not conditions of distress that are *dominant* but overflow and squandering, even to the point of absurdity. The struggle for existence is only an *exception*, a temporary restriction of the will to life. The great and small struggle always revolves around superiority, around growth and expansion, around power—in accordance with the will to power which is the will of life.[82]

To embrace nature and history under the image (i.e., the metaphor or myth) of the "eternal return," therefore, is to identify one's very being with the "will to power." In the absence of the infinite God, we become the infinite creators of an infinitizing future. For Nietzsche, this is at once our natural inheritance and our historical imperative.

Each moment heralds an infinite future.
Each moment recurs—again and again—in an eternal festival of transience. Being is thereby stamped as becoming.
Each moment is thus a contraction of the infinite past into a discrete now, which augurs an unheard of destiny.
And it is the now, this now that must be lived and filled up, complete, replete, with life—in order that there be a subsequent now.
All this happens each and every moment.