CONTESTING SPIRIT

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NIETZSCHE, AFFIRMATION, RELIGION

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Alexander S. T. Roberts

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NOTE ON TEXTS AND CITATIONS

I HAVE INCORPORATED references to Nietzsche into the text. For Nietzsche's works, I have used *Samtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Banden*, edited by G. Colli and M. Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980). For the most part I follow the translations listed below. Where I have made alterations, or where I have followed the translation but feel that no English word or phrase can render adequately Nietzsche's German, I have supplied the German in the text. I cite works that have been published separately in English by the initials of their English titles and the page number. Other citations are designated by SW, volume number, and page number (eg., SW 13: 127). There are a few citations from the *Nachlass* that I found in Kaufmann's translation of *The Will to Power*, and did not track down in the notebooks. Those are cited as WP.

At this point let me say a brief word about my use of Nietzsche's texts in this study. Since Nietzsche's sister and others collected notes and fragments from Nietzsche's *Nachlass* under the title of *The Will to Power*, and especially since Heidegger's magisterial four-volume study of Nietzsche, which relied heavily on *The Will to Power*, a debate has ensued as to whether Nietzsche's published works or his *Nachlass* hold the key to his thought. My own view is that we must begin with the texts Nietzsche either published in his lifetime or that he considered finished (*The Antichrist* and *Ecce Homo*), but that were not published until after his breakdown. Nietzsche was not just a philosopher interested in taking a position or constructing clear arguments. He was also a writer who considered the style, the force, and the rhetoric of his writings to be of utmost importance in understanding his thinking. As I argue in this study, to ignore the strategies and styles of Nietzsche's writing is to ignore a key aspect of his philosophical task. It is necessary, then, for the interpreter of Nietzsche to attend first of all to the work that he considered ready for publication, the work that was written and rewritten, not just jotted down or sketched. This does not mean, however, that Nietzsche's notes and letters, as with those of any thinker, are not helpful for illustrating ideas and concepts for which he argues in his finished texts. This is particularly true in studies, such as the present one, that attempt not only to establish and evaluate certain ideas in Nietzsche, but also to emphasize and explore his ambivalences and ambiguities. Thus, for example, the notes are extremely suggestive on the question of religion. In my study, then, I refer to the *Nachlass* sparingly, either when I am satisfied that a note synthesizes or illustrates ideas or arguments I find in Nietzsche's finished texts, or when a note

suggests directions in which we might take ideas further than Nietzsche himself did.

I list here the abbreviations used in the text and the works to which they refer, followed by the date(s) that best reflect when the book was actually written and the publication information for the English translations. Note that instead of a date, the German *The Will to Power* is designated by (PH). This reflects the fact that this text not only was not published by Nietzsche, but was assembled from his notebooks by others after his death. *Thus Spake Zarathustra* was written, in four parts, between 1883 and 1885, but while the first three books appeared during Nietzsche's lifetime, it was not published in the form we have it today, with a fourth part, until after Nietzsche's death. Finally, *Dithyrambs of Dionysus* are poems written throughout Nietzsche's life and assembled by him in 1888.

Nietzsche's Texts

AC *Der Antichrist* 1888: *The Antichrist*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin Books, 1990.

BG *Jenseits von Gut und Bose* 1886: *Beyond Good and Evil*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

BT *Der Geburt der Tragodie* 1872: *The Birth of Tragedy*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1967.

D *Morgenrote* 1881: *Dawn*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

DD *Dionysos Dithyramben* 1888: *Dithyrambs of Dionysus*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Redding Ridge, Conn.: Black Swan Books, 1984.

EH *Ecce Homo* 1888. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1969.

GM *Zur Genealogie der Moral* 1887: *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage Books, 1969.

GS *Die frohliche Wissenschaft* 1882 (Part 5, 1887): *The Gay Science*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1974.

HH *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* 1878: *Human, All too Human*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

NC *Nietzsche contra Wagner* 1888. Translated by Walter Kaufmann, in *The Portable Nietzsche*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1954.

PTG *Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen* 1873: *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. Translated by Marianne Cowen. Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 1962.

SP *Nietzsche, A Self-Portrait in His Letters*. Edited by Peter Fuss and Henry Shapiro. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971.

SW *Samtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Banden*. Edited by G. Colli and M. Montinari. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980.

TI *Gotzen-Dammerung* 1888: *Twilight of the Idols*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin Books, 1990.

UM *Unzeitmassige Betrachtungen* 1873–76: *Untimely Meditations*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

WP *Der Wille zur Macht* (PH): *The Will to Power*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage Books, 1968.

Z *Also Sprach Zarathustra* 1883–85: *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. London: Penguin Books, 1978.

CONTESTING SPIRIT

Introduction

NIETZSCHE AND RELIGION

> If we are to think anew it must be from a new stance, one essentially unfamiliar to us; or, say, from a further perspective that is uncontrollable by us.
> (Stanley Cavell, "Time after Time")

IN 1886, at the height of his powers as writer and thinker, Friedrich Nietzsche wrote a series of prefaces for new editions of his early works.[1] As autobiography, they embellish the plain facts of his life; as philosophy, they say more about what Nietzsche was thinking in 1886 than about the early texts with which they are concerned. Still, they disclose a vibrant and paradoxical vision of Nietzsche as a thinker. Read together, the new prefaces narrate the trajectory of Nietzsche's writing and thinking as a life that transpired between hopeless disillusion and the joy of love's recovery. In the new preface to *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche exults in "the saturnalia of a spirit who has patiently resisted a terrible, long pressure—patiently, severely, coldly, without submitting, but also without hope—and who is now all at once attacked by hope, the hope for health, and the *intoxication* of convalescence" (GS: 32). Here, and throughout his writing, Nietzsche imagines philosophy as a practice of shaping a life—as the struggles and failures and ecstatic surges of energy—that turned him from the malaise of idealism through myriad dark nights and toward the reaches of an impassioned health.

Perhaps the greatest modern critic of religion, Nietzsche would with these prefaces subtly activate the conventions of classic religious narratives: the discovery of a deep-seated sickness unto death; scales falling from eyes; brave and bleak periods of isolation; daily martyrdoms; the bite of hard-heartedness, of discipline and desire; the flaming spirit; and, finally, the grace of renewal where one finds one's life and one's world

Epigraph: Cavell 1995: 6.

[1] Nietzsche wrote prefaces for new editions of the following: *The Birth of Tragedy*, originally published in 1872; *Human, All too Human*, first published in 1878; *Dawn*, published in 1881; and *The Gay Science*, published in 1882. Having finished *Thus Spake Zarathustra* in 1884, Nietzsche published *Beyond Good and Evil* in 1885, the prefaces and the remarkable fifth book of *The Gay Science* in 1886, and *On the Genealogy of Morals* in 1887.

transformed. If one reads Nietzsche carefully, one finds throughout all his writing a glancing equivocation between religion and antireligion. From the romanticism of *The Birth of Tragedy* through the cold "chemistry" of *Human, All too Human*, and *Dawn*, to the rapture of *The Gay Science* and "no-saying" of his final works, Nietzsche led a philosophical life that resisted the religious traditions that have shaped Western civilization only at the same time that he accomplished a transformative renewal of their disciplines and passions.

Since the early 1960s in France, and a decade or so later in the United States, scores of books and articles have been published on Nietzsche's thought and life. For a thinker who brazenly transgressed modern disciplinary boundaries, it is not surprising that these studies have emerged from a wide range of academic fields, and from between fields, including philosophy, literary criticism, political science, sociology, and women's studies. Some commentators continue to elaborate the existentialist, anti-Christian Nietzsche—the Nietzsche of the will to power and eternal recurrence—familiar since the turn of the century.[2] Many others, however, have explored the multiple faces of the "new Nietzsche." This Nietzsche is the prototype of the postmodern thinker/writer, writing on the boundaries of academic discourse, flaunting his extravagant style, and sweeping away the renunciatory ethic—the "spirit of gravity"—that has tied Western thought to metaphysics and religion.[3] For still another group of commentators, finally, neither the old nor the new Nietzsche offers anything to celebrate. Few figures in the tradition of Western thought have aroused as much antipathy as Nietzsche has. From the beginning of this century, defenders of Western cultural, philosophical, and religious traditions have pointed to Nietzsche as the most visible symptom, or even a source, of the decline of Western culture. For them, Nietzsche's relativism contributes to the undermining of any coherent sense of the value of Western cultural traditions, and his apparent reduction of reason to interest and power supports the politically dangerous antihumanism of postmodern thought.[4]

His work having been scrutinized from almost every imaginable perspective and from radically different intellectual commitments, it is surprising how, in at least one respect, the same Nietzsche reappears so often in the secondary literature: most commentators—modernists and postmodernists, supporters and detractors alike—agree that Nietzschean suspicion and Nietzschean affirmation are definitive modes of antireligious

[2] Walter Kaufmann's (1974) remains the most influential interpretation along these lines. Karl Jaspers's (1961) *Nietzsche and Christianity* is less influential (though it was instrumental for Kaufmann) but is superior to Kaufmann's on the issues of Christianity and religion.

[3] See Deleuze 1983, Nehamas 1985, and Allison 1985.

[4] See Habermas 1986, MacIntyre 1984, and Bloom 1987.

thought.[5] On this point, the new Nietzsche is the same as the old. Not without good reason, of course, for Nietzsche's polemics against religious consolation and illusion mark him as one of modernity's foremost despisers of religion. However, as Friedrich Schleiermacher reminded his contemporaries at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it is one thing to be a cultured despiser of religion and another thing to think and write without or beyond religion. I suggest that if we move too quickly from Nietzsche's attacks on religion to assimilate him to modern secularism, as most of his commentators do—the gesture is now almost automatic—we miss a great deal of his complexity, and we fail to think carefully about religion. Such assimilation may be useful as a blunt hermeneutical instrument for various ideological and polemical interests: for committed secularists with a furious view of the degradations of religious life; or for defenders of the faith who can point to Nietzsche's ideas on power and morality to demonstrate the dark logic of secular modernity. But such assimilation fails to think *with* Nietzsche, for it does not think with sufficient genealogical self-consciousness; it does not adequately resist the temptation to position Nietzsche rather than follow the dynamic movement of his thought; and it fails to recognize that to think with Nietzsche is to think against him.

The Question of Religion

The place of religion in Nietzsche's writing begs to be reexamined. Nietzsche announces the death of God, but with Dionysus, the eternal return, and affirmation, he invokes a new spiritual sensibility—a new reverence, a new joy—that has yet to be fully explored by his interpreters. Even if it is undeniable that Nietzsche is highly critical of a certain religiosity—which he sometimes, but not always, equates with "religion" in general—and regardless of how we want to view Nietzsche's "final" conception of religion (whatever "final" might mean for a thinker like Nietzsche), his thought suggests ways to distance ourselves from the ossi-

[5] This is not to say that commentators never remark on a certain spiritual, prophetic, or even religious pathos in Nietzsche's thought. But even among those who do, very few studies have treated this aspect of Nietzsche's thought in any real depth, and most seem satisfied that this sensibility has little impact on the overall anti-religious nature of his ideas. Exceptions are Jaspers 1961 and, more recently, Valadier 1975 and Figl 1984. There remains no sustained examination of the issue in English. Stambaugh 1994 examines some of the mystical tendencies of Nietzsche's writing and Makarushka 1994 offers an analysis of religious language in some of Nietzsche's texts. Neither study, however, undertakes a detailed and comprehensive exploration of the problem of religion in Nietzsche. There are a number of theological thinkers who find Nietzsche a valuable resource for postmodern religious thought, though they also have not supplied any detailed studies of Nietzsche's thought. See especially Altizer and Hamilton 1966, Taylor 1984, Winquist 1995, and Raschke 1996.

fied conceptual dichotomy so instrumental for modernity: secular/religious. In this book, I endeavor to specify a certain equivocation in Nietzsche's writing between religion and antireligion, the religious and the secular. My purpose is not to ease the strains or difficulties caused by this equivocation. It is, rather, to ask whether these equivocations might be regarded as productive, helping us to gain more insight into Nietzsche's thought and, in addition, to gain more insight into ourselves by offering us an opportunity to explore the meaning of religion at the end of the twentieth century.

We cannot understand Nietzsche, in other words, without questioning the way we depend upon the construct of "religion" in order to order and settle our world, and within it, the modern study of religion.[6] This is a book about Nietzsche, but it is also an exercise in what Jonathan Z. Smith has called "imagining religion" (1982). Imagining and reimagining religion becomes a particularly important task not just as new forms of spiritual life emerge, but as scholars of religion become more and more aware of the degree to which "religion" is a construct of modern Western thought. As various genealogies of religion have shown, *religion* is a word with a history, in the course of which it has taken on specific meanings in specific contexts. Most important for my purposes here, *religion* is a word that took shape in the medieval and modern periods as, first, the Christian Church exerted its authority to distinguish Christian practices as "true religion" from paganism, and then, second, as early modern political thinkers, scientists, and philosophers sought to distinguish the religious from the secular.[7] Especially with respect to the latter, *religion* as a noun rather than an adjective comes to the fore to refer to cultural complexes marked by rituals, beliefs, books, and gods. The word takes its modern meaning at the intersection of the encounter between Christianity and what came to be called "other religions," and between Christianity and the antitraditional and naturalistic impulses of modernity. It is enmeshed, therefore, with issues of power, politics, and culture as it is deployed to mark these differences.[8] *Religion* becomes a highly charged term, playing a crucial role in negotiating giant encounters and shifts of worldviews, the ramifications of which are felt in the very way we understand modernity, enlightenment, progress, pluralism, and tradition.

[6] In *Desiring Theology*, Charles Winquist states, "Secular discourse has to risk wandering out of mind if it is to let go of reductionistic strategies" (1995: 43).

[7] See the accounts of W. C. Smith 1978, Robert Markus 1990, and Talal Asad 1993.

[8] Asad criticizes the "insistence that religion has an autonomous essence" and wonders, with a heavy dose of irony, whether it is "a happy accident that this effort of defining religion converges with the liberal demand in our time that it be kept quite separate from politics, law, and science—spaces in which varieties of power and reason articulate our distinctively modern life." He also points out that it can be a strategy on the part of liberal Christians for defending religion (1993: 28).

Religion, therefore, has meant different things at different times to different people. And it has meant nothing at all—because it could not be translated into their language—for many others whom modern Westerners, without hesitation, call "religious." This is not to imply that such people are not religious, or that the word somehow falsifies their reality—though this danger is a real one. It is to say, instead, that to the extent that "religion" is a category that human beings in the West have constructed for exploring and understanding their world, they should strive to be self-conscious about how they use it. We should ask what these particular categories have allowed us to see, think, do, and imagine—and we should consider the ways in which they may have blinded us to other possibilities of understanding and experiencing.

Nietzsche plays a significant role in the genealogy of religion, through his own criticisms of religion and through the assimilation of his thought to the ideology of secularization. The rhetoric of this ideology makes it easy for most readers to identify religion in Nietzsche's texts as the embodiment of a nihilism to be overcome; in turn, this makes it difficult to see that the questions he raises and the possibilities he imagines are far more complex than is allowed by a simplistic reading of the pronouncement, "God is dead," which Nietzsche made in *The Gay Science* (GS: 167, 181). Often the consequence of ignoring the question of religion is to force Nietzsche into a secularizing and/or philosophizing mode that misses deep tensions in his thought and the deep resonance of Greco-Roman and Christian ideas and practices that pervade his imagination—whether he acknowledges it or not. It is interesting, for example, that so many interpreters of Nietzsche assume that the "religious" has simply a negative place in his thought, while "art" and "philosophy" hold places of honor. In fact, from his earliest writings, Nietzsche problematized each of these categories. Though it is true that he was more generally critical of religion than of philosophy or art, Nietzsche sought to subvert and reimagine each of them, looking ahead to new philosophers, new artists—and even new saints (GS: 346). He did so in such a way that, properly speaking, what emerges from his thinking is not "philosophy," "art," or "religion" in the modern senses of these terms, but something else, something Nietzsche never really named. However, by reintroducing the complex of ideas and practices that the concept *religion* allows us to deploy, and by critically interrogating this concept, one can follow the complexity of Nietzsche's vision with more precision than a simply secular reading affords.

Religion and Affirmation

Nietzsche's madman declares the death of God, and his Zarathustra urges his disciples to "remain true to the earth." But those who mock the mad-

man are those "who did not believe in God." And Nietzsche's "earth" is not simply the ordinary, disenchanted world as experienced by the "men of today" whom Zarathustra dismisses as "sterile," "incapable of faith," and "unbelievable" (Z: 120). Neither the madman nor Zarathustra feels at home with such unbelievers precisely because they are too much at home in their modern malaise. They have not understood or been willing to experience the full force of the madman's pronouncement because it demands a far greater engagement with life than they can imagine. They refuse the true message of the death of God: the end of the illusory ideal that has hidden a deathlike despiritualization of humanity and the difficult demand to affirm the homelessness implicated in the death of God. In fact, where the death of God is both terrifying and exhilarating for the madman, to the "men of today" it is old news, like all news.

But even if the madman means something far more profound than those unbelievers can grasp, if, in some significant sense, God is dead, how does the category *religion* help us to understand Nietzsche?

The rejection of the moral cosmos implicated in Nietzsche's pronouncement of God's death is a hard teaching, for it means that human beings must confront a certain blankness, or muteness, in the fabric of the universe. This elicits different responses. One might fall into a despairing nihilism that yearns nostalgically for some ultimate grounding or meaning—as Nietzsche, at times, seemed tempted to do. Or, granting this impossibility, one might embrace the modern humanist self-assertion that appears indifferent to metaphysical grounds and offers human foundations instead—whether scientific progress, moral autonomy, or social consensus. But this too, for Nietzsche, is ultimately nihilistic. He points in a different direction, affirming the meaninglessness of the universe without existentialist angst, modernist self-assertion, or postmodern indifference. In the will to power—in life itself—Nietzsche finds what he calls "the affirmation of life" or "the eternal joy of becoming." To the extent that the will to power is simply the pulse of striving, amoral, endless life, however, he finds joy only at the same time that he encounters a deep anonymity and insecurity. The Nietzschean philosopher must bring him- or herself to the edge of the abyss of meaninglessness, and there must learn to dance. Such dancing, writes Nietzsche, is the philosopher's "ideal," "art," and "finally his only piety" (GS: 346). This dance proclaims a "faith" (GS: 340) that holds gracefully the affirmative tension between joy and meaninglessness. This is not faith as blithe assurance or even as fear and trembling—it is the affirmation of holiness without familiarity, and life without consolation.

Again, if God is dead, what kind of "faith" are we talking about? In some respects, it is a relatively simple matter to define religion in terms of the belief in gods; that is, in terms of superhuman beings that exist

independently of human beings, are not accessible to them in the same way natural phenomena are, and exert some kind of control over or influence on them. If we define religion and gods in this way, then I think there would be little debate that Nietzsche is an atheist and an enemy of religion. But scholars of religion are not at all in agreement that religion always has to do with gods as they have just been defined, either because scholars want to include as "religions" nontheistic traditions (Theravada Buddhism, for example, generally has been understood to be nontheistic), or because the concept *god*, when considered carefully, can be just as difficult to pin down as the concept *religion*. One response to this difficulty has been to define religion not in terms of gods, but, more abstractly, in terms of a kind of experience of ultimate or divine force, the "Holy" or the "Sacred." But what actually constitutes such experience has been notoriously hard to define.[9] As Ninian Smart (1979) argues, it is not clear that descriptions of religious experience that focus on an "Other" that exists over against one, or that descriptions of some power, even if not personalized as a god, account for all kinds of religious experience.

Even in contexts where gods or other superhuman entities are invoked, it is a mistake to assume automatically that they are "believed in" in the sense of propositional statements about the existence of certain kinds of beings. Such an assumption leads one to reduce the mythical, literary, and ritualistic use of god language and symbol to the propositional language of doctrine. Even Nietzsche's writing, in spite of the madman's declaration, is full of the language of the divine: apart from criticizing Christian notions of God, he writes of feeling divine, of creating gods, of Dionysus. Following the protocols of modern critical thought, it might be easy to dismiss the language of divinity in Nietzsche as merely metaphor or as a poeticizing of all-too-human psychological states. But, from Nietzsche's perspective, I will argue, this reduction to the psychological is simply one more form of dogmatism, one that fails to understand the power and the source of metaphor and poetry. As numerous commentators have contended, even "body" and "psyche" are metaphors for Nietzsche, ways of tracing the boundaries of human life and human knowledge. From this perspective, the language of the divine in Nietzsche serves to designate neither independently existing beings or forces, nor "mere" projections that can be traced to foundational psychic causes. Instead, such language traces the unrepresentable limits of the human, emerging in the practice and experience of these limits.

Whether or not religion has to do with gods or other superhuman forces or experiences, many scholars of religion treat it primarily in terms of its social function, where religious beliefs are a reflection of social values or

[9] For a more detailed criticism of the category of the Sacred, and its place in the study of religion, see Penner 1989.

meanings and religious rituals are the means by which these binding forces are affirmed. Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim offer two prominent examples of this approach. Nietzsche, too, can be read this way: thus, the madman's bewildered, frightened gloss on his pronouncement of God's death: "Are we not straying as though through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space?" (GS: 181). After the death of God, in other words, there is no longer anything to hold us together, or hold us in place, and so circumscribe our world as a meaningful one: Where will we find meaning? What shall we value? If we view religion as a force for stabilizing social meaning, the death of God as Nietzsche understands it would mean the end of religion. Robert Torrance has recently argued, however, following anthropologists such as Victor Turner, that religion and ritual are creative forces, not simply serving to reinforce already existing values, meanings, or social structures, but anticipating new ones and so making possible the transformation of both community and individual: "Religion reveals the intrinsic incompleteness of all human attainments by holding out the possibility of an order transcending the approximative actual: the indispensable if unreachable goal of an all-encompassing nomos, all-embracing communitas" (1994: 15). If we think about religion and ritual in terms of such transformation of meaning, instead of simply its maintenance, and if we adjust for Torrance's totalizing language, then we might be better prepared to note the ritualistic tones of Nietzsche's madman: "What was 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?" (GS: 181).

There is something common to these approaches to religion, even if we acknowledge the doubts about the centrality of gods or stabilizing human meaning, value, and community. In both cases, there is an orientation to transcendence: thus Smart argues that the most we can say in trying to define religion along these lines is to employ the rather general idea of the "transcendentally unseen" as that with which religious myths, concepts, and rituals typically deal. In various ways, and to varying degrees of intensity, religious belief and practices point us beyond the manifest, even the meaningful world in ways that can either legitimize it or relativize it, or both (1979: 34). I would add to this, however, by qualifying the idea of the "transcendentally unseen" with the idea of "truth" or "reality." Relating to that which is unseen, human beings, in some sense or another, relate themselves to what is ultimately true, or ultimately meaningful, or salvific. Religion involves discourses and practices that attend to the limits of the human in the cultivation of the fullness of human life: religion brings us

to the limits, the "borderland" of what is us and what is not.[10] As they say to the man with the blue guitar, in the poem by Wallace Stevens: "But play, you must,/A tune beyond us, yet ourselves,/A tune upon the blue guitar/Of things exactly as they are" (1982:165).

I highlight this common factor in two influential but problematic approaches to the study of religion not in order to assert a new essence of religion by salvaging something common from them, but to indicate, heuristically, a point of linkage between Nietzsche's thought and the way religion in the West has been imagined. As writer and thinker, Nietzsche finds himself at the limits of the human in his effort to imagine and practice an affirmative humanity. Paraphrasing Clement Rosset, one way to describe affirmation is as an unconditional commitment to the real and the practice of continually reorienting oneself to it (1993: 25). For Nietzsche, the "real" is not "merely" the world we find in front of us in our daily, ordinary lives. Instead, "reality" is this world experienced through the transfiguring awareness of the becoming, shifting flux or chaos "beyond" the world we ordinarily perceive and think. Again, Stevens writes: "Things as they are/Are changed upon the blue guitar." Nietzsche seeks to intensify the awareness of the flux of life by living life as "becoming": in this awareness exists a connection with the power of life, which finds its force in the tension between the organizing, shaping forces of language and culture and the unlimited striving of will to power.

Some of the most poetic and reverential writing in Nietzsche is to be found in passages expressing, discussing, imagining an affirmative life, a life that refuses to shrink before life's demands and sufferings but embraces them with love and joy. It is here that we need to think seriously about how Western religious traditions offer paradigms that can help us understand, through contrast and comparison, Nietzsche's affirmative project. And it is here, I argue, that we find resources in Nietzsche for reimagining religion. For if we acknowledge the valid objections to casting traditions and spiritual virtuosos commonly called "religious" in terms of belief in God or gods, or in terms of faith in the ultimate salvation

[10] J. Z. Smith argues that when we study religion, we are studying "one mode of constructing worlds of meaning . . . the passion and the drama of man discovering the truth of what it is to be human." He goes on to say that "religion is the quest, within the bounds of the human, historical condition, for the power to manipulate and negotiate one's 'situation' so as to have 'space' in which to meaningfully dwell . . . [and] so as to guarantee the conviction that one's existence 'matters.' Religion is a distinctive mode of human creativity, a creativity which both discovers limits and creates limits for humane existence . . . through the use of myths, rituals and experiences of transformation" (1993: 290–91). George Steiner claims that one of the two main senses of religion is "a root-impulse of the human spirit to explore possibilities of meaning and of truth that lie outside empirical seizure or proof." (1989: 225).

of the individual beyond his or her worldly, temporal life, then we might consider Nietzsche's affirmation as a form of reverence. This is surely not an "otherworldly" faith, but one that cultivates the passionate, eternal affirmation in and of this life through a certain—both critical and affirmative—practice of the limit of the human. Nietzsche does not "believe," but he performs a worshipful dance that exemplifies Emerson's dictum: "Let a man learn . . . to bear the disappearance of things he was wont to reverence without losing his reverence" (1982: 336).

Affirmation, Negation, Nihilism

Nietzsche's reputation as a despiser of the otherworldly promises of religion is well deserved. His deft and merciless unmasking of the need for power and consolation at the root of religious life has exerted enormous influence on philosophical, psychological, and sociological studies of religion. Of course, such unmasking by itself does not necessarily make one an antireligious thinker, for many past "masters of suspicion" have been passionately religious—one need think only of the prophets of the Hebrew Bible, or, more recently, prophetic theologians, such as Kierkegaard and Karl Barth.[11] But of course Nietzsche is not simply suspicious of the reasons some people embrace religion; he connects Christianity and religion, God, worship, and faith with the nihilistic hatred of life. He rejects belief in God and most other forms of community, ritual, and reverence generally associated with the religious life. His reasons for this are various; most importantly, he finds that religion has been one of the most potent sources of the "denial of life" that has infected humankind.

In this respect, as so many have noted, Nietzsche exhibits affinities with other modern unmaskers of religious illusion, such as Marx and Freud.[12] But these affinities are limited by a crucial difference. Marx and Freud sought to guide human beings to a more rational conduct of life by enlightening them about their irrationality. What makes them distinctively modern is that they sought to ground their unmaskings "scientifically," by isolating the material codes or mechanisms by which human society or the human psyche works. Marx thought the way to the future was opened by demystifying human social and economic relations; Freud, despite a certain resignation, was relentless in asserting the need for the mastery of Logos and ego. Nietzsche, however, was more ambivalent than either with respect to the modern project of enlightenment. He did not reject the value of enlightenment, but he insisted on its limits, and on the

[11] See Westphal 1993.

[12] See Paul Ricoeur's famous characterization of Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche as "masters of suspicion" (1970: 32).

value of cultivating attention to these limits and to that which lies beyond them. As such, Nietzsche was as suspicious of the modern idealization of rationality, and its humanistic faith in enlightenment, as he was of metaphysical values, religion, and morality.

It is precisely at this point that many commentators, whether they are persuaded or not by Nietzsche's analysis, find Nietzsche's own thought nihilistic.[13] And it is true that a certain groundlessness seems to haunt all Nietzsche's attempts to put forward positive claims or "solutions." Nietzsche veered from the humanistic ideals of modernity with a groundless—"abyssal"—suspicion that refused to anchor itself in reason, science, and/or morality. Some critics accuse Nietzsche of moral or epistemological nihilism; others go further to argue that such nihilism, paired with his glorification of power, culminates in a sort of monstrous fascism—or in French postmodernism. And, indeed, despite his claims to be an affirmative thinker, it is impossible to ignore the fact that there is much about this existence that Nietzsche despised and from which he yearned to be free; denial and negation played such a formative role in his thought and rhetoric that they at times smothered the affirmative impulse. Nietzsche denounced the mediocrity and bankruptcy of Western culture; he ridiculed the moral thinkers of his day and of past generations; he honored the Dionysian "joy in destruction"; he exhibited an unapologetic streak of misogyny, and he expressed disgust at humankind in general: he was, in many respects, a vituperative naysayer. At times, there seems to be little about human life that Nietzsche was able to affirm except possibly the strength that allowed him to endure in his misanthropic solitude.

Nietzsche himself, however, insisted on a close, even paradoxical relation in his thought between negation and nihilism on the one hand, and affirmation on the other. Zarathustra proclaims, "Deeply I love only life—and verily most of all when I hate it" (Z: 109); and he preaches that the creation of new values requires both a "sacred 'No'" and a "sacred 'Yes'" (Z: 27).[14] Tensions between love and hate, yes and no, hope and despair, meaning and nihilism strain the problem of affirmation in Nietzsche's thinking. How does one affirm life in the depths of abyssal suspicion? How does one simultaneously affirm life and demand that it be transformed? How does one love life in hating it? When Nietzsche distanced himself from both the metaphysical traditions of religion and the critical modernity exemplified by Marx and Freud, he was one of the first Western

[13] See, for example, Milbank 1990. Although I disagree with some of his conclusions about the echo of idealism in Nietzsche, the best work on Nietzsche and nihilism is in Gillespie, *Nihilism Before Nietzsche* (1995).

[14] Nietzsche also asserts that "the desire for *destruction*, change, and becoming can be an expression of an overflowing energy that is pregnant with future" (GS: 329).

thinkers to think the postmodern, or, in what might be a less loaded and more precise term, the *postcritical*. Like Freud, Nietzsche undertook what Paul Ricoeur describes as an "*ascesis* of the necessary." But unlike so many modern thinkers, Nietzsche refused to stop with the critical, demystifying move and insisted on the affirmative embrace of life: where Freud commends a stoic resignation in the face of the necessary, Nietzsche imagines affirmation as the ecstatic, joyful embrace of a life that holds no hope for metaphysical salvation. In *Zarathustra*, and also later, in more critical and somber writings, life is loved and praised, even revered: not simply accepted or nobly borne. What enabled Nietzsche to make the move to affirmation instead of resignation?

The question of the relation of negation and affirmation in Nietzsche is not solved simply by invoking the historical labor of the negative, whether through Hegelian or Marxist dialectic, or through the struggle of a quasi-Darwinistic evolution. Metaphysical morality and religion are, for Nietzsche, responses to the problem of existence that promise to solve the problem once and for all. Yet, it is precisely in this attempt to find a *solution* to existence that, for Nietzsche, nihilism is most clearly and dangerously manifested. In the final analysis, Nietzsche's critical attack on religion—which gains its full force as an attack on Christianity—is secondary to his confrontation with nihilism. As I explain in the first chapter, for Nietzsche nihilism is rooted in the attempt to ground and secure one's being, to master it in a way that excludes boredom, suffering, and tragedy. But this grasp for mastery is self-defeating, for in the end it leaves one with nothing: unable to acknowledge the reality of this world of suffering, one puts one's faith in something beyond the real (for instance God or Truth), in what for Nietzsche literally is *nothing*.

The dynamic of Nietzsche's thought is one that continually prevents us from holding too tightly to any perspective, any ideal, any meaning. Some of the most profound suffering in human life arises for Nietzsche precisely in confronting the fact that any definitive meaning of life continually escapes our grasp. He presents this poetically, if not philosophically, with his idea of eternal recurrence. Eternal recurrence signals the definitive rejection of an economy of redemption that would give life meaning by offering an ultimate meaning for suffering. Affirmation, as Nietzsche's response to nihilism, is not a kind of salvation in the sense of a solution or justification of the difficulties and pain of human existence. Nietzsche imagined an affirmation that eschews the need for promises of paradise or purity, certainty and security—or even more mundane promises of "improvement" or "progress." For him, the problem of affirmation becomes the problem of how we affirm a life without the hope that the negative—evil and suffering—will slowly wither away to nothing. To affirm life only in the hope that we are able to end suffering—or to affirm life only from

the perspective of that goal ("it was difficult, but it was worth it")—is not to affirm *this* life.

Nietzsche thinks, therefore, that we must embrace a certain meaninglessness, a certain muteness in existence, instead of wishing it or thinking it away with "solutions" such as God or Truth; nihilism, he contends, can be a "divine way of thinking." But such divine nihilism must be contrasted with the exhausted, life-hating nihilism of the Western tradition. As he explored the nihilism of modernity and imagined a joy that transcends the rational ego-centered consciousness, Nietzsche's thinking recovered certain religious concepts and practices. His ambivalence toward modernity is mirrored by an essentially ambivalent attitude toward religion. It is possible to specify the ways in which Nietzsche saw specific forms of religion implicated with nihilism; but it also is possible to then highlight those aspects of religious life that Nietzsche continues to affirm and to specify certain forms of religious life that help us illuminate Nietzsche's "Yes and amen" to life.

Philosophy as Spiritual Practice

Nietzsche was convinced that philosophy as he knew it in nineteenth-century Germany was one of the many symptoms of nihilism. He sought therefore to transfigure philosophy, in part by looking to its past. When he writes of himself as a philosopher, or about the philosophers he imagines for the future, Nietzsche's model is not the respected academic philosopher of the Kantian or Hegelian tradition, but the ancient philosopher, whom Nietzsche the philologist and classicist had studied closely. For ancient philosophers, philosophy was enmeshed in regimens and practices of life and spirit: it was "a way of life," as Bernard McGinn puts it, "more than a mode of discourse" (1995: 63). Working with this ancient model, Nietzsche writes a new, embodied philosophy, one that is both more passionate and more literary than the philosophy of his time. As with so many of the dichotomies central to modern thought—like the "religious" and the "secular"—Nietzsche interrogates and unsettles the distinction between the philosophical and the literary, between theory and practice, and between writing as argument and writing as performance. The philosopher for Nietzsche is a shaper of self and culture. Like the figure of the ascetic saint, with which Nietzsche was so fascinated, the philosopher is a figure that represents, in body, soul, and practice—not simply in thought or text—the powers and possibilities of human life.

The complexity of Nietzsche's thought and style demands flexibility with respect to the methodological resources one brings to bear on his texts. Nietzsche is a thinker who calls us to see things in a new way and in doing so tears down many of the concepts and methods we use to view

and understand our world. This causes certain problems for the reader, especially since Nietzsche gleefully uses categories and concepts at the same time that he is denouncing them. He writes, in many respects, against himself. This suggests the limitations of a hermeneutic strategy that would be satisfied with the univocal philosophical determination of his concepts and arguments. To borrow from contemporary deconstructive criticism, the necessity emerges out of Nietzsche's own thinking to read him against the grain of closure. When confronted with Nietzsche's contradictions, or evasions, or metaphors, it is not enough just to attempt to make his thinking cohere or to conclude that he was confused. One must also ask, what is he doing by writing this way? Or, how is he performing? In part, my reading of Nietzsche rests on the claim that he enacts affirmation precisely in undermining philosophy as he considers it to have been established in the West since Socrates. Nietzsche's abyssal suspicion is not, from this perspective, a failure of intellect or a misguided nihilism, but a practice of self-resistance through which Nietzsche is able to write an affirmative joy. Philosophy, as Nietzsche understands it, is a spiritual path *of* (not simply *to*) affirmation, the only path he sees available for those of us living in the West at the end of modernity. The possibility of affirmation rests on something beyond philosophical investigations and justifications, for affirmation wells from out of the body as much as from the mind, compelling one to live vibrantly rather than assuredly. Ultimately, Nietzsche does not simply discuss and analyze affirmation philosophically; instead, he exemplifies affirmation in his philosophical practice, in a performance of an ecstatic, figurative, affirmative thinking and writing.

There are significant dimensions of Nietzsche's thought that come into view only when we treat his work as the expression of a spiritual practice. I use the term *spiritual* with some hesitation, which emerges directly from the questions of religion this book seeks to address. Used with some specificity, the term can be helpful. For example, Pierre Hadot (1995) has defined the *spiritual* as a person's "whole way of being"—the existential unity of intellect, emotion, and psyche—and *spiritual exercise* as a process of self-transformation and reorientation of this existential unity. This definition helps us distinguish, for instance, between the spirit and the psyche or the spiritual and the psychological. *Spirit* indicates something more comprehensive than *psyche*: cultivating the spiritual, a person opens him- or herself to something beyond the psychological unity we refer to as the personal self. To be spiritual, in this sense, is not simply to be well integrated within oneself and one's community, but to be able to view oneself and one's web of interpersonal relationships from a perspective of "not-self," a perspective from which one can be forced to resist and seek to transform certain aspects of self and community. As David Hal-

perin glosses Hadot, the "spiritual self" is "not the locus of a unique and private psychological depth (on the model of bourgeois humanism) but the side of a radical alterity: it is the space within each human being where she or he encounters the not-self, the beyond" (1995: 75).[15]

In this sense, the term *spirit* is important for understanding Nietzsche, who makes great use of the concept *Geist*, the German word most often translated by the English word *spirit*. At times, Nietzsche uses *Geist* to refer to mind, intellect, or consciousness. But he also uses it in a more open, dynamic sense to identify one of the most important ways in which the "will to power" increases in the human being through a certain capacity for self-reflexivity and self-resistance: spirit, in this sense, is something by which life "cuts into itself" in order to grow into strength and beauty. Moreover, when Nietzsche writes that philosophy is the "most spiritual will to power" (*der geistigste Will zur Macht*; SW 5: 22), he says something more about spirit and about philosophy. In and through the capacity for self-reflection and self-cultivation, one's whole being becomes stronger. And I will argue that "stronger" in this case means far more than the power to manipulate or control; it means "beautiful" and "exemplary." The powerful self is one that shines. Philosophy, then, is for Nietzsche more than an academic discipline: it is a practice by which he cultivates, strengthens, and beautifies the self and its relationship to the world and cosmos; it is the spiritual exercise *par excellence*. Philosophy is the "art" of spiritual cultivation—or, to use Nietzsche's word, the art of *transfiguration* in which one continually refines and beautifies body and mind in the "spiritualization" of oneself. To be spiritual, for Nietzsche, is to learn to live in pain and paradox, even exacerbating these, with an affirmative intensity and celebration.

The terms *spirit* and *spiritual*, however, are not without their problems. In contemporary Western culture, many people use the word *spiritual* when they want to say something like *religious*, but cannot quite bring themselves to do it, largely because of the authoritarian, traditionalist, dogmatic connotations religion has for them, or because, in our naturalistic age, it is simply impossible for them to find any real meaning in a term like "God" or to believe in anything "supernatural." In addition, for good historical and conceptual reasons scholars tend to be wary of the term. The current use of "spiritual" owes much to the modern, Protestant attempt to distinguish the "faith" of a vibrant inner, "spiritual" life from the "religion" of dead dogmatic (read Catholic) tradition or rote ritual.

[15] Halperin's work is especially illuminating for the link it makes between the spiritual and the political. This use of "spiritual," and its implication with self-transformation and politics, is also conveyed by Iris Murdoch's term *moral*: "I can only choose within the world I can see, in the moral sense of 'see' which implies that clear vision is a result of moral imagination and moral effort" (1970: 37).

But then in contrasting the spiritual and the religious, it is easy to ignore the dogmatic roots of the former and lend support to a thin, problematic—and quintessentially modern—understanding of religion. As such, the term *spiritual* also reflects the rise of modern, Western individualism, based in the valorization of the autonomous, rational self for whom tradition and ritual can be nothing more than hindrances to the full, free development or realization of the self. Closely connected with such individualism is the modern split between the public and the private. Traditional religion, in the modern view, is dangerous in large part because it is public, and so threatens the autonomy of the political and economic realms. Spirituality, on the other hand, is private, and more easily avoids the temptations of public pronouncement and influence faced by modern institutional religion. With *spiritual*, then, one can point to something inward, profound, deeply or ultimately important; one can even invoke some sort of connection with a transhuman or divine reality, though not one that can be circumscribed or regulated in the institutional setting of a "religion"; one can distinguish (crudely) between a set of discourses, institutions, hierarchies, and practices, centered on the idea of God and functioning as a social authority or ideology, and a nondogmatic, nonauthoritarian commitment to the practice of self-transformation; one can contrast religion, tradition, and ritual as vehicles by which human beings close off and regulate human experience from spirituality, by which one cultivates a dynamic openness to experience.

These kinds of distinctions function polemically in Nietzsche's writing. Thus, he rails vehemently against Paul and the tradition of "Christianity," while, in the same pages, honoring Jesus as a "free spirit" who "stands outside all religion" (AC: 155). At the same time, though, it is easy to imagine Nietzsche scoffing at what "spirituality" has become today. Being spiritual today is easy; for Nietzsche becoming a free spirit was the most difficult thing a human being could undertake. Nietzsche loved the insouciance of the gay scientist, the lightness of dancing feet, the cheerfulness of the noble disregard for suffering—but he loved these not because they are ways of living free from severe discipline and deep suffering, but because they are the refined expressions of a life that is religiously passionate in its confrontation with life's difficulties. The problem with any sharp distinction between the religious and the spiritual, Nietzsche's included, is that it tends to rely on a distorted, one-sided view of religion, ignoring the close interweaving of discourses of authority and community on the one hand, and practices of self-transformation and piety on the other, that one finds in any religious tradition. As Robert Torrance has argued, the world's religious traditions are means by which human beings have negotiated the dialectic of openness and closure, dynamism and stability, both of which are necessary for meaningful, vibrant human life (1994: 261–

22). Throughout this book, then, I invoke the term *religious* pragmatically, in an effort to push the contemporary use of "spiritual" toward a balance between these two poles. Nietzsche too easily ignored the way in which religious traditions, especially Christianity, offer resources for the affirmation of spiritual searching and researching. The contemporary use of "spiritual" too easily ignores the difficulty, discipline, and structure that must be embraced in such a quest.

Asceticism and Mysticism

This study examines Nietzsche's philosophy in terms of the ascetic and mystical elements of Nietzsche's philosophical spiritual practice.[16] His joyous, Dionysian "dance of life" is grounded in intellectual and bodily disciplines that have close affinities and connections with the ascetical and mystical practices of Western religious traditions. Despite his vehement criticisms of the ascetic ideal and religious intoxication, Nietzsche cultivates an affirmative self in a transfiguration of ascetic and mystical practices. For example, certain forms of self-denial and discipline are central to Nietzsche's self-image as a philosopher: the quest for knowledge is based on the renunciation of much that is comfortable and peaceful in human life—particularly the renunciation of consolation—and his philosophical life is made possible by highly disciplined "practices of the self," which attend to the smallest details of body, mind, and will and to the intimate connections between nature, spirit, and culture. While Nietzsche criticizes Christianity for its life-denying "ascetic ideal," he sees philosophy as a kind of self-discipline and renunciation, which he describes as the "asceticism" of "the most spiritual human beings" (AC: 188). It might appear paradoxical that the affirmation Nietzsche celebrates could be based in the serious and painful labor of asceticism, which he so often denounced as an expression of the hatred of life. But Nietzsche recognized that the ascetic had discovered a key to power and spirit. Instead of repeating the paradigmatic gesture of the ascetic ideal by extirpating asceticism, Nietzsche refigured asceticism as an affirmative discipline of spiritualization.

Nietzsche's influence as an antireligious thinker has contributed to the specifically modern connotation of *asceticism* as a term of abuse, epitomizing the otherworldly, life-denying aspects not only of religion—Christianity in particular—but also of Western culture in general. Images of emaciated, verminous hermits or of parsimonious, repressed Puritans have been composed, with more or less subtlety, by great modern think-

[16] By writing about ascetic and mystical "elements," I want to avoid the ultimately uninteresting issue of whether Nietzsche is a mystic or an ascetic. I follow Bernard McGinn's example in his study of Christian mysticism (1994: xv–xvi).

ers, such as Rousseau, Weber, and Freud, in addition to Nietzsche. More recently, such images have been reactivated by postmodern and feminist thinkers who seek to celebrate the unrepressed body and desire. There is a strong correlation between the construction of asceticism as religious grotesque and the ideology of healthy, vibrant secularization. To put it crudely, the ascetic stands for repression and denial in an age when self-definition is understood to be a task of freeing oneself from such barriers to self-realization.

But some scholars have recently argued that it is a mistake to view all forms of asceticism as pathological phenomena. Instead, they suggest we think about asceticism as *ascesis*, as an empowering means of re-creating mind and body. Despite his role in the modern construction of asceticism, I argue that Nietzsche himself offers resources for such a rethinking of asceticism. By attending to the dynamic of self-denial and self-affirmation in the process of exercising a specific self, one begins to appreciate the kinetic relationships between "no" and "yes," suffering and affirmation, discipline and freedom that energize the uncanny "logic" of Nietzsche's thinking. Rethinking asceticism with and against Nietzsche means rethinking ourselves, engaging in a kind of spiritual discipline. In this way, this book is an attempt to indicate how Nietzsche calls us to such discipline.

Nietzsche's ascetic discipline is the means by which he cultivates certain practices of ecstasy crucial to his affirmative vision. In the book he valued above all his others, Nietzsche portrays Zarathustra as undergoing experiences of self-transcendence in which he realizes the joy of eternity, a joy that involves the affirmation of the necessity of worldly, suffering life.[17] In *Ecce Homo*, and scattered throughout his other works, Nietzsche invokes a kind of ecstatic thinking and writing constitutive of the restless logic of his philosophical style and method. In each of these cases, Nietzsche offers powerful reasons for bringing the lenses of mystical experience and mystical writing to bear on his work.

The study of mysticism offers another angle on the tension between affirmation and negation in Nietzsche. In the literature of certain Christian mystics one finds a paradoxical intertwining of joy and suffering that helps me to follow the links Nietzsche forges between suffering, ecstasy, and affirmation. Most accounts of Nietzsche's affirmation have either avoided his difficult attitude toward suffering, explained it away, or simply rejected it as perverse and ethically problematic. None have tried to explain it in terms of mystical transcendence and participation. Nietzsche views suffering as necessary for the cultivation of the noble soul; yet his affirmation of suffering is not merely instrumental, it is also ecstatic. That is, although he finds in suffering a certain kind of meaning for his own

[17] "So rich is joy that it thirsts for woe, for hell, for hatred, for disgrace, for the cripple, for world—this world, oh, you know it!" (Z: 323).

life, this meaning is inextricably bound up with a movement of self-transcendence that simultaneously renders the individual insignificant. There are some difficult epistemological and ethical questions involved here, which may be enlivened (if not answered) by displaying Nietzsche's consonance with mystical traditions. Like many mystics, Nietzsche's disposition to and for suffering composes a particular kind of responsiveness to the world and to others, what I will call a "passion for the real." I will argue that we need to suspend common and seemingly obvious ideas about action, command, and power in Nietzsche in order to take full measure of the kinds of responsiveness his philosophy articulates. His passion for the real is a strange and vibrant disposition, not far removed (though absent the theistic inflection) from what Simone Weil, herself a fierce opponent of Nietzsche's, describes as the "gift" of suffering: "Each time that we have some pain to go through, we can say to ourselves quite truly that it is the universe, the order, and beauty of the world and the obedience of creation to God that are entering our body. After that how can we fail to bless with tenderest gratitude the Love that sends us this gift? Joy and suffering are two equally precious gifts both of which must be savored to the full" (1951: 131–22).

Questioning Religion, Questioning Nietzsche

I utilize historical and theoretical studies of asceticism and mysticism to generate a novel hermeneutical approach to Nietzsche's writing. Although I rely on current scholarship to argue that we need to resist and rethink common modern constructs of asceticism and mysticism, I do not seek simply to cull alternative definitions that I might then "apply" to Nietzsche in order to argue that he "is" an ascetic or mystic. Such an exercise would be uninteresting, for it would only play with definitions. It also would ignore the fact that concepts such as *asceticism* and *mysticism*—like *religion*—are constructs, which, in their contemporary usage, are generated in large part through the debates that constitute the modern study of religion. Their status as intellectual and social constructions, in addition to Nietzsche's own polemical contribution to those debates and his indelible impress on the terms themselves, will chasten any aspirations to use the terms definitively. Thus, in deploying these terms, I do not seek to prove that Nietzsche is a particular kind of ascetic or meets the criteria of an authentic mystic—or that he is or is not religious. Nor do I seek to dispute the usefulness of the concepts by exposing them as "mere" constructions. To view them as constructions is not to invalidate them, but to use them strategically and pragmatically, in a way that enables questions and comparisons that might not be obvious when contemporary constructions are used uncritically. Thus, all three terms are useful as lenses, through which I identify certain central modes of discipline, self-

transcendence, and piety, which enable scholars to identify and compare practices and ideas across historical and cultural contexts. In the case of Nietzsche, they carry a constructively subversive force, resisting the assimilation with secularism by illuminating productive tensions in his thought. The relevant question is not whether Nietzsche "is" or "is not" a religious thinker, or whether he is a "religious" rather than a "secular" thinker. I do not want to dispute that in many respects his thinking is radically "worldly" and "historical"—*secular* in the most literal sense of the word. Instead, the question I want to ask is whether the concept of religion—and more generally the web of concepts that religion leads us to deploy, such as reverence, piety, and god—makes it possible to perceive and analyze something in Nietzsche's thinking that has not received adequate attention.

In addition, I use these terms to read Nietzsche against himself, ironically, to show not only the kinetic sources of Nietzsche's positive vision, but to exhibit the polemical limitations of the essentializing rancor of his criticisms of religion. This ironic hermeneutics is intended sincerely, however, for it seems to me that illuminating Nietzsche's thought in this way raises questions about some of the fundamental distinctions and dichotomies we use to map our modern world. My objective, then, is twofold: to undertake a critical study of Nietzsche and to explore the categories by which we endeavor to understand human religiosity. These objectives depend on one another, and work through each other, for as Nietzsche challenges us to examine our desire for religious consolation, the question of religion, raised in a way that resists certain modern constructions of the category, challenges us to reread Nietzsche.

This demands a three-step hermeneutic. It is necessary, first, to explore the way Nietzsche determines the concepts of asceticism, mysticism, and religion. I examine Nietzsche's critical perspective on religion in Chapters 1 and 2 and his views of asceticism and mysticism in the opening sections of Chapters 3 and 4. These chapters and sections lay the textual groundwork for my study. Second, I will examine contemporary studies of asceticism and mysticism that challenge or complicate modern constructions of the concepts, particularly with respect to the way modern thinkers have, after Nietzsche and Weber, constructed asceticism and mysticism as two forms of flight from or denial of the world. In other words, I explore the ways in which ascetic and mystical practices can be said to be affirmative in the Nietzschean sense. This is the task of Chapters 3 and 4. Finally, the third step is a comparative and evaluative process by which I use the lenses of asceticism and mysticism to compare Nietzsche to his self-declared enemy, Christianity. In doing do, I argue that in certain specific ways Nietzsche is closer to Christianity than is commonly thought. I must emphasize from the start, however, that the point of this comparison is *not*

to claim that Nietzsche is Christian or that the Christian thinkers I examine are Nietzscheans. Instead, the point is to bring them together as closely as possible, utilizing the lenses of asceticism and mysticism, to determine precisely where they are similar and where they differ on the question of denial and affirmation. This allows me to articulate the limitations of Nietzsche's criticisms of religion and to argue that rethinking or reimagining religion through a certain resistance to the modern distinction between the religious and the secular allows us to gain new perspectives on Nietzsche's affirmation. In particular, it allows us to appreciate the significance of the slender but brilliant threads of thanksgiving, reverence, and love woven into the fabric of Nietzsche's writing.

Nietzsche has become a familiar icon, a strong and unmovable signpost for the division between the religious and the secular. Perhaps we have not wanted to question why we are so content, even determined, to have him do this. Yet, like any great thinker, Nietzsche can provoke us to rethink our common sense, to remap the familiar terrain of our world and experience, by looking, once again, at how he constantly unsettled his own convictions. Reading Nietzsche as he asks us to read him is to engage in a sort of ascetic discipline, a discipline by which the reader repeats the tension that springs the dynamic of his writing—the tension between close, slow attention and a letting go of the mastery that demands progression, coherence, and resolution. Nietzsche asks us to resist the desire for such mastery in an effort to read with him—and against him—as he opens himself to the plurality of forces by which one becomes who one is. Such discipline opens us to new questions and new insights on persisting questions; it lures us into the labyrinth of ourselves and our time as we think with and against Nietzsche, with and against ourselves.

Chapter One

TOO MUCH OF NOTHING: METAPHYSICS AND THE VALUE OF EXISTENCE

It's hard to imagine, that nothing at all could be so exciting,
could be this much fun.
(David Byrne, "Heaven")

There is not enough love and goodness in the world for us to be
permitted to give any of it away to imaginary things.
(Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human*)

The Value of Existence

Introduction

IN THE 1886 preface to his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy* (originally published in 1872), Nietzsche offered a critical review of that book's attempt to grapple with the question, What is the value of existence? By 1886 the significance of the question had changed for him, yet it continued to occupy his reflections on affirmation. The new preface recalls how he had tried to pose the problem of the value of existence by contrasting the "pessimism" of Greek tragedy and the "optimism" of Socratic philosophy. Nietzsche had claimed that with the demise of tragic sensibility Western culture had lost a fundamental connection with the primal forces of life. This was not, however, simply a historical or scholarly problem, for Nietzsche was looking forward to a recovery of a tragic sensibility as the key to the renewal of European culture. The new preface reflects back:

> You will guess where the big question mark concerning the value of existence had thus been raised. Is pessimism *necessarily* a sign of decline, degeneration, waywardness, weary and weak instincts—as it once was in India and now is, to all appearances, among us "modern" men and Europeans? Is there a pessimism of *strength*? An intellectual predilection for the hard, gruesome, evil, problematic aspects of existence, prompted by well-being, by overflowing

Epigraphs: Talking Heads, "Heaven," from the album *Fear of Music*; Nietzsche, HH: 69.

> health, by the *fullness* of existence? Is it perhaps possible to suffer precisely from overfullness? (BT: 17)

When he was writing *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche was still very much engaged with the thoughts of Schopenhauer.[1] He had been convinced, and would remain convinced, of one of Schopenhauer's fundamental claims: all life consists in suffering. In tragedy, Nietzsche believed he had discovered the way in which pre-Socratic Greeks had confronted suffering while continuing to affirm life. Tragedy, he argued, had provided a "metaphysical comfort" for those who had glimpsed the terrifying "Dionysian" depths of life. Tragedy, in other words, was a dramatic ruse by which life preserved itself in the face of the stark revelation that the life of the individual is never released from suffering.

By 1886, Nietzsche's ideas about the significance of tragedy had changed. His emphasis was not on metaphysical comfort, which he now rejected, but on what he called, in a new formulation, the "pessimism of strength." Nietzsche contrasted the pessimism of strength with a pessimism of decline. By now, he had Schopenhauer in mind as an exemplar of declining pessimism, for Schopenhauer had thought that the ultimate response to suffering was to deny the value of life by turning from it in mystical transcendence. The new preface disparaged this kind of response, and raised questions about the possibility of another, one without metaphysical comfort or consolation, one grounded in a willingness, a settled disposition, or even desire ("predilection") to seek out *positively* the difficult and dangerous aspects of existence. Nietzsche continued to affirm pessimism because he continued to believe that suffering was fundamental to life. But where Schopenhauer recommended turning from this life, Nietzsche now sought to affirm life in its radical implication with suffering.

The rejection of Schopenhauer's weak pessimism entailed more than a different response to the problem of suffering and to the question of the value of existence. By 1886, Nietzsche had concluded that the question of value could not be adjudicated philosophically: as he would bluntly state in a later text, "The value of life cannot be estimated" (TI: 40). But this did not prevent him from finding the question, and the attempts philosophers had made to answer it, of great interest, for he viewed the philosophical disposition that questioned the value of existence as symptomatic of a certain kind of soul. The question of the value of life thus became a psychological question, to be explored in terms of the health

[1] It is generally accepted that it was only after *The Birth of Tragedy* that Nietzsche began to move away from Schopenhauer. In two very different studies, both of which have shaped my reading of Nietzsche on metaphysics, Jorg Salaquarda (1989) and John Sallis (1991) challenge this interpretation, arguing that Nietzsche had already had deep reservations about Schopenhauer's metaphysics by the time of *The Birth of Tragedy*.

that "prompts" the question of value in the first place. This particular question, and more generally all modes of valuing, register for Nietzsche significant features of a people's psychocultural condition.

Affirmation and Denial in Schopenhauer

The problem of affirmation takes shape in Nietzsche's efforts first to understand, then to resist, Schopenhauer's philosophy. Schopenhauer's position on suffering can be traced to his basic metaphysical claim that "will" is the true inner nature of all that is, the "thing-in-itself," of which all that we are and experience, all phenomena, are representations. This fundamental reality is not divine, but only blind, endless striving, suffering in its eternal conflict with itself. "All willing," according to Schopenhauer, "springs from lack, from deficiency, and thus from suffering" (1969a: 196). This lack never can be filled: the will wills endlessly, always seeking new satisfactions, always finding that its satisfactions don't satisfy the endless hunger. Thus Schopenhauer's "pessimism."[2] It is not surprising that the young Nietzsche, who broke with Christianity in his adolescence and already had intimate experience with chronic pain and isolation, would find truth in this pessimism.[3]

As evidenced by the distinction between phenomenon and the thing-in-itself—in this case, between the will as it appeared in the individual will and "Will" as metaphysical reality—Schopenhauer's philosophy was deeply indebted to Kant. He agreed with Kant that our knowledge of phenomena, ourselves included, is determined by the "principle of sufficient reason" and thus is subject to the conditions of space and time (1969a: 173). He also rejected post-Kantian speculative attempts to reconcile the Kantian distinction between things as we know them and things in themselves through a philosophy of consciousness, particularly Hegel's. But Schopenhauer took issue with Kant on a crucial issue by claiming that the will, as thing-in-itself, can be known; more specifically, can be "intuited." Following Plato instead of Kant on this point, he thought that through the intuitive grasp of the will, in what he describes as "con-

[2] Schopenhauer writes that optimism, "where it is not merely the thoughtless talk of those who harbor nothing but words under their shallow foreheads, seems to me to be not merely an absurd, but also a really *wicked*, way of thinking, a bitter mockery of the unspeakable sufferings of mankind" (1969a: 326).

[3] Hayman (1982: 72 ff.). Hayman quotes from a memoir, in which Nietzsche remembered his first encounter with Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*: "Each line cried out with renunciation, negation, resignation. I was looking into a mirror that reflected the world, life and my own mind with hideous magnificence." Schopenhauer was one of the first major Western philosophers to take seriously Hindu and Buddhist thought, which no doubt influenced his view that the willing self must be extinguished in order to end the inevitable misery of life.

templation," we can come to the knowledge not of individual, phenomenal things, but of "Ideas" themselves (1969a: 179, 199). The "Idea," as the principle of form, is the purest and most "adequate" representation, or objectification, of the will and is on this account to be distinguished from "concept." Ideas are the original, living, unified objectifications of the will, whereas concepts are the abstract unities constructed by human intellectual effort out of our perceptions of the plurality of the world. Ideas are not constructed and manipulated, but apprehended in the "metaphysical glance" (1969a: 279) of intuition that is afforded the "genius" (1969a: 235). Schopenhauer argued that such intuition is grounded not in consciousness but in the body, in its desires and passions, and that it could be brought to the point of knowledge in an act of pure, willless knowing. Because in contemplation human beings are freed from the strivings and struggles of willing, Schopenhauer considers this state the most blissful one that human beings can experience (1969a: 196). This position would be an important point of departure for Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy.*

Schopenhauer's major work, *The World as Will and Representation*, which Nietzsche first read in 1865, examines in great detail the affirmation and denial of life. There, Schopenhauer writes that the "willing or not willing of life" is "the great question" (1969a: 308). In one sense, he argues, such willing is the very nature of will: the will *is* "the will-to-live" and it affirms itself in its representations, the phenomena. But Schopenhauer distinguishes between this natural, blind self-affirmation of the will from the self-conscious affirmation to which human beings can ascend in contemplation. Attending only to phenomena, human beings are easily struck by the inevitability of suffering and the pain of individuation. But they continue to will as individuals, desiring the end of their suffering. It is only in a certain overcoming of the individual will, thinks Schopenhauer, that life can be genuinely affirmed. He is particularly interested in two types of overcoming. In the artist, Schopenhauer sees the paradigmatic affirmer of life. The true artist is able to grasp intuitively the selfless knowledge of the will, participating in a particularly vivid way in the will's suffering, yet doing so in such a way that he or she finds pleasure and consolation in the spectacle created in this activity. In contemplation, the artist, as a pure subject of knowledge, sees beyond his or her own misery and death to comprehend the greater movement of life, the "eternal justice" by which all suffering and destruction is balanced by the creation of new life (1969a: 330). In artistic creation the will comes to know itself in such a way that "this knowledge does not in any way impede its willing" (1969a: 285).

Taken one step farther, however, knowledge of the will actually enables the will to turn against itself. According to Schopenhauer, this step, the

will's self-transcendence, the denial of life, is taken by the religious virtuoso. The life of the virtuoso is characterized not simply by transient experiences of aesthetic bliss, but by the cultivation of a life turned against the ever-striving will, by the denial of the will to live. Schopenhauer makes three basic distinctions between the artist and the religious virtuoso. First, the latter ascends farther in a contemplative knowledge of the will not just as objectified Idea, but in the full reality of its fundamental discord and suffering: the saint loses the self and becomes the will in encountering the highest truth: that "constant suffering is essential to all life." Second, this knowledge is grounded in a certain kind of conduct toward others, a self-transcending love for all beings in their suffering (1969a: 309). Schopenhauer is difficult to interpret on this point, but he seems to be suggesting that while aesthetic contemplation discerns the reality of the will as Idea, that is, the reality of the will in its most fundamental objectification, the religious virtuoso, in taking on the suffering of others, intuits the "inner nature" of the will as suffering. The artist, in other words, comes to know the will simply through contemplation, but the saint's intuition of the will also involves the experiential knowledge that comes through pity. Third, the saintly denial of life, the will's self-renunciation, liberates: coming to contemplative and experiential knowledge of the ultimate truth that all that we desire is grounded in discord and conflict, the will turns against itself, stripping the human being in whom this happens of the motives for desiring or willing (1969a: 402). This is a turn in which one "abandons all knowledge of individual things as such . . . and, by means of knowledge of the Ideas, sees through the *principium individuationis*. An actual appearance of the real freedom of the will as thing-in-itself then becomes possible, by which the phenomenon comes into a certain contradiction with itself, as is expressed by the word self-renunciation" (1969a: 301).

This, claims Schopenhauer, is the saint's state of holiness, ultimate freedom of the will. His pessimism thus leads to a vision of the end of all striving and desiring.

Soon after *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche came to question the metaphysical pretensions of this vision and valuation and became more and more convinced that to affirm life, human beings had to affirm the suffering of existence—not transcend it—and even find joy in it. In "Schopenhauer as Educator," from 1874, Nietzsche paid homage to his teacher, but also hinted at a fundamental break on the questions of suffering and value. Praising Schopenhauer's resistance to the vacuous optimisms of Christianity and liberal modernism, Nietzsche asserted that simply by asking the question of the value of existence, Schopenhauer had taught him the way of "struggling against [one's] age" (UM: 153). For this, Nietzsche would always admire Schopenhauer. But without directly con-

fronting his teacher's answer to that question, Nietzsche suggests a way of asking and answering it that puts him once and for all at odds with Schopenhauerian resignation. "Do you affirm this existence in the depths of your heart? Is it sufficient for you? Would you be its advocate, its redeemer? For you have only to pronounce a single heartfelt Yes!—and life, though it faces such heavy accusations, shall go free" (UM: 146).[4] Nietzsche imagines freedom in the "Yes" rather than in the "No." This "Yes" marks the beginning of a philosophical journey that would find one of its culminating statements in the new view of tragedy Nietzsche articulated in the preface from 1886. There, tragedy is viewed as a pessimism of strength, an affirmative insistence on the depths of human suffering that *desires* the "hard, gruesome, evil, problematic aspects of existence." The question of affirmation is the question of this desire.

Metaphysics and the Denial of Life

Metaphysics, Philosophy, and the Value of Existence: Human, All too Human

Nietzsche began to take his distance from Schopenhauerian pessimism in a thorough rethinking of the goals and methods of philosophy. This effort brought him to the conclusion that certain ways of doing philosophy are in themselves either life-denying or life-affirming. Specifically, in *Human, All too Human*, *Dawn*, and *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche criticized what he called "metaphysics" and experimented with a new philosophical method. He poses the problem—with an allusion to Schopenhauer—in the first chapter of *Human, All too Human*, from 1878, entitled "First and Last Things": "almost all the problems of philosophy once again pose the same form of question as they did two thousand years ago: how can something originate in its opposite, for example . . . disinterested contemplation in covetous desire?" (HH: 12). This "question" points to the fundamental philosophical dualism that Nietzsche will continue to struggle against, under the names of metaphysics, morality, and the ascetic ideal, for the remainder of his active life.[5]

[4] Nonetheless, Nietzsche would continue to struggle with his own pessimism. "The conviction that life is worthless and that all goals are delusions comes over me so strongly, above all when I'm lying sick in bed." Letter to Carl Von Gersdorff, 13 December 1875 (see Fuss and Shapiro 1971: 30). He offers another insight into his feelings in a note from 1888: "Since I was a child, I felt in my heart two contradictory feelings: *l'horreur de la vie, et l'extase de la vie*" (SW 13: 81).

[5] In the preface to GM (1887), Nietzsche looks back on *Human, All too Human*, as an attempt to free himself from Schopenhauer's influence. "What was especially at stake was the value of the "unegoistic," the instincts of pity, self-abnegation, self-sacrifice, which Schopenhauer had gilded, deified, and projected into a beyond for so long that at last they be-

Philosophers and priests, sages of all types, Nietzsche argues, have always been offended by the idea that those things they value most highly might have an origin that is less than pure and perfect. When he uses the term *metaphysics*, Nietzsche refers to a philosophy based in the dualistic conviction that things of the highest value have an origin altogether distinct from the origin of the things of lower value. This dualism draws this absolute distinction in values in a particular way: things of the highest value are unchanging, unconditioned, eternal, and harmonious, while things of lowest value are changing, conditioned, transitory, and dissonant. "Metaphysical philosophy has hitherto surmounted this difficulty [of origins] by . . . assuming for the more highly valued thing a miraculous source in the very kernel and being of the 'thing in itself' " (HH: 12). Later, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche will designate as the "faith in opposite values" the assumption that

> things of the highest value must have another, peculiar origin—they cannot be derived from this transitory, seductive, deceptive, paltry world, from this turmoil of delusion and lust. Rather from the lap of Being, the intransitory, the hidden god, the "thing-in-itself"—there must be their basis, and nowhere else. This way of judging constitutes the typical prejudgment and prejudice which give away the metaphysicians of all ages; this kind of valuation looms in the background of all their logical procedures; it is on account of this "faith" that they trouble themselves about "knowledge," about something that is finally baptized solemnly as "the truth." (BG: 10)

Human, All too Human, like all Nietzsche's subsequent philosophy, proceeds from a different premise: the origin of all values are to be found *in* and not *beyond* the contingencies and dissonances of human life—in the "human, all too human." Under the influence of his friend Paul Ree and of F. A. Lange's *History of Materialism*, Nietzsche sought to bring a rigorous scientific and empirical sensibility to philosophy.[6] He moved from there to a radical historicizing project that looks to the body, psychology, and society to develop a "chemistry" and history of moral feelings and values. This methodological interest grounds one major aspect of his critique of metaphysics. Nietzsche was not interested in proving that all the claims made by metaphysicians are wrong—he even acknowledges that "there could be a metaphysical world" (HH: 15). But, he con-

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came for him "value-in-itself," on the basis of which he *said No* to life and to himself" (GM: 19).

[6] Ree, a close friend of Nietzsche's, especially in the late 1870s, had written a book entitled *Psychological Observations*, which Nietzsche thought was an excellent example of the scientific way of thinking he was pursuing in *Human, All too Human*. Nietzsche thought Lange's *History of Materialism and Critique of Its Significance for the Present* was one of the most important philosophical works of the nineteenth century.

tends, there are no good philosophical grounds for supposing that there is such a pristine, otherworldly origin for our highest values. More generally, Nietzsche argues that metaphysical explanations are methodologically suspect. He writes that they have "been begotten in passion, error and self-deception; the worst of all methods of acquiring knowledge, not the best of all, have taught belief in them." Exposing these methods, as far as Nietzsche is concerned, is enough to refute the systems developed out of them (HH: 15).

Nietzsche also argues, however, that such philosophical criticism of the methods of metaphysics is limited, for though it can undermine the philosophical pretensions of metaphysics, it cannot understand the value of metaphysics. Compared to the question of value, the issue of the origin of beliefs is relatively unimportant; as Nietzsche would claim in *Dawn*: "The more insight we possess into an origin, the less significant does it appear" (D: 31).[7] His point is not that we should not investigate origins, but that origins do not determine the value or worth of ideas, beliefs, or practices. Nietzsche therefore brings another type of examination to bear on the question of metaphysics: a psychological hermeneutic of value that anticipates what he would come to call "genealogy."[8] This is a genuinely critical method of demystification, one that not only tries to determine whether a belief is mistaken or not, but one that examines how even a mistaken idea can exert a powerful hold on human beings by virtue of the role it plays in their lives.

The "philosophical liberation" that Nietzsche seeks to achieve through the criticism of metaphysics is therefore a complex one, for it demands both philosophical clarity, with respect to the propositional claims of metaphysical beliefs, and psychological and sociological analyses of the value of metaphysics for human life. This aspect of Nietzsche's investigation is diagnostic and therapeutic, rather than strictly philosophical; "overcoming metaphysics" is achieved only through a rigorous philosophical regimen or therapy designed to "eliminate metaphysical needs" (HH: 26, 82). Most important, this means eliminating the need for what Nietzsche calls "consolation." For Nietzsche, the value of metaphysics can be attributed, in large part, to its function as an interpretation of suffering, one that directs human concern away from worldly sources of misery and to a future or ultimate state where suffering will be redeemed or ended (HH: 60). Metaphysics promises a certain kind of control over the contingencies and disasters of human life, consoling human beings and offering them security. This control is ultimately unverifiable, but this itself, as Nietzsche would come to recognize more and more, contributes to the power of its interpretations. Nietzsche believes this immense power

[7] See also GS: 285.

[8] See Schrift's discussion of Nietzsche's "psychogenealogy" (1990: 53 ff.).

of consolation is dangerous, for it alleviates certain forms of human suffering only at the expense of creating other, more terrible forms of suffering, which undermine and weaken engagement with this life.

To further complicate matters, Nietzsche refuses to level a blanket condemnation of metaphysics. When he claims that origin does not determine value, Nietzsche has in mind not only the fact that the criticism of an origin will not necessarily free us from an error, but he also is asserting that something rooted in error can come to have great value and produce great beauty. Or that something can be both valuable and destructive. To understand metaphysics, one must take a "retrograde step" in order to understand the historical and psychological significance of metaphysical ideas, a process by which one comes to realize not only the danger of consolation, but that, in certain respects, metaphysical ideas "have been the most responsible for the advancement of mankind" (HH: 23). Nietzsche's project here echoes Feuerbach's: although religious ideas and feelings are based in mistakes, only through these ideas have human beings been able to develop to the present level of culture (HH: 26). This suggests that the practice of liberation involves recognizing the historical continuity of human life, and further, that it is impossible simply to start afresh with new ways of valuing and living. Rather, it is necessary to build on the past, so as not to be deprived "of the best that mankind has hitherto produced" (HH: 23; D: 32).

The existential implications of his own philosophical "chemistry" frighten Nietzsche. For even assuming one could succeed in undermining false ways of thinking, if "every belief in the value and dignity of life rests on false thinking" (HH: 28), how then is one to renew the sense of meaningfulness? How can human beings say "Yes" to their existence? How can they affirm their dignity? Will genuine philosophical vigilance undermine life? One might derail these questions by supposing that Nietzsche is only making a historical claim here; that, *to this point*, all belief in dignity and value have rested on false thinking, but that with "right thinking," Nietzsche's thinking, new, more solid, grounds for human dignity can be established. But Nietzsche does not see it this way in *Human, All too Human*, for although philosophy can strip us of our consolations by arriving at knowledge of the errors and sources of previous ways of valuing life, philosophy conducted with proper respect for the limits of reason and the nature of human valuing cannot determine or discover new value. The reason is that valuing is not a matter of knowing as much as it is of feeling, mood, and desire (HH: 28). The human being, therefore, is torn between knower and valuer. The most the intellect can do is tell us that we are necessarily unjust and illogical, that we depend on errors; this, writes Nietzsche, "is one of the greatest and most irresolvable discords of existence" (HH: 28).

By 1878, then, Nietzsche already had brought himself to the impasse with which he would struggle for the rest of his active life. Honest thinkers cannot but see through humanity's most cherished ideals and values—but it is not clear how they can establish new ones, for it seems that science and philosophy resist all affirmations of the value of existence. "Will our philosophy not thus become a tragedy? Will truth not become inimical to life, to the better man?" (HH: 29). Faced with this prospect, Nietzsche offers some tentative answers in fragments scattered throughout *Human, All too Human*. Two are of interest here. At one point, he wonders whether there is an alternative to philosophical despair, at least for persons with a particular kind of "temperament," in a kind of liberating, contemplative detachment. Such detachment would enable one to live "as in nature, without praising, blaming, contending, gazing contentedly, as though at a spectacle, upon many things for which one formerly felt only fear" (HH: 30). This solution shows traces of Schopenhauer's continuing influence (and of a traditional Platonic vision of philosophical transcendence), for it requires a reorientation of desire in a shift from relationships and ordinary forms of valuing to a "free, fearless hovering over men, customs, laws, and the traditional evaluations of things," a freedom from things of the world that is itself "most desirable" (HH: 30).

At the same time, Nietzsche's antimetaphysical perspective requires that the objects of his contemplation not be eternal ideas or God, but human life and nature themselves. Nietzsche suggests that such philosophical liberation is only possible through a practice of knowing in which one is continually reimmersing oneself in life—in order to again transcend it. This philosophical practice is a kind of "wandering," which involves being "a noble traitor to all things that can in any way be betrayed (HH: 203).[9] The object of wandering is not to transcend one's humanity in any final sense, but to distance oneself from oneself, gaining some degree of freedom from passions, needs, and conviction. As wandering, philosophy is a matter of utilizing one's life—one's "unjust" and "illogical" perspectives on life—to gain knowledge about oneself and about humanity: one can come to some knowledge of oneself *as* unjust and illogical. One's experiences, passions, and moods become the stuff of philosophy; one looks into oneself and takes from oneself: one's "own life will acquire the value of an instrument and means of knowledge," and "the clouds of affliction hovering over you will yet have to serve you as udders from which you will milk the milk for your refreshment" (HH: 135). And, in opposition to Platonic philosophizing, the tragic motif continues to play a role in Nietzsche's thinking, for he has here interiorized the tragic stage by envisioning a kind of self-relation in which one gains enough

[9] What became the second part of *Human, All too Human*, was originally a separate work, entitled *The Wanderer and His Shadow.*

distance from oneself to be able to turn back and view, as a "spectator," one's own passionate struggles and sufferings. In the spectacle of suffering life, as achieved by the philosopher, one finds equanimity and joy.

Nietzsche offers a second response to the conflict between knowledge and value. This one, however, throws into question the precise extent of Nietzsche's hopes for overcoming metaphysics, for he poses the possibility of establishing a creative and fruitful tension between science and metaphysics by addressing the conflicting demands of the "drives" toward science, on the one hand, and "poetry, religion and metaphysics," on the other. Where his contemplative solution demands the overcoming of the latter in favor of the former, here he claims that "higher culture" demands something different.

> Such a situation between two so different demands is very hard to maintain, for science presses for the absolute dominance of its methods, and if this pressure is not relaxed there arises the other danger of a feeble vacillation back and forth between different drives. To indicate the way towards a resolution of this difficulty, however, if only by means of a parable, one might recall that the *dance* is not the same thing as a languid reeling back and forth between different drives. High culture will resemble an audacious dance. (HH: 130–31)

There is a hint in this passage of a perspective on science that belies the critical attitude Nietzsche affirms in most of the rest of the text, for science here is more than a means to knowledge and even more than an "attachment" that one might find desirable. It is, instead, a drive that seeks absolute dominance. It appears that Nietzsche senses the need to resist this drive. This passage, then, raises two questions. How does the figure of the dance help Nietzsche conceive of a relation to both science and metaphysics that both resists and affirms them? And, does this figure suggest the affirmation of a certain kind of metaphysics, poetry, or religion?

Nihilism as the Will to Nothing: On the Genealogy of Morals

Nietzsche criticizes metaphysics because its object of value and its goal are, in reality, "nothing." The human need for consolation, the inability to will or desire the reality of suffering, has meant for millennia that this nothing has been the object of humanity's greatest desires: "Have all the great passions of mankind not hitherto been as these are, passions for a nothing? And all their solemnities—solemnities about a nothing?" (D: 197). Reflecting on this "nothing," Nietzsche was led in his later works, and especially in the essay on the ascetic ideal in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887; hereafter *Genealogy*), to grapple with the problem of nihilism.

In this essay, Nietzsche argues that in order to live, human beings need a goal for their will, an ideal. When life has a goal, he asserts, it has meaning. The essay shows how the dualism of a metaphysical, religio-moral ideal—the ascetic ideal—has been able to inspire countless people by giving them "nothingness" to will. Nietzsche claims that to this point in human history this ideal has been the *only* goal that the human will has had so far.

> Apart from the ascetic ideal, man, the human *animal*, had no meaning so far. His existence on earth contained no goal . . . the *will* for man and earth was lacking. . . . *This* is precisely what the ascetic ideal means: that something was *lacking*, that man was surrounded by a fearful *void*—he did not know how to justify, to account for, to affirm himself; he *suffered* from the problem of his meaning. He also suffered otherwise, he was in the main a sickly animal: but his problem was *not* suffering itself, but that there was no answer to the crying question, "*why* do I suffer?" (GM: 162)

The ascetic ideal holds power because it makes human suffering bearable—even desirable—by giving it meaning: specifically, suffering becomes the sign of the promise that, at some point, in some other realm of existence, suffering will end once and for all.

So strong is the need, for ideal or meaning, that human beings "would rather will nothingness than will nothing at all." This distinction goes to the heart of Nietzsche's mature critique of metaphysics as the "faith in opposite values" and as nihilism. To "will nothingness" is still to will, in this case, to will a metaphysical "beyond." By contrast, "to will nothing at all" means that the will finds nothing, not even the illusory beyond, to strive for: it simply does not will. This echoes the problem that Nietzsche had already anticipated in *Human, All too Human*: struggling to expose the nothingness of the metaphysical will to the beyond, he confronts the calamitous possibility of being left with nothing to will. The primary question Nietzsche raises in the *Genealogy*, therefore, can be posed in an initial formulation: when we see the ascetic ideal for what it is—a will to nothingness—is it possible to find a new ideal, a new way of willing or valuing, or does the philosophical search for the truth of our most cherished values and meanings leave us with nothing?

However, in the period between *Human, All too Human*, and the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche had come to look at the power of metaphysics in a new way. With the formulation "will to power," Nietzsche began to think toward a philosophical monism in which all reality was understood in terms of forces of life striving for power. As a result, Nietzsche began to treat the power of metaphysics not simply in terms of a conscious need for security and control, but as a deep instinctual response of self-preser-

vation. The ascetic ideal gives meaning to life by denying the value of the world and nature, but this denial is a ruse of the life force itself. Its vehicle is the priest. Through this figure, Nietzsche deepened his grasp of the intertwining of sociological and psychological forces in the creation of human value.

Nietzsche contrasts two perspectives on the ascetic ideal. On the surface is the valuation of life acknowledged by the "ascetic priest," who "juxtaposes [life] (along with what pertains to it: "nature," "world," the whole sphere of becoming and transitoriness) with a totally different mode of existence which it opposes and excludes, *unless* it turn against itself, deny itself: in that case, the case of the ascetic life, life counts as a bridge to that other mode of existence" (GM: 117).

The ascetic priest is a self-conscious dualist: one lives this life and undergoes its suffering, glories in its suffering, for the sake of another—better, truer, more divine—mode of existence. Nietzsche's priest believes that it is possible to lead a life that will make it possible for one to enter this different mode of existence; as with Schopenhauer's saint, this involves a way of stepping beyond life, in the course of life, so as find a place from which one can turn against life. For Nietzsche, however, this is the characteristic misunderstanding of value committed by those enslaved to the faith in opposite values, and it is the characteristic hope of those for whom the absence of suffering is the highest value. Reading values genealogically, as expressions of historical forms of "life," of will to power, Nietzsche probes to a different perspective: "*The ascetic ideal springs from the protective instinct of a degenerating life* which tries by all means to sustain itself and to fight for its existence; it indicates a partial physiological obstruction and exhaustion against which the deepest instincts of life, which have remained intact, continually struggle with new expedients and devices" (GM: 120–21).

Nietzsche's monism gives him a way of rejecting the priestly (and Schopenhauerian) idea of a transcendent freedom by means of which something that lives can turn against the principle of life itself. The ascetic ideal, from this perspective, is not a denial but an affirmation, the means by which the instinct of self-preservation of a particular kind of life accomplishes its purpose. The ascetic priest works as the tool of a will to power. The will to nothingness, in other words, is for Nietzsche the manifestation of "the deepest instincts of life" struggling to preserve themselves. And the priest, "this apparent enemy of life, this denier—precisely he is among the greatest conserving and yes-creating forces of life" (GM: 120–21). Nihilism, as the will to nothing, has been a force for the preservation of life at the same time that it is a route to power for the priest.

Yet Nietzsche still wants to talk about the ascetic ideal's "denial" of life; more specifically, its "hostility" to life, and he conveys the impression

that he wants humanity to find a different meaning for life. Despite the fact that it is a "yes-creating" force, Nietzsche sees three fundamental, interconnected problems with the ascetic ideal. First, one who follows the ascetic ideal gives meaning to his or her life only through a self-deceptive, dualistic refusal to acknowledge his or her own rootedness in life or motives in adhering to the ideal. The desire to transcend this life can be justified, and be successfully self-deceptive, only if it posits a realm of absolute truth and value. Otherwise the weak must face the fact that their desire for another mode of existence is rooted in their own weakness and their own desire, not in God's command. Claiming to worship God, one really seeks to be free of suffering. Thus the ascetic ideal can no longer grasp those who see through this self-deception, those who are compelled to "honesty." Second, the ascetic ideal has preserved a specific kind of life—a declining, weak, exhausted life—for those who are bewitched by the promises of a life without suffering. Third, and most important: the ascetic ideal has been the means by which the weak, led by the priest, have prevailed over the strong in a battle of values. This victory deserves careful attention.

The weak have been victorious, according to Nietzsche, through a revaluation of values, or, more precisely, by instituting a new mode of valuation. In the first essay of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche argues that the ascetic ideal finds its source in the *ressentiment* of the priest and all those who, out of one form of weakness or another, hate and envy self-affirming humanity. The self-affirmers are the strong and noble, who find the source of all value in themselves and all that is an extension of themselves: valuing, here, begins in designating themselves as the "good." In contrast to this active self-affirmation, the weak value through the reactivity of *ressentiment*.[10] That is, their mode of valuation begins in the reaction to the strong, determining them as "evil"; "good," in this scheme, is the derivative concept, used to designate the victim of evil—oneself. When Nietzsche writes of the revaluation of values, he has in mind this essential difference between the active valuing of health and affirmation, on the one hand, and the reactive valuing of *ressentiment*, on the other.

For it to have any force, the mode of valuing rooted in the distinction between evil and good must be made absolute:

> They monopolize virtue, these weak, hopelessly sick people, there is no doubt of it: "We alone are the good and the just," they say, "we alone are *homines bonae voluntatis*." They walk among us as embodied reproaches, as warnings to us—as if health, well-constitutedness, strength, pride and the sense of power

[10] See the first essay in the *Genealogy*, especially Section Ten, for Nietzsche's discussion of these issues. See also Deleuze (1983: 1–36) for a detailed discussion of the concepts "active" and "reactive."

> were in themselves necessarily vicious things for which one must pay some day, and pay bitterly: how ready they themselves are at bottom to *make* one pay; how they crave to be *hangmen*. . . . The will of the weak to represent *some* form of superiority, their instinct for devious paths to tyranny over the healthy—where can it not be discovered, this will to power of the weakest. (GM: 123)

The ascetic ideal allows the weak to affirm life through self-deception and the active hostility to ascending, vital life. Paradoxically, the will to nothingness, as a last gasp of the weak, has found the power of domination: nihilism has held sway under "the holiest of names." The particular configuration of metaphysics, morality, and religion employed by the ascetic priest not only gives meaning to suffering, but with the claim that its evaluation of life has an otherworldly, divine source, it supports its moral absolutism. The power of this hostile absolutism is supported by the fact that there are so many people who need this interpretation. The ascetic ideal thereby undermines any "will for man and earth" and idealizes the passion for nothingness. Through the ascetic ideal, life can simultaneously be affirmed and despised. It is not affirmed or loved for itself, but only as a means to peace beyond this life and absolute mastery in this life. Nietzsche attacks the ascetic ideal because it undermines those who would affirm this life here and now.

The Ascetic Ideal and the Will to Truth

Religion and morality are the most prominent initial targets in Nietzsche's attack on the ascetic ideal. It is therefore surprising, at least at first, that near the end of the essay on the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche leaves off his discussion of the ascetic priest to argue that the ascetic ideal finds its "strictest, most spiritual formulation" not in Christianity, but in the atheistic and scientific spirit of modernity (GM: 160). As he had shown in *Human, All too Human*, Nietzsche's criticisms of metaphysics, religion, and morality lead him to a position in which he questions his own embrace of the scientific, worldly spirit of the age. In that earlier book, however, Nietzsche had been concerned primarily with the possibility that the critical consciousness would undermine the ability of human beings to value their existence. Thus, he had imagined the possibility of being able to find joy and dignity in scientific, philosophical detachment, in the enjoyment of the spectacle produced by the insistence on truth. By the time of the *Genealogy*, however, Nietzsche had refined his understanding of the metaphysical presuppositions of philosophy itself, and he had found the metaphysical consciousness more uncanny than he had thought. Near the end of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche argues that the antimetaphysical spirit is itself metaphysical, a manifestation of the ascetic ideal. "Uncondi-

tional and honest atheism (and its is the only air we breathe, we more spiritual men of this age!) is therefore not the antithesis of the ideal, as it appears to be; it is rather only one of the latest phases of its evolution" (GM: 160).[11]

Nietzsche bases this claim on the argument that at the core of the ascetic ideal, of both the metaphysical and "anti-metaphysical" spirit, one finds a moral imperative—the "will to truth." This will has been the driving force of the ascetic ideal, and continues to drive the secularism and atheism of modernity.[12] Nietzsche thus brings into sharp relief the fundamental characteristic of metaphysical dualism. The key to the will to truth lies not in epistemological problems regarding truth or knowledge—their existence or human access to them—but in the moral/religious problem of the belief in the absolute value of truth. The "will to truth" is

> faith in the ascetic ideal itself, even if as an unconscious imperative—don't be deceived about that—it is the faith in a metaphysical value, that absolute value of truth, sanctioned and guaranteed by this ideal alone. . . . The truthful man, in the audacious and ultimate sense presupposed by the faith in science, *thereby affirms another world* than that of life, nature, and history; and insofar as he affirms this "other world," does this not mean that he has to deny its antithesis, this world, *our* world? (GM: 151–52)

The will to truth affirms a value qualitatively different from all other values, an otherworldly value that subordinates all "natural" human values to itself. Those who adhere to the will to truth do not necessarily require that all natural values are in fact valueless, only that their value consists in the extent to which they make possible the realization of truth: this world only has value to the extent that it leads us to the "true world." Like the theist, the unconditional atheist is an absolutist, who refuses to question the value of truth.

Throughout the *Genealogy*—and in the fifth book of *The Gay Science*—Nietzsche identifies himself with the "men of knowledge" who have held truth to be divine.[13] Yet in these texts, pursuing the will to truth into the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche has found the men of knowledge, there with the rest of those remorseless introspectors and vivisectors who up-

[11] A few pages earlier, Nietzsche is even more explicit, quoting a passage from the fifth book of *The Gay Science*: "It is still a *metaphysical faith* that underlies our faith in science—and we men of knowledge of today, we godless men and anti-metaphysicians, we, too, still derive our flame from the fire ignited by a faith millennia old, the Christian faith, which was also Plato's, that God is truth, that truth is *divine*" (GM: 152).

[12] See GS: 282–83 for Nietzsche's discussion of the connection between will to truth and morality.

[13] See also Nietzsche's discussion of the "self-sublimation" of morality in the preface to *Dawn*.

hold the ascetic ideal. These truth seekers have remained ignorant of their own constituting ideals and drives; the will to truth has masked a certain will to ignorance about the souls that cleave to the will to truth. "We are unknown to ourselves, we men of knowledge—and with good reason. We have never sought ourselves—how could it happen that we should ever find ourselves?" (GM: 15). The will to truth, Nietzsche perceives, "has become conscious of itself as a problem in us" (GM: 161).

Nietzsche finds the face of the ascetic in the mirror of his own philosophical inquiry. To discover the ascetic ideal as the condition of one's own philosophical spirit mortifies the genealogist. Thus the will to truth attacks itself; the ascetic ideal mortifies its highest objectives. Paradoxically, Nietzsche's genealogy epitomizes, to the furthest degree, as it were, the self-mortifying reflex of the ascetic ideal. And yet at the furthest degree of this torment, the philosopher is able to look beyond. He sees a possibility that has not been broached before: the possibility that the value of truth, the "kernel" of all absolute values, is not absolute. The will to truth turns its merciless gaze on itself to give Nietzsche insight into the fate of the absolutism of metaphysics: the nihilism of a historical trajectory in which the highest values—God, the Good, Truth—devalue themselves.

> All great things bring about their own destruction through an act of self-overcoming: thus the law of life will have it, the law of the necessity of "self-overcoming" in the nature of life. . . . After Christian truthfulness has drawn one inference after another, it must end by drawing its *most striking inference*, its inference *against* itself; this will happen, however, when it poses the question "*what is the meaning of all will to truth?*" (GM: 161)

At the end of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche appears to leave us with the hope that this question—"What is the meaning of all will to truth?" or "What is the value of truth?"—may provide the means to extricate ourselves from the ascetic ideal. Turning truth on truth, the ascetic ideal betrays itself. But this betrayal holds familiar dangers, for if God dies, if truth is not an absolute value, how can human beings determine the value or the meaning of life? From what perspective, or with what criterion, will they be able to determine what is or is not valuable? If they, with Nietzsche, look beyond the ascetic ideal, they are confronted with a new intensification of nihilism, no longer the will to nothingness, but, more terrifying, the state of having nothing to will.

One of the most uncanny things about the *Genealogy* is that it is not at all clear that, out of these discoveries, Nietzsche is able to present us with a definitive alternative, a vision of the "opposing ideal." One might argue that he has given us this vision in *Zarathustra*, as he suggests at the

end of the second essay and confirms in *Ecce Homo*. This position is, I think, essentially correct, yet it must be qualified by his assertion that the will to truth has only now risen to consciousness "as a problem," which will take "centuries" to work through (GS: 280–83). In other words, Nietzsche discovers a problem, not a solution; in fact, he claims to find his meaning not in an ideal that solves the problem of the ascetic ideal, but in the *problem* of the old ideal itself. " '*What does all will to truth mean?*' . . . and here I touch on my problem again, on *our* problem, my unknown friends . . . : what meaning does our being have, if it were not that will to truth has become conscious of itself *as a problem* in us?" (GM: 161).

One solution to this problem would be to consider whether it is possible to give meaning to life with an ideal or highest value that is not absolute in the life-denying way of the ascetic ideal. Along these lines, Maudmarie Clark has argued that Nietzsche's critique of the will to truth does not involve the claim that there is no longer any value in searching for truth. Questioning truth as absolute value is not the same as claiming that truth does not exist or that it has no value. As Clark argues, one can pursue the truth of truth without conceiving of this pursuit as the most important thing one can do, or, at least, without thinking that this search has its end in itself (1990: 200). Clark proposes, therefore, that Nietzsche's task is to find a new ideal, for the sake of which one searches for truth. As Nietzsche asks, "Where is the opposing will that might express an opposing ideal?" (GM: 146). Finding their meaning in the absolute value of truth, human beings will find their meaning in some other ideal, which as Clark rightly points out, will be an ideal that affirms this-worldly life.

But what makes an ideal life affirming or life denying? In the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche neither poses an explicit answer to this question, nor proposes an alternative to the ascetic ideal. While he points to Zarathustra as the "man of the future, who will redeem us . . . from the hitherto reigning ideal" (GM: 96), he only takes us as far as the "problem" of the old ideal. One partial explanation for this is that Nietzsche finds himself still captive to the ascetic ideal. He finds himself on a threshold, at a place where values that have reigned heretofore are devaluing themselves and where the future remains unclear because the will to truth remains a problem. But he also claims that this problem of the will to truth *is* the meaning of "our being." Is Nietzsche suggesting that the *question* of the will to truth and the ascetic ideal—"the only meaning offered so far"—is itself a new meaning? If we follow *Genealogy's* identification of "meaning" and "ideal," do we find that the new ideal for which Nietzsche is searching is the search itself?

Morality as Mastery

For Nietzsche, "morality," strictly speaking (though he will use the term more loosely at times), is the mode of valuing rooted in *ressentiment* and the metaphysical faith in opposite values. The priest, the guardian of morality, proclaims the ultimate value of selflessness and the virtue of surrender. Nietzsche, however, unmasks priestly morality as an uncanny, and intricately deceptive drive for power. It has been braided out of secret and obsessive mutterings of the need for vengeance on all that constrains or hurts the vulnerable self; it arises in the tenderly nurtured desire to have more power than the rapacious oppressors; power, as I have indicated, that is incontestable, absolute, inhuman. Nietzsche's attack on the ascetic ideal is an attack on the priestly attempt to master "life itself," revealing the fundamental nature of Nietzsche's concept of nihilism: seeking absolute mastery, this mode of idealizing and valuing in essence eviscerates the very ground of value—life itself—and so produces highest values that must always consume themselves (GM: 117–18).[14] At the same time, however, this insidious "will to power of the weakest" is able to triumph over the "noble morality" of the strong.

As the philosopher of the will to power, Nietzsche affirms the way all life strives for power. Nevertheless, he attacks morality because it is based in a quest for unworldly power: unable to exercise the power of life, it seeks power over life. Adherents of the ascetic ideal, on this view, nurture twists of self-deception, which permit them to evade knowledge of their hatred for life and ground their claims to power not in their own will, but in a "divine" will to which they "surrender" themselves. Since their morality exalts self-surrender, they must never admit how this ruse disguises their hunger for limitless power. Nietzsche perceives that adherents of the ascetic ideal find relief from the human condition by bathing in the intoxicating righteousness of *moral* condemnation, which derives not from the puny, insignificant self, but from infinite God, who upholds the weak and mortifies the strong. Through morality, one denounces one's own finite power in a self-deceptive orgy of self-denial only in order to wield or be comforted by absolute, divine power.

The problem of nihilism as Nietzsche poses it in the *Genealogy* is primarily a moral problem—not just one moral problem among others, but the problem of morality itself. It is not a religious problem. Evidence for this can be found in the fact that Nietzsche does not find the slave revolt in values only in the emergence of Judaism and Christianity, or in religion in general, as one who has read only the *Genealogy* might suppose.

[14] Cf. Kristeva (1987: 63): "It is the height of nihilism to claim in the name of the rights of man—or superman—rights over life itself."

Nietzsche's critique of the "slave revolt in values" is also at the heart of his criticism of Western philosophy since Plato. In *Twilight of the Idols* (1888), he traces the trajectory of *ressentiment* and morality through the philosophical revaluation accomplished by Socrates. There, Nietzsche returns us to the victory of Socratic philosophical optimism over the pessimism of Greek tragedy, an optimism he had described in an earlier book as the "delusion of limitless power" (BT: 111). He argues that Socratic dialectic was a tool of the "rabble" by which Socrates completed the destruction of the aristocratic mode of valuation. With the Athenian nobles already mired in decadence, their instincts in a state of anarchy, forces from the lower social order embodied in Socrates asserted themselves to impose a new mode of valuation grounded in morality and reason (TI: 39–44). Nietzsche condenses this mode of valuation in the formula "reason = virtue = happiness." Socratic *ressentiment* expresses itself by endowing reason with absolute value. Reason as moral imperative overrides the instincts of self-affirmation and dominance that had characterized the Greeks of the tragic age. All instincts and desires now had to *justify* themselves before the tribunal of reason, all that Nietzsche will come to call "the body" now had to submit itself to the mastery of consciousness. This mastery becomes the obsession of Western philosophy—a philosophy of consciousness—from Plato to Kant and Schopenhauer.

For Nietzsche the critique of nihilistic mastery shakes the foundations of modern, Western morality, which means, ultimately, the seat of this morality in the concept of the ego or the "I." In his later work, Nietzsche returns again and again to the concept of the "I," criticizing priestly philosophers who have been bewitched by grammar into believing that "I" refers to some kind of substantiality, some autonomous consciousness, underlying all acts and feelings. As Nietzsche puts it in the *Genealogy*, the priest understands the "I" as a "neutral substratum" behind all actions, as their cause. This belief, Nietzsche thinks, is an error with great consequences (TI: 48). For the priest, "evil" implies the judgment that those so designated can choose not to be as they are, that they are responsible for their "evil" (GM: 45). The "I" is the ground of this responsibility: because its neutrality means it can "choose" to act in one way or another, it is the condition for the ideas of free will and responsibility, ideas without which morality would not have been possible (GM: 45). And for the resentful priest the idea of a self with free will becomes a powerful weapon in the battle with the nobles because it allows the priest to claim that the nobles are responsible for the harm they visit upon the weak.

Philosophers have followed the priest by attaching to this "I" the thought not just of freedom but also of holiness. This is especially clear in Kant, for whom morality is concentrated in a freely reasoning and

willing "I" that can divorce itself from body, instincts, desire, relationships—from the whole of its material and historical matrix—in order to will solely on rational/moral grounds. Such willing is definitive of holiness. The imaginary unified consciousness is set over against the body and desire, expressing freedom and holiness by subjugating those imponderable forces of energy and fecundity. The moral self, the holy self, is the self who masters that part of itself that changes. Although, as we have seen, Schopenhauer takes issue with Kantian epistemology, both are in essential agreement with respect to morality and holiness. As in Kant, Schopenhauer identifies holiness with the freedom of the will by which the will detaches itself from the life of the body and the passions. For both, then, the self, as holy—as spirit—exists only in a certain curved cipher, whose sharp edges cut against the suffering body. Nietzsche despised this domesticated holiness that opposes in principle the wildness of the body, for it expresses the philosophical baptism of a pathological will to mastery. Such holiness no longer breathes in the element of mysterious attractions, births, transformations, deaths, which disclose the permeability of the self, its radical constitution through unbiddable forces; holiness as a certain abashed and exalted piety before the necessities of one's life is overthrown. Instead, now, the holiness of the self is readily located in the imaginary, yet utterly transparent, point of the impassive free will.

It is from the perspective of this critique of morality as "anti-nature" (TI: 52) that Nietzsche rejects moral concepts of "responsibility," "freedom," and "spirit." These concepts drive the stake of responsibility deep into the body of human beings, dividing them from themselves with the idea that it is their finitude and animality that are responsible for their suffering. To this spectacle of human beings tearing themselves apart from guilt, Nietzsche can offer only an agonized lament: "Oh, this insane, pathetic beast—man! What ideas he has, what unnaturalness, what paroxysms of nonsense, what *bestiality of thought* erupts as soon as he is prevented just a little from being a *beast in deed*!" (GM: 93). Responsibility as a moral category, suspended between guilt and innocence, registers the ideal of primordial mastery, given to human beings, a mastery over suffering itself, over life itself. This, finally, is God's mastery, devolved upon human beings in the moment of creation. Yet despite his provocative claims about the nonexistence of free will, the illusion of the ego, and the sickness of morality, Nietzsche does not seek to deny certain possibilities of freedom, self, or responsibility. His objective is to combat the psychological and sociological uses to which these ideas have been put in service of the morality of the ascetic ideal. And he seeks to imagine a human self whose freedom and holiness are not premised on the grammatical "I,"

nor lorded over the heterogeneous regions of suffering, desire, and contingency, which philosophers designate, "the body." Although Nietzsche thinks a certain kind of self-mastery is the mark of the noble, affirmative self, such mastery must be distinguished from the absolute mastery over life.[15] Self-mastery, as Nietzsche affirms it, is always mastery within life, thus vulnerable to the inescapable conditions of life and growth. It must affirm this vulnerability, not seek to hide or flee from it.

Conclusion

From the time of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche, in one way or another, grappled with the question of the value of life. In his later work, however, he was convinced that the question itself was symptomatic of a perverse will to master life. Discussing "The Problem of Socrates," in *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche writes: "One must reach out and try to grasp this astonishing *finesse, that the value of life cannot be estimated*. Not by a living man, because he is party to the dispute, indeed its object, and not the judge of it; not by a dead one, for another reason.—For a philosopher to see a problem in the *value* of life thus even constitutes an objection to him, a question-mark as to his wisdom, a piece of unwisdom" (TI: 40). The value of life cannot be estimated by the living, which includes the deadened priest who absolutizes self-surrender or the deadened philosopher who seeks to master life through consciousness. A will to mastery over life underwrites both these demands, tearing human thought and expression from body, nature, and history.

In Nietzsche's rethinking of mastery, selfhood, and responsibility, one begins to apprehend the extent to which his search for a "Yes" to life changes the whole issue of value. The revaluation of all values is not simply a matter of a new set of values, but of a new way of valuing altogether, as Deleuze points out when he argues that the revaluation of values means

[15] To reiterate, Nietzsche does not equate this morality of mastery—the morality of the weak or the slaves—with religion per se. He does correlate it with the priestly revaluation made possible in the monotheistic religions of the Hebrews, but he also correlates life-affirming self-mastery with the religious roots of Greek tragedy. These correlations are evident in his contrast between the concepts of "sin," rooted in Judaism, with the Greek concept of "sacrilege." "Sin" is based in a conception of the divine as totally separated from the human, a dualistic vision of power, such that all transgressive expressions of human power are seen as utterly evil. By contrast, the concept of "sacrilege" does not assume an absolute distinction between human power and divine power. Transgression against the divine in this case, as evidenced in Greek tragedy, is punishable, but it is not without nobility (GS: 188). Thus tragedy is, for Nietzsche, alien to monotheistic religious traditions and Western philosophical morality alike.

"not a change of values, but a change in the element from which the value of values derives" (1983: 170). This element can be either the active "Yes" or the reactive "No." These are not judgments for or against life, but fundamental stances toward the alterity of existence from which all valuing emerges. For Nietzsche, the modern soul finds itself caught between the two.

He argues further that for centuries the "No" has been implicated in the will to truth. But now the will to truth unmasks itself to itself as an aversion to life. How can Nietzsche, himself a "man of knowledge" and—so I will argue—an ascetic, move from this "No" to the noble "Yes"? I have indicated that the inconclusiveness of both the *Genealogy* and *The Gay Science* suggests that for Nietzsche the "Yes" must begin here and now, in the midst of the problem of the ascetic ideal itself, not in the solution to the problem. Is it possible to live the problem of life turned against itself, valuing the search for its own sake, not for the sake of the destination? Nietzsche, on this reading, is not looking to settle the issue of life, but to dance with life, eschewing the rigid posture of philosophical and moral "positions" in the fluid choreography of gesture and motion. Nietzsche seeks to envision a mastery or self-discipline that is aesthetic rather than moral, the self-discipline and freedom of a dancer, for whom freedom and holiness emerge from the beauty of body and spirit in motion: "I would not know what the spirit of a philosopher might wish more to be than a good dancer. For the dance is his ideal, also his art, and finally also his only piety, his 'service of God'" (GS: 346).

This holiness entails its own practices, psalms, laments, deprivations, and raptures. It will involve, as we will see in the following chapters, characteristically religious themes. The question of religion has not been treated in any detail in this chapter, in part because I sought to demonstrate that Nietzsche's critique of nihilism is directed primarily at a certain way of valuing and devaluing life. Of course, Nietzsche argues that religious beliefs and institutions have been instrumental in sustaining the nihilistic dualism of the faith in opposite values, and, in certain instances, he comes close to identifying religion with nihilism. And in his later work, as he became more explicitly concerned with the problem of nihilism, Nietzsche's polemic against Christianity became sharper and more relentless, to the point where in two of his final works, Christianity is identified as *the* enemy of his positive Dionysian vision. If we want to talk about the religious character of Nietzsche's philosophical vision, we are clearly faced with the conundrum of identifying the instrumentalities of his vision with the very tropes he vehemently denounced.

It will be necessary, then, to determine the nature and scope of Nietzsche's criticism of religion. What, precisely, is the link between religion and nihilism? What distinctions need to be drawn between Christian-

ity, in particular, and religion, in general? And what is one to make of the "remainder" of religious language and imagery in Nietzsche's writing? Why, for example, does he leave us, at the end of *Ecce Homo*, not with Zarathustra—the "godless"—but with a confrontation between gods—"Dionysus vs. the Crucified"?

Chapter Two

FIGURING RELIGION, CONTESTING SPIRIT

> The stories of saints are the most ambiguous literature in existence . . .
> (Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*)

> The Christian conception of God—God as God of the sick, God as spider, God as spirit—is one of the most corrupt conceptions of God arrived at on earth: perhaps it even represents the low-water mark in the descending development of the God type. God degenerated to the *contradiction* of life, instead of being its transfiguration and eternal *Yes!*
> (Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*)

> Have I been understood?—*Dionysus vs. the Crucified*.
> (Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*)

The Power of Religion

WITH FREUD AND MARX, Nietzsche is widely regarded as one of the modern period's original and most influential "masters of suspicion." Like their Enlightenment predecessors, each of these thinkers held the critique of religion as an important key to overcoming the discontents of humankind and realizing human autonomy. At the same time, each went beyond Enlightenment conceptions of reason and superstition to develop deep critical readings of religion that sought to account for the hold it exerted on human beings. In the case of Nietzsche, the quintessential modern vision of the liberation from religion leading to human progress is especially evident in the pre-*Zarathustra* works, where he seeks to accomplish a movement from a philosophy still bound by metaphysics, morality, and religion to a "truly liberating philosophical science" (HH: 26). His later work, however, complicates this vision, not only on the matters of philosophy and affirmation, but on the matter of religion as well. Religion in Nietzsche's text is multivalent—both with respect to the meaning of the concept itself and with respect to his judgments about the value of particular religious traditions and figures.[1] This multivalence, however, has not been satisfactorily acknowl-

Epigraphs: Nietzsche, AC: 150; AC: 138; EH: 335.

[1] Nietzsche entitles the third chapter of *Beyond Good and Evil*, "*Das Religiose Wesen*."

edged by Nietzsche's commentators: in this chapter, I chart the contours of this multivalence to show that it demands a rethinking of Nietzsche's critique of religion.

Consoling Powers

In *Human, All too Human*, and in *Dawn*, Nietzsche explores the question of religion from two methodological perspectives, following the pattern I isolated in the previous chapter. First, he attacks the speculative origin of religion. For example, he suggests that it originated in the attempt to regulate nature through the mistaken belief that nature is controlled by invisible spirits. For those with a modern, intellectual conscience, he argues, it is no longer possible to believe in supernatural beings or forces. "Thus the daemon of Socrates too was perhaps an ear-infection which, in accordance with the moralizing manner of thinking that dominated him, he only interpreted differently from how it would be interpreted now" (HH: 68). Second, following his protogenealogical claim that "the more insight we possess into an origin, the less significant does it appear" (D: 31), Nietzsche critically examines the value of religion by asking how this speculative, intellectual "error" could exert such a hold on human imagination and life.[2] Nietzsche forges a psychological link between the philosophical and genealogical approaches to religion with the ideas of fear, suffering, and power. He believes that metaphysical, religious errors take hold of the human imagination in situations of fear or suffering, developing as powerful ways of coping with the uncontrollable exigencies of human life. These ideas and practices are more than errors, they constitute a hermeneutic through which one comes to view and experience life and suffering. As Nietzsche writes in the opening of his chapter on religion

One might translate this as "the essence of religion" (Walter Kaufmann's translation turns it into the question, "What is religion?"). Nietzsche identifies this *Wesen* as the *religiose Neurose*—the religious neurosis. Does Nietzsche, in the end, essentialize religion, despite his genealogical method and the numerous meanings that "religion" takes on in his work? And does he connect the essence of religion with the misery of a human neurosis he seeks to overcome? Gilles Deleuze, whose *Nietzsche and Philosophy* has had an enormous impact on poststructuralism and the "new Nietzsche," makes such an argument. Deleuze recognizes quite clearly that Nietzsche claims there are active and affirmative gods and religions. However, he also argues that Nietzsche nonetheless holds that religion is essentially tied to bad conscience, and, from bad conscience, also to *ressentiment* and guilt (1983: 143–44). On this reading, religion is essentially allied to all the "reactive forces" that for Deleuze are at the root of the nihilistic negation of being that Nietzsche's affirmation seeks to overcome. As I argue below, however, it is a mistake to move so quickly from bad conscience to guilt. Moreover, this identification of religion and *ressentiment* does not leave adequate room for religion as "gratitude," which Nietzsche attributes to the Greeks.

[2] For example, his discussion of "metaphysical need" (HH: 62) and the uses of "revelation" (D: 38).

in *Human, All too Human,* when people suffer, they "can dispose of it either by getting rid of its cause or by changing the effect it produces in our sensibilities" (HH: 60). To address its effects on our sensibilities is to interpret suffering, in this case by interpreting life and world religiously (and, Nietzsche adds, artistically and metaphysically).

Thus, Nietzsche raises three basic objections to religion, where religion is understood as the belief in metaphysical entities that determine the fortunes and misfortunes of human life. First, it is an intellectual error to posit metaphysical causes, since, by definition, we can have no evidence of such causes. Second, by positing metaphysical causes of suffering and developing methods of calling to and persuading divine power(s) to address their woes, human beings ignore real, worldly causes. Consequently, suffering is only ameliorated through a "narcotic" effect, not eliminated or healed. Finally, as with any narcotic, religious (and moral) interpretations only grant the alleviation of suffering by intensifying other kinds of suffering. For example, Christianity alleviates meaninglessness and hopelessness by infecting people with the belief in sin and guilt, which only further alienates them from the reality of human life. Ultimately, Nietzsche thinks, religious interpretations of suffering make the human condition worse.[3] "The worst sickness of mankind originated in the way in which they have combated their sicknesses, and what seemed to cure has in the long run produced something worse than that which it was supposed to overcome" (D: 33).

Religion as a hermeneutic of suffering has succeeded, Nietzsche argues, in large part because it has been able to impart to human beings a sense of power in the face of fear and suffering.[4] Even in *Human, All too Human*, and *Dawn*, before Nietzsche began to write of the "will to power," the nature of divine power was crucial for his hermeneutic of religion. Of particular importance here is the distinction between polytheism and monotheism. Nietzsche admired the polytheism of the Greeks. He saw the Greek gods as idealized versions of humans, standing in close relationship to them, "as though two castes lived side by side, a nobler and mightier and one less noble; but both somehow belong together in their origins and are of *one* species" (HH: 65). Although these gods are in one sense metaphysical because they "exist" beyond the physical, they are not metaphysical in the sense that, as values, they oppose and negate the physical world. Such gods develop as an idealizing expression of noble self-affirmation. Moreover, Nietzsche finds in polytheism's affirmation

[3] See, for example, HH: 60, where Nietzsche claims that religion, art, and metaphysical philosophy are interpretations of suffering that serve only as narcotics and cannot address the real problem of suffering.

[4] Nietzsche ascribes the origin of religion to various factors, for example, the struggle with nature (HH: 65) and of fear and need (HH: 62). See also D: 16, 19.

of plurality the roots of later positive developments of humanity. In *The Gay Science*, he writes of polytheism's "wonderful art and gift of creating gods" and considers its affirmation of plurality a great advantage over monotheism. Polytheism was the preliminary form of the "free-spiriting and many-spiriting of man [which cultivated] the strength to create for ourselves our own new eyes" (GS: 191). In other words, polytheism provides a certain kind of model for a philosophy of "free spirits" and "perspectivism." In this affirmation of plurality and difference, polytheism also provides Nietzsche with a model for affirmative love. "What is love but understanding and rejoicing at the fact that another lives, feels and acts in a way different from and opposite to ours. If love is to bridge these antitheses through joy it may not deny or seek to abolish them" (HH: 229–30).

By contrast, in monotheistic visions of absolute power Nietzsche isolates the key to the metaphysical faith in opposite values and its devaluation of the human. The monotheistic notion of divinity, he claims, is based in an absolute, metaphysical gulf between God and human. I have already indicated how, from this theological perspective, when human beings compare themselves with this almighty God, they see themselves as "totally depraved," "crushed and shattered" beneath the weight of divine perfection. The god of monotheism therefore reflects not an idealization of the human, but is a negative reflection of a lack, representing all that we are not but should be. Given this distinction between polytheism and monotheism, then, it is not surprising that as his thinking develops, Nietzsche's most detailed and incisive criticisms of "religion" come more and more to focus on what is for him the most completely developed form of monotheism: "Christianity." This suffering of the soul in sin, instilled through the Christian conception of divine power, horrifies Nietzsche and becomes the target of a bitter polemic. Reaching its peak in his final months of frenzied writing, the target of his polemic against sin, punishment, and responsibility "becomes Christian."[5]

Nietzsche's critical view of Christianity focuses on the concept of sin, which he links to the figure of Paul. For Nietzsche, Paul is the true founder of Christianity as tradition and dogma. (Interestingly, as I discuss below, the intensity of Nietzsche's contempt for Paul is matched by his admiration for Jesus.) Nietzsche's interpretation of Paul is, in key respects, traditionally Protestant, concentrating on Paul's struggle with the Law and the theological genius that was able to "discover a signpost of consolation in [his] own personal distress" (D: 39). But Nietzsche attributes this struggle

[5] Though after *Dawn* Nietzsche's primary target remains Christianity, in the *Genealogy* he places the original revaluation of all values at the feet of the Jews. In the *Antichrist*, Nietzsche also casts Buddhism as a development of nihilistic resignation. Throughout, the Greeks and the "Brahmans" hold a more positive position.

and its success less to Paul's piety than to his yearning for distinction and power. Paul discovers that his guilt over his inevitable sinning can be eliminated by "accepting" the fact that the Law is overcome with the crucifixion of Jesus. Dying with Christ, Paul can die to the Law; and to die to the Law is to die to the flesh.[6] Dying to the world and the flesh, Nietzsche writes, Paul becomes one with Jesus in an "intoxication" of divinity where "all shame, all subordination, all bounds are taken from [the importunity of his soul] and the intractable lust for power reveals itself as an anticipatory reveling in *divine* glories" (D: 42).

Nietzsche's Paul reinterprets the suffering of guilt and sin as signs that one must turn against the world. This does not eliminate one's guilt; in fact, it intensifies it as one begins to see—more and more clearly, the harder one tries to turn away from the world—how deeply one remains enmeshed in it. Rather than relieving guilt, the Pauline strategy is to bring it to a nearly unbearable pitch in the recognition of one's worthlessness—and in preparation for surrendering to the power of grace. On this reading, suffering and worldly misery are signs of future happiness. "[M]an sees in every feeling of indisposition and misfortune a punishment, that is to say, an atonement for guilt and the means of getting free from the evil spell of a real or supposed injustice" (D: 15). The idea of a moral God consoles only by casting suffering as a sign of future bliss, and requiring that it be intensified in order to gain that future state. Suffering itself is not healed, but, at the price of one kind of suffering from suffering—guilt—another—the feelings of helplessness and uncertainty—is ameliorated. Suffering is "healed" only in its transformation into hatred for this world and desire for the next.

Nietzsche's treatment of Paul establishes the basis of his attack on Christianity as an attack on religious monotheism. The monotheist devalues finite human power in an intoxicating, self-deceptive contrast with the absolute power of God. The way to new life is accomplished not simply by cultivating a path of suffering, but by systematically devaluing and renouncing all that is human. Nietzsche will pursue this argument in great depth in the *Genealogy*, where he shows that the power of the ascetic ideal finds a foothold in a decadent, exhausted culture. In such a context, the goal of another life enables decadents to live, it relieves boredom and exhaustion by giving them something to strive for: the rest and peace they want more than anything else.

In *Dawn*, however, Nietzsche develops a different part of his analysis, one that is always presupposed in his later work. Instead of concentrating on the religiosity of followers, Nietzsche analyzes the paradigmatic reli-

[6] As part of his critical insistence on a dualistic interpretation of Christianity, Nietzsche flatly interprets "flesh" as carnality, thereby equating it with nature in general. As I discuss in Chapter 3, many Christian thinkers do not equate "flesh" and body or nature.

gious virtuosos—the saint, the ascetic, and the priest—to show how they thrive on the metaphysical interpretation of power that becomes Christianity. This attention to the religious virtuoso coincides with the development of Nietzsche's ideas about power in the years leading up to the writing of *Zarathustra*. In *Human, All too Human*, Nietzsche seems to be operating with an essentially hedonistic view of human motivation: human beings are motivated by the desire to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. But even there, and more and more in *Dawn*, Nietzsche refers to the "lust for power" as that which drives human beings (D: 16). He argues that suffering is of little consequence because human beings do not strive after happiness or pleasure, but after power. This issue dominates the opening pages of *Dawn*, to the point where Nietzsche appears no longer interested in the intellectual errors at the origin of religion, but in the way religion originates in the lust for power. He continues to stress the need for consolation, but now the promise of a better life is not simply a consolation that allows one to *bear* suffering in the present, but, to the extent that one is able to strive for that future by imposing suffering in the present, one also is able to experience the intoxication of power. Put differently, power itself consoles (D: 15, 19). And it does so in two ways: through "madness" and "voluntary suffering," both of which are means to power perfected in the saint.

The Saint

Following Schopenhauer, the saint is for Nietzsche the paradigm of the religious virtuoso or genius: as in Schopenhauer, the saint is both mystic and ascetic. Nietzsche argues that ecstatic states and ascetic practices enable certain people to exercise great power. In the "madness" of ecstasy, one appears to lose oneself in the immediate and to experience the overwhelming power of the "divine," in a way that rids one, at least temporarily, of fear and anxiety. "By devoting yourself with enthusiasm and making a sacrifice of yourselves you enjoy the ecstatic thought of henceforth being at one with the powerful being . . . to whom you dedicate yourself" (D: 134). Moreover, through such experience, the metaphysical interpretation of the cosmos is confirmed. One can see that an extraordinary power exists, a power unlike anything one can produce oneself and through which one feels united with all. One finds, in the ecstatic state, the transcendent goal of human life, the true state of the human soul, in comparison with which the life of finitude and change stands condemned (D: 27, 33). The self-deception of this stance is at the root of Nietzsche's critique of mysticism.

This power promises those who have ecstatic experiences, as well as those who observe them, that it is possible for human beings to possess,

in being possessed, divine powers and "pure spirit." Ecstasy, in this case, literally is the loss of oneself, but it is a loss repaid with a gain. The ecstatic, by means of this possession, is able to separate him- or herself from the domination of custom and law that binds the community together, for the feeling of power serves as a divine warrant for the rejection of the communal norm; it becomes the guarantee that the voice urging one to depart from custom is not the voice of a mere human, but the voice of a god. The display of ecstasy or madness also can convince the rest of the community of the presence of divine power, concentrating that power in the saint. Nietzsche invokes the concept of "spectacle" and "performance" to explain the cultural power of ecstasy: madness becomes a dramatic struggle between the divine and the human.

In addition to madness, sometimes in the context of madness, "cruelty" plays a crucial role in the drama of power because, as Nietzsche puts it, "to practice cruelty is to enjoy the highest gratification of the feeling of power" (D: 16). In the spectacle of cruelty, human beings find power in forgetting the suffering of their own lives. They also imagine that the gods enjoy cruelty, so it becomes necessary to have in the community people who suffer. The ascetic is originally so fascinating for Nietzsche because religious leaders can stand out from and lead the community if they take upon themselves a certain amount of "voluntary suffering" in order to appease the gods (D: 17). Because most people cannot comprehend how others can impose suffering upon themselves, they assume that those who can, those who overcome the power of natural human desire and display their self-denial in excess and ecstasy, are empowered with divinity. Self-imposed suffering produces a feeling of power in the ascetic as well—as with Paul, there is a unique feeling of power that comes with absolute submission, submission to the point of inflicting suffering upon oneself. In fact, Nietzsche argues, "happiness, conceived of as the liveliest feeling of power, has perhaps been nowhere greater on earth than in the souls of superstitious ascetics" (D: 68).

In a fundamental sense, the power of the ascetic is based in an illusion. As "this riddle of self-conquest and final renunciation" (BG: 65), the ascetic certainly is a powerful human being. But Nietzsche, unlike Schopenhauer, does not believe that any "final renunciation" or absolute self-transcendence is possible. "The truth of the matter is that you only seem to sacrifice yourselves: in reality you transform yourselves in thought into gods and enjoy yourselves as such" (D: 139). Nietzsche acknowledges the feeling of the divine as a feeling of power, but points out that the idea of "self-sacrifice" is self-deceptive. Without dismissing the value of ecstasy or renunciation and without dismissing the usefulness of the concept of the divine, Nietzsche contends that as long as ecstasy and renunciation are interpreted as indications of metaphysical power, they hide the fact

that fundamentally they are ways of increasing power that is "human, all too human." The distinction between finite human power and absolute divine power is a false one. The religious illusion that propagates the power of the ecstatic/ascetic saint helps also to propagate destructive ideas about guilt, responsibility, and the corruption of the "natural" human condition.

But the saint remains for Nietzsche an ambiguous figure. Even after turning away from Schopenhauer, Nietzsche continues to be fascinated with the idea of self-denial. This leads him to rethink the vague psychological hedonism that marks *Human, All too Human*, in favor of a more complex understanding of the psychology of power. Any simple understanding of pleasure and pain is inadequate for explaining the "happiness" that can result from the denial (which for Nietzsche is, in fact, always the deferral) of pleasure, the embrace of surrender or weakness (D: 36), and, most important, the striving for freedom. Although Nietzsche finds that ecstatics and ascetics deceive themselves as to the source of their power, he recognizes that their freedom, their departure from the stupid pleasures and consolations of the herd, could be purchased only at the price of great pain. "Every smallest step in the field of free thought, of a life shaped personally, has always had to be fought for with spiritual and bodily tortures . . . change of any kind has needed its innumerable martyrs" (D: 17). Madness and suffering, suffering in madness, are means by which those chosen by the gods are identified to stand apart, with the power of distinction, from the community. In this respect, the saint is a force of alterity within the human and a precursor to Nietzsche's free spirit. In his own striving for freedom of thought, genuine philosophy, and individuality, Nietzsche encounters his own pain and power and inquires whether he might not find some direction along this path from the saint.

The Priest

The saint is the central religious figure of Nietzsche's early work, but after *Dawn* the figure of the priest begins to play an equal, if not more important, role.[7] The emergence of the priest in Nietzsche's texts is tied to the increasing vehemence of his attacks on Christianity, as well as the growing subtlety of his conception of the workings of power in individual and society. With respect to the saint, Nietzsche argues that religion is a means by which individuals cultivate and interpret extraordinary experi-

[7] There is no final way to demarcate the priest from the ascetic or the ecstatic saint, for a priest could be a saint and vice versa. One might say that "priest" for Nietzsche is a socioreligious category and has to do primarily with religion as institution, while "saint" is primarily a spiritual category.

ences and disciplines of power through which they distinguish themselves from the herd. But already in the analysis of the saint, Nietzsche saw how such power could be used not just to tear the individual away from the constraints of the community, but also to exercise power over the community. The saint, in other words, can be a force for alterity but also a force for new community and conformity. Nietzsche articulates this possibility in his discussions of the priest, complicating the figure of the saint by showing how one class of people exerts social power by investing itself with the aura of the divine, and also, in the process, by infecting others with the self-doubt and self-hatred of guilt and sin. These analyses are not unrelated: as the Paul of *Dawn* found an intoxicating sense of the divine in the depths of sin, the priest of the later work transforms impotence—the inability to express oneself in "deeds"—into a "spiritual" strength. But Nietzsche's later analysis is distinguished by the addition of the concept of *ressentiment*, a "most spiritual and poisonous kind of hatred" (GM: 33). With this development, the later Nietzsche, particularly in the *Genealogy*, exposes the means by which priestly power in the west has accomplished a "revaluation of values."

Nietzsche describes *ressentiment* as the hatred of "all that represents the *ascending* movement of life, well-constitutedness, power, beauty, self-affirmation on earth." He goes on to say that, as priestly hatred of such affirmation, *ressentiment* "becomes genius" and

> invent[s] *another* world from which that *life–affirmation* would appear evil, reprehensible as such. . . . [For the] *priestly* kind, *decadence* is only a *means*: this kind of man has a life-interest in making mankind *sick* and inverting the concepts "good" and "evil," "true" and "false," in a morally dangerous and world-calumnating sense. (AC: 144–45)

Reflecting on this hatred and on the sociological conflict between masters and slaves (or the noble and the base) leads Nietzsche to develop his most complex genealogical account of the origin of priestly religion—of which Christianity is the logical culmination. In the second essay of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche distinguishes a fundamental psychological self-alienation he calls "bad conscience" from the idea of guilt before God. Bad conscience has its origin in the "internalization" of aggressive impulses required for the preservation of social structures. Guilt has a dual origin, first, in economic relationships of indebtedness, and, second, in the concept of "god" that grows out of the gradual intensification of the feeling of debt and fear toward ancestors. Here is where the priest steps in, finding in the concept of "god" a perfect tool for bringing the self-hatred of the bad conscience to its highest pitch. The priest transforms the feeling of debt before ancestors/gods into an unredeemable guilt before God.

> This man of the bad conscience has seized upon the presupposition of religion so as to drive his self-torture to its most gruesome pitch of severity and rigor. Guilt before God: this thought becomes an instrument of torture to him. He apprehends in "God" the ultimate antithesis of his own ineluctable animal instincts; he reinterprets these animal instincts themselves as a form of guilt before God . . . he stretches himself upon the contradiction "God" and "Devil." (GM: 92)

Nietzsche is concerned here not with the power of the free spirit struggling against the morality of mores, but with a social revolution, an uprising of the "weak," led by the priest, who wield the weapon of the morality of good and evil. This distinction between good and evil, and, implicit in that distinction, the concepts of individual responsibility and guilt, corrupts the spontaneous self-affirmation of the nobles and makes self-denial an ideal. Through this ascetic ideal, Nietzsche argues, the priest has exerted great power in Western civilization and has given great numbers of exhausted, decadent people a reason to live, thus playing a significant role in the preservation of the human species.[8] Denying human power, invoking divine power, the priest institutes the mastery of the will to power of the weakest.

Religion and the Free Spirit

Religion in Nietzsche I: Christianity and Totality

In the period between *Human, All too Human*, and the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche shifts emphasis from the saint to the priest. Correlatively, he comes to focus more and more on the development of monotheism in the Jewish and Christian traditions, and on the moral and social consequences of this trajectory. In the process, his critique of "religion" becomes, strictly speaking, a critique of monotheism, and particularly of Christianity. These trajectories are crucial parts of the more general movement of Nietzsche's thought, described in the previous chapter, toward a critique of Western nihilism. The focus on Christianity does not mean that there are not resources in both Nietzsche's early and late writing for a comprehensive critique of religion, or that it is impossible to define religion in such a way as to make Nietzsche's mature thought deeply opposed to "it." However, in his mature work Nietzsche's main problem is the nihilistic religio-moral revaluation of the "priest" who uses the monothe-

[8] Already, in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche argues that every individual—even the most apparently harmful individual—inevitably serves the "preservation" of the human race. His main point concerns an "instinct," that is, the instinct to preserve the human race, which Nietzsche claims is the "essence of our species, our herd" (GS: 73).

istic God of Christianity and Judaism to form a conception of the human emptied of any sense of self-worth. The priest relies on the idea of human depravity as strategy for worldly power. In this way, Christianity has "carried" Western nihilism for two millennia.

On these points, it is instructive to compare Nietzsche's thought to that of some of the other "masters of suspicion" of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, as well as Feuerbach, all offer methods of interpreting religion beyond the ostensive meaning of religious ideas, symbols, and practices. As critics of religion, they do not simply dismiss religion as superstition or error, they "read" religion: its signs have meanings and logics, or, alternatively, its signs are symptoms; in either case, religion can be read in a way that leads us to a greater understanding of the ills and the possibilities it holds for human life.

Of these thinkers, Feuerbach and Nietzsche developed the most genuinely critical readings of religion.[9] Neither simply rejects religion, like some of their Enlightenment predecessors, as simply a mistake; each explores the complex roles, both constructive and destructive, that religion has played in human culture. Their thought exhibits interesting parallels with respect to the concepts of projection and alienation, and to the place of Christianity in a developmental scheme of religions. In these respects, Hegel and the historicizing temper of the nineteenth century stand in back of both of them. Feuerbach argues that the idea of god originates when human beings "project" their species consciousness, creating belief in a separate, transcendent reality. This projection, more literally, this "objectification" (*Vergegenstandlichung*) gradually results in the alienation of humanity from its powers and possibilities as humanity weakens itself to the same degree that the projected god becomes more and more perfect. Obviously, there is some similarity here to Nietzsche's claims about religion and power, for he too, as I have argued above, claims that belief in a perfect, all powerful God drains human beings of their ability to affirm their own power.[10] To borrow the term *alienation* to describe the effects of metaphysical and moral religion in Nietzsche is to acknowledge the point that for him, as for Feuerbach, human beings can lose themselves through belief in God.

[9] Ultimately Feuerbach is more concerned than Nietzsche with the question "What is religion?" Here, I confine my remarks to the Feuerbach of *The Essence of Christianity*. For the definitive treatment of Feuerbach on religion, see Harvey 1995. Wagner, at least before his conversion to Christianity, was strongly influenced by Feuerbach and encouraged Nietzsche to read him. Surprisingly, Nietzsche mentions Feuerbach fewer than ten times in his notes, though, according to one of contemporaries, Nietzsche was discussing Feuerbach with friends and acquaintances in the period leading up to *Zarathustra* (see Gilman 1987: 114).

[10] "He ejects from himself [*wirft . . . aus sich heraus*] all his denial of himself, of his nature, naturalness, and actuality, in the form of an affirmation, as something existent, corporeal, real, as God, as the holiness of God, as God the Judge, as God the Hangman" (GM: 92).

In distinction from Feuerbach, however, Nietzsche claims that Christians do not project their possibilities and perfections into God, but rather their impossibilities. In other words, God becomes a perfect omnipotence that humans could never achieve. This impossible perfection makes their own finite power seem worthless.[11] Where for Feuerbach the concept of God *is* human possibility, for Nietzsche the concept destroys genuine possibility. For Feuerbach, therefore, the danger of alienation lies in the loss of that which human beings have projected into God; that which has been alienated must be recovered. The Hegelian Feuerbach sees a universal process of projection, alienation, and reconciliation as the history of the development of human self-consciousness. Like Hegel, he sees the history of religion as involving a necessary alienation by which human destiny is achieved. History, coming to its culmination in modern self-consciousness, testifies to the redemption of alienation in this self-consciousness: alienation and religion have been the means by which human beings have come to know and become themselves. For Nietzsche, by contrast, God becomes a means to self-torture. The function of alienation consists in the priestly preservation of the weak. The genealogical Nietzsche sees the concept of god being used in a particular way in a particular historical trajectory by which human beings alienate themselves in the worship of God. Although Nietzsche does think that it has brought some benefits to human culture, this historical trajectory does not represent the necessary movement of spirit or human self-consciousness.

Despite this difference, Nietzsche, like Hegel and Feuerbach, does think that we can understand the significance of the history of alienation only in a reading of Christianity, one that attends especially to the correlation between Christ's crucifixion and the atheism of the present. In each of these thinkers, the concept of alienation is worked out in the logic of the concept of the monotheistic God, which reaches its culmination in the Christian narrative of the death of God in the crucifixion of Christ. The crucifixion is the self-sacrifice of God. For Hegel, and especially for Feuerbach, this self-sacrifice is an act of love by which God gives autonomy to human beings, an autonomy realized, paradoxically, in the atheism of the nineteenth century. For Nietzsche, matters are more complicated and ambiguous. He argues that the crucifixion marks the culmination of religious self-hatred insofar as it reflects the recognition that the debt to God could never be repaid by human beings, that only God could pay the

[11] It must be kept in mind that Nietzsche's criticism only goes for monotheism. In fact, it seems that the Feuerbachian idea of "objectification" might be more properly applied to Nietzsche's claims about polytheism. For Nietzsche, monotheists project their fears and their lack into God; polytheists project their ideals, that is, their strengths. This is objectification in a strict sense, that is, without the detrimental, alienating effects that Feuerbach describes.

wages of sin. In this respect, the crucifixion points to the ultimate powerlessness of human beings. Moreover, the death of God in modernity does not automatically lead to autonomy, for, as I have discussed, atheism itself, for Nietzsche, can be a form of religious nihilism. Yet, Nietzsche does recognize in himself, and thus in a certain trajectory of modern Western thought, a turning point in the development of human self-consciousness. He finds in himself the kernel of the ascetic ideal—the will to truth—and, in doing so, becomes aware of himself as a point in the history of nihilism, an awareness that holds some promise for the overcoming of the denial of the world. There is, then, as in Feuerbach and Hegel, the promise of "redemption" in the death of God (TI: 64). God's overcoming of God—the highest value devaluing itself—is the high point of nihilism.

Christianity, in short, is ultimately more radically self-effacing for Nietzsche than it is for either Hegel or Feuerbach. Hegelian logic, to which at least the early Feuerbach is still indebted, demands that the essence of Christian truth and love be fully realized in the death of God. Feuerbach, for example, argues that God's sacrifice for love shows us that it is more important to love one another than to love God: love conquers faith. More generally, Christianity essentially realizes its morality in its own self-dissolution, or kenosis. Thus both Hegel and Feuerbach adhere to the modern tendency to find the positive content of religion in morality, content that can be purified of tradition and dogma by philosophical reason. This idea is of a piece with their interpretation of the history of humanity as a history of an alienation ultimately reconciled. And to the extent that they propose an ultimate reconciliation, their visions are closed, totalizing. For both, and for Marx as well, this reconciliation is marked by the "end" of religion, where the "end" of religion is religion's goal, accomplished in Christianity's self-overcoming.

By contrast, Nietzsche claims that Christian love is based in self-hatred and that the overcoming of belief in God (which also is the overcoming of the will to truth) is not simply a demythologization but also demoralization. In other words, for Nietzsche, the completion of the devaluation of the highest values must involve a revaluation. The teleological vision of universal love and self-consciousness is, for Nietzsche, mere romanticism, more nihilism; he urges revaluation rather than reconciliation. He claims that human beings can never be reconciled to themselves if they will continue to grow, if they are going to be able to affirm life. Reconciliation, the end of all alienation, means the end of striving and struggle, which, for Nietzsche, means the end of power, growth, life. Thus, he does not envision the final overcoming of bad conscience or asceticism, does not reject self-denial or self-imposed suffering. On the contrary, he values these as means to power, understood as the means to spiritualization, the creating of "distance" within the soul. Affirmation for Nietzsche thus is not a kind of reconciliation of the human being with him- or herself, an

overcoming of self-hatred, the struggle of the self with itself, or suffering. Affirmation does overcome the alienation of believing oneself to be sinful, but Nietzsche's affirmation does not overcome a certain distance within the self, a self-aversion that keeps the self constantly striving.

In this respect, Nietzsche is closer to Freud, than to Hegel, Feuerbach, or Marx, for both Nietzsche and Freud reject a vision of a human consciousness and human community at peace with itself. But Nietzsche also resists the kind of resignation Freud exemplifies, finding self-aversion constitutive of joy and envisioning a "redemption of the earth" in a joyous, exuberant play of body and mind. One question, then, is how Nietzsche finds his way between resignation and reconciliation, how his thinking exemplifies Zarathustra's hope for a will that can "will something higher than any reconciliation" (Z: 141).

Religion in Nietzsche II: Affirming Alterity, Freeing the Spirit

A more general question needs to be addressed first. In one sense, at least, Nietzsche's rejection of Christianity, and of moral-metaphysical religion generally, is more complete than that of Feuerbach or Marx, because Nietzsche finds that there is no real promise in the Christian promise—only nihilism and decadence. But should we equate Nietzsche's polemic against Christianity with a polemic against religion in general? Much of what Nietzsche writes makes such an identification seem unproblematic; and it cannot be denied that in numerous places he claims that the answer to the nihilistic crisis of the modern West lies beyond religious belief and practice. Still, the issue can be contested on two grounds. First, even though Nietzsche does make some apparently sweeping rejections of "religion," he is not consistent on this point, as his comments on polytheism show. Second, even to the extent that Nietzsche does reject "religion," there is no prima facie reason that one should simply accept his claims about what does or does not count as "religion." If Nietzsche never develops a coherent or systematic theory, nor offers a comprehensive critique of "religion" in general, then even if one wants to argue that on his own terms Nietzsche does reject religion, one might want to question those terms. It may be that there are elements of his thought and his practice of philosophy that one might want to call religious, or, at least, that can be more fully comprehended when one attends to the way they are positively informed by religious traditions and practices. It becomes necessary, therefore, to elaborate Nietzsche's hints of a different, affirmative conception of religion by relating them to other aspects of his thought, and in light of a critical reading of his treatment of both religion and Christianity.

It is possible to distinguish at least three uses of "religion" in Nietzsche's texts. The dominant one is critical, and refers to priestly, monotheistic religion as a social force—most importantly, Christianity.

But alongside this conception are two others—polytheistic religion and saintliness—each of which reflects the value Nietzsche places on difference and affirmation. Neither conception is necessarily canceled out or rendered inconsequential by Nietzsche's attack on Christianity. On the contrary, Nietzsche considers both to be instrumental for understanding his "free spirit."

Nietzsche expresses a consistent admiration for pagan religion and polytheism. Though his admiration is in most respects muted compared with his condemnation of Christianity, his late invocations of Dionysus occupy a crucial place in his thought. As I have remarked, for Nietzsche polytheism's belief in a multiplicity of gods is an idealizing expression of gratitude for human life and for the differences that constitute it. Nietzsche invokes paganism and polytheism at crucial points in his work, thus qualifying his tendency to offer blanket condemnations of "religion" or the concepts of "divinity" or "god." For instance, at the point in the *Genealogy* where his attack on the Christian concept of guilt nears its rhetorical peak, Nietzsche pauses to reflect on "nobler uses" of the conceptions of gods in Greek religion (GM: 93).[12] Despite some of his own claims to the contrary, the distinction between monotheism and polytheism complicates the relation of religion and metaphysics in Nietzsche's writing. For it makes it impossible to say that Nietzsche simply defines religion in terms of metaphysics in the full, nihilistic sense. Even as he was writing *The Antichrist*, his notes reflect another attitude, one in which he could reflect on the possibility of a "yes-saying religion" and exclaim "and how many new gods are still possible!"[13]

In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes of polytheism as the "preliminary form" of free spiritedness: "The wonderful art and gift of creating gods—polytheism—was the medium through which this impulse [to individualism] could discharge, purify, perfect and ennoble itself. . . . In polytheism the free-spiriting and many-spiriting of man attained its first preliminary form" (GS: 191–92). *Beyond Good and Evil* allows a more thorough comparison between such free spiritedness and the monomania of Christianity, for Nietzsche devotes the second chapter to the "free spirit" and the third to the "Religious Essence," especially as exemplified in Christianity. The chapter on spirit concentrates on the necessity of error for life, the masks and solitudes of the free spirit, and the philosopher as "attempter" who breaks with the herd's previous valuations and experiments with values and new ways of life. The "spirit," in this context, is defined as a capacity for "invention and simulation" (BG: 54), which enables the free spirit to cultivate the difference that marks his own life

[12] See also HH: 65 to 66; D: 129; BG: 49, 64; AC: 144.

[13] See SW 13; in the same volume of notes Nietzsche writes: "We believe in the Olympians, not in the "Crucified" (487).

and to become a force for difference in the culture. By contrast, in the next chapter the "Christian faith" is seen as the "sacrifice of all freedom, all pride, all self-confidence of the spirit" (BG: 60). As such, religion is "a bond that unites rulers and subjects and betrays and delivers the consciences of the latter, that which is most concealed and intimate and would like to elude obedience, to the former" (BG: 72–73). Where free spirits lead a life of cultivating and creating beauty out of difference—that which is "most concealed and intimate" about themselves—the *homines religosi* preach a life of conformity through self-denial.

As his polemic against Christianity grew in volume and rancor, particularly in his final year of writing, Nietzsche came more and more to oppose Christianity with the figure of Dionysus. In what turned out to be his final book, *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche ends with the formula, "Dionysus versus the Crucified." This contrast is fleshed out in a note from the spring of 1888. There, Nietzsche compares the deaths and resurrections of Christ and Dionysus. The "Crucified" symbolizes the hope for final redemption from the human condition, the romantic wish for a life without suffering, resurrection into a *new* life. Dionysus, on the other hand, affirms suffering, because he is born back into *this* life. "One will see that the problem is that of the meaning of suffering: whether a Christian meaning or a tragic meaning. In the former case, it is supposed to be the path to holy existence; in the latter case, being is counted as *holy enough* to justify even a monstrous amount of suffering" (SW 13: 265–67). In both *Twilight of the Idols* and *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche ties this concept of Dionysus to human creativity and the creative urge of life itself, suggesting a nonmonotheistic, immanent conception of divinity.

"The stories of saints are the most ambiguous literature in existence" (AC: 150). With this observation, Nietzsche begins his most detailed and passionate treatment of the figure of Jesus and the concept of free spirit. In doing so, he articulates with some precision another aspect of his multivalent view of religion: the saint as a force of alterity and blessedness. Nietzsche's saint, though an ambiguous figure, is potentially a force for difference and affirmation because the saint finds the power to separate him- or herself from the herd, to affirm a different set of values, and to find a liberating blessedness in this life.

In the Gospels one finds Jesus as both preacher of the Sermon on the Mount and as fierce opponent of the Jews. How does one interpret such an ambiguous text to understand who Jesus really was? Nietzsche dismisses the historical-critical search for the "historical Jesus" as incapable of comprehending such ambiguity, arguing instead in favor of a "psychological" examination of the issue. And such, Nietzsche claims, can be conducted only by "we emancipated spirits" who possess the requisite insight and discipline to distinguish "Jesus" the man from "Christ" of the

tradition. For my purposes, what is most significant about this claim is that Nietzsche thereby asserts a certain identity between himself and Jesus. Jesus is himself a kind of free spirit: "[H]e cares nothing for what is fixed: the word *killeth*, everything fixed *killeth*. . . . He speaks only of the inmost thing: 'life' or 'truth' of 'light' is his expression for the inmost thing—everything else, the whole of reality, the whole of nature, language itself possesses for him merely the value of a sign, a metaphor" (AC: 154).[14]

Nietzsche can be one of the first in almost two thousand years to really understand Jesus because, as free spirit himself, he also finds life in the movement of metaphor and death in the fixed conformity that so easily befalls community and language. Nietzsche, too, is an "evangel" (the label he thinks best fits Jesus) of affirmation, seeking to bring the "glad tidings" (EH: 327) of a spiritual perspective that "transfigures" all of reality: as Karl Jaspers put it, "The problem of the presence of eternity, of experiencing bliss, which Jesus solved by his way of life, is Nietzsche's own problem" (1961: 89).

In light of his vehement criticisms of Christianity, and of the "Christ" figure produced by the Christian tradition, Nietzsche's identification with Jesus, as only a few commentators have noted, is remarkable.[15] This is not to say that Nietzsche's portrait of Jesus is wholly positive. Nietzsche attributes to Jesus as "redeemer" an "instinctive hatred of reality" that forces him to take refuge in an unchangeable, impervious inner reality. He also sees Jesus as childlike, in fact more "idiot" than "hero." And Jesus is a "decadent." But the apparent harshness of such characterizations must be qualified with care. It is necessary, for one, to distinguish the physiological aversion to reality Nietzsche attributes to Jesus from the *ressentiment* of his followers. That is, the love that Jesus proclaims does not emerge from the subterranean twistings of hatred and envy that Nietzsche so brilliantly explores in the *Genealogy*. Jesus loves with a childlike innocence. This makes him, in Nietzsche's eyes, an idiot in the sense of Dostoevsky's Prince Myshkin—"sick" and "childish" but also "sublime." And one must keep in mind that for Nietzsche, decadence is always equivocal: indicative of a disruption and decline of the strength of the instincts, but also the prerequisite condition for change, growth, and enhancement.

There are other important differences between Nietzsche's Jesus and Nietzsche's philosophical free spirit. As he does with Jesus, Nietzsche characterizes the affirming spirit in terms of a kind of childlike play; it is a child who can proclaim the "sacred Yes" (Z: 139) and who embodies

[14] It is instructive to compare Nietzsche's treatment of Jesus in these pages with Emerson's in his "Address" to students from Harvard Divinity School, which Nietzsche had read (Emerson 1982: 114 ff.).

[15] See Jaspers 1961; Makarushka 1994; Stang 1997.

the "great health" (GS: 347). But, as he makes clear in *Zarathustra*, one must *become* a child, one must first bear the burdens of the camel and learn to say "No" like the lion (Z: 26). Nietzsche's affirmer has passed through the fires of suspicion and nihilism; Nietzsche's Jesus, by contrast, has not. He is a child by nature, he has never matured. This difference decisively marks their respective affirmations. For Nietzsche, Jesus is incapable of resisting, and he is incapable of experiencing enmity and the sense of distance between people; his affirmation is therefore unable to discriminate between types of people or kinds of lives. As Nietzsche writes in his notes, for Jesus "everything is good" (WP: 128). Jesus's spirit is in this respect stunted, without the intellectual perspicacity or joy in struggle characteristic of the Nietzschean spirit. This is not the case for the Nietzschean affirmer. One way to put the difference is that the Nietzschean affirmer is "noble," that is, is an affirmer of "distance" between things and people, and he places different values on things. The affirmation of Jesus falls back into a kind of totalizing way of thought; Nietzsche's noble affirmation affirms differences that the former cannot acknowledge.

Still, Nietzsche's identification with Jesus remains significant, particularly as it relates to the question of "religion." Note that it is not symbols such as "God" or "Kingdom of God" that Nietzsche finds problematic or necessarily life-denying in Jesus. For Jesus, this symbolism is precisely an expression of the freedom of spirit; that is, of the "idealizing" or "transfiguring" capacity Nietzsche finds so wonderful in human beings. What is significant about Jesus for Nietzsche is not the metaphysical reality of Father, Son, and Kingdom of Heaven, but this "condition of the heart" (AC: 157). This condition makes blessedness possible here and now by the *practice* of a divine life. What Nietzsche finds so compelling in Jesus is that "he knows that it is through the *practice* of one's life that one feels 'divine,' 'blessed,' 'evangelic' at all times a 'child of god.' It is *not* 'penance,' *not* 'prayer for forgiveness' which leads to God: *evangelic practice alone* leads to God, it *is* God!" (AC: 156). Jesus shares his blessedness; as evangel he teaches that "blessedness is not promised, it is not tied to any conditions: it is the *only* reality, the rest is signs for speaking of it," and that the Kingdom of God is within (AC: 155). Paul and the other disciples of Jesus were unable, psychologically, to comprehend this intimacy of the divine. Consequently, for them, Jesus became the Christ and blessedness become a function of a metaphysical God's promise for the future. The key to this Christ was not the life Jesus practiced, but the promise contained in his death. The living spirit of Jesus' symbolism became petrified into dogma and institution, to which one must adhere through "faith"; the Jesus who, for Nietzsche, is the "holy anarchist" and "stands outside all religion" (AC: 155) becomes the dogmatic Christ of the Christian religion. As free spirit, however, Jesus practices a life of

blessedness—without sin, without *ressentiment*—and understands all reality as a symbol of this blessedness.

Where the saint and the polytheist are, for Nietzsche, forces of alterity, the priest represents the resentful drive for totality. Like the saint (even as a saint) the priest is able to find the power to distinguish himself from the herd; unlike the saint, however, the priest does not affirm this difference in itself, but seeks to master the herd, strengthening the ties that bind the herd together, in order to wage war against the nobles.[16] Using this contrast between the saint and the priest, it is possible to trace two trajectories of "religion" in Nietzsche's thought. The first, the priestly line, has its contemporary manifestation in Christianity and the scientific spirit. The second, the saintly line (along with polytheism's affirmation of multiplicity) has produced something that is not obviously religious, the philosophical free spirit.[17] The saint, in other words, is the figure in whom the distinction I made in the introduction between the "religious" and the "spiritual" is particularly relevant. Here is where we see that, for Nietzsche, "religion" designates discourses and institutions of authority and conformity, valuing totality and unity and structured around a strict correlation between the unity, perfection, and omnipotence of a monotheistic god, the peace and harmony of the social body, and the unity and rationality of the subject. "Spirit," on the other hand, specifically, the "free spirit," is based in the valuation of difference, and is manifested precisely in spiritual exercises in which the totalizations of society and self are resisted, where spirit disrupts totality to reinvigorate and empower human life by opening the self to the undomesticated power of life.[18]

Transfiguring Religion, Contesting Spirit

I argued in the introduction that although the distinction between the spiritual and the religious has its uses, it depends on a problematic view of religion. This problem, I think, is reflected in Nietzsche's provocative,

[16] In a similar vein, both Hegel and Feuerbach see the trajectory of Christianity as one in which humanity finds the possibility of unification and reintegration through demystification and reason. Nietzsche's reading of Christianity, however, both exposes the lie of such reconciliation, and challenges the ideal of reconciliation itself by positing difference and struggle as necessary for human life.

[17] For one account, see GM: 115.

[18] This is an extremely complex distinction and marks a place of deep ambiguity in Nietzsche's writing. For instance, in *The Antichrist* Nietzsche describes the free spirit as one who wages war on "holy lies" (158), but, later in the book, he seems to affirm the holy lie (185), if it is told for the sake of the right "ends." On the one hand, Nietzsche develops this concept of free spirit as a force of difference; on the other, those who are free spirits, he

but ultimately absurd, claim that Jesus "stands outside all religion." On the contrary, even if we agree with Nietzsche's view of the free spiritedness of Jesus, the fact remains that the metaphors Jesus employs and the religious structures he both honors and resists are made possible only in the context of a religious tradition. Moreover, Jesus, or any "saint," only can realize free spiritedness by embodying and inspiriting both the structuring and the liberating potentials of a religious tradition or traditions—even if it means realizing the potential in revolutionizing or overcoming a particular tradition.

The same is true for Nietzsche, for his affirmative self takes shape in a "transfiguration" or "spiritualization" of the religious self. I take the term *transfiguration* from Nietzsche's description of philosophy as a practice of creative spiritualization: "A philosopher who has traversed many kinds of health, and keeps traversing them, has passed through an equal number of philosophies; he simply *cannot* keep from transposing [*umzusetzen*] his states every time into the most spiritual form and distance: this art of transfiguration [*Transfiguration*] *is* philosophy" (GS: 35).

With the idea of "transfiguration," Nietzsche's conceptions of art, philosophy, and religion converge to determine his task as a thinker. On the one hand, transfiguration is a philosophical practice in the sense that it is an attempt to articulate the body in language, to bring the truth of life to thought. On the other hand transfiguration is an art, more specifically a divine art, in the sense that in the course of bringing the body to thought, the body (and life and world) shines forth in idealized, perfected form.

Nietzsche describes this art of philosophy in terms of the "transposition" and "transfiguration" of body into spirit. His choice of these words is significant. As a musician and music lover, Nietzsche would have been attuned to the technical sense of *transposition* as the reiteration of a piece of music in a higher or lower key. When a piece of music is transposed, it both changes and remains the same, not through a kind of evolution or growth into a mature state, not through a purifying of something into its essence, but rather in a kind of translation that allows the same melody to be heard in a different way, or played on a different instrument, producing some of the same impressions or feelings, but new ones as well. Different keys are more or less able to convey different moods: music played in minor keys, for instance, is generally sadder or more haunting than music in major keys. Ḥayden's choice of C major as the key that ushers in God's light in *Die Schopfung* is far from arbitrary. If we think of transposition, then, in terms of the connections between philosophy, health, body, and

envisions, will also be the rulers of the future, those, who for the sake of the order of rank may use the holy lie, may impose a total culture on others. A similar tension can be found in *Beyond Good and Evil* between Chapter Two's discussion of the free spirit and Chapter Three's treatment of the uses to which religion may be put to create culture.

spirit that Nietzsche utilizes in this passage, it suggests that philosophy's spiritualization is not an overcoming or purifying of body by spirit, but body in a different key. It also suggests that the body is not the "ground" of spirit, but that these are modulations of one another. As transposition, Nietzsche's philosophy expresses in its method and form a reconceptualization of the relation between body and spirit.

The character of this transposition is made more precise through the term *transfiguration*. As the scion of generations of Lutheran pastors, Nietzsche would have been aware of the episode of "The Transfiguration" in the New Testament. There, Jesus ascends a mountain, talks with Moses and Elijah, and is "transfigured" so that "his face shone like the sun and his garments became white as light."[19] Theologically, this epiphany echoes the baptism of Jesus and foreshadows both the Passion and Parousia. In German, this episode is generally referred to as *die Verklarung*. Beyond its specifically Christian use, *Verklarung* means "glorification," and as a verb (*verklaren*), it means to rise above the earthly or to appear in clear light. This word is commonly associated with religious phenomena, but Nietzsche used it most often in the context of his discussions of art. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, for instance, he writes of the "*Verklarungschein* of art" (BT: 143). Kaufmann translates this as "transfiguring illusion," a concept that many commentators treat as central in their discussion of Nietzsche's aesthetics.[20] But, as Kaufmann points out in a footnote, "*Verklarungschein*" might also be translated as "transfiguring halo" (BT: 143, n. 2). And to support the idea that we should attune ourselves to such religious resonances in Nietzsche's writing, it is the case that Nietzsche uses the term *Verklarung* in his discussion of Jesus in *The Antichrist*. As I noted, the blessedness that Jesus practices is a "transfiguration of all things."

Because Nietzsche had used the word *Verklarung* frequently in the past, and would continue to do so, it is remarkable that in defining philosophy in the preface to *The Gay Science* he uses *Transfiguration,* the Latin cognate (from *transfiguratio*), instead of *Verklarung*. This is a word that is used rarely in German and then *only* to refer to the transfiguration of Christ.[21] What this suggests is that in this brief definition of philosophy,

[19] Gospel of Matthew 17:1–8, as translated in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Revised Standard Version. The episode also appears in Mark and Luke.

[20] See Schacht 1983: 476 f.

[21] *Transfiguration* does not even appear in many German dictionaries, including the Grimm edition of 1935. In D. Sanders's *Worterbuch der Deutschen Sprache* (Leipzig: Otto Wigand, 1876), it is defined simply as "the *Verklarung* of Christ or a painting of it." In a contemporary dictionary, it is defined, first, as "the *Verklarung* of Christ and the change in his form [*Gestalt*] into that of a heavenly being," and, second, as "a representation of the Transfiguration." (Duden: *Deutsches Universalworterbuch* [Mannheim: Dudenverlag,

Nietzsche is telling us something crucial not only about the way he understands philosophy, but also about the relation between body and spirit, and, I will argue, about the religious sensibility implicated in his concepts of art and philosophy. "Transfiguration," first of all, helps specify the difference between body and spirit while suggesting, as with "transposition," that the relation between them is not fundamentally adversarial or hierarchical. In the biblical transfiguration, the spirit of Jesus does not leave the body; instead, *he*—body and soul—shines. As I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter, for Nietzsche spirit is not something opposed to body, but an aura or a shining, or raiment, by which the body and one's whole being is glorified. It is a manifestation of blessedness...

More generally, *transfiguration*—as either *Transfiguration* or *Verklarung*—can be applied to Nietzsche's notion of artistic idealization, which, for him, is the function of art—and the clearest expression of affirmation. Throughout his writing, as I discuss particularly in Chapter 6, Nietzsche draws close connections between transfiguration, art, religion, and affirmation; he in fact asserts that everything worth living for is "transfiguring, subtle, mad, and divine" (BG: 101). Such transfiguration is accomplished by the Greek gods, and, it seems, by the God of Jesus, but not the "Christian" God. The latter is "God degenerated to the *contradiction of life*, instead of being its transfiguration (*Verklarung*) and eternal *Yes*!" (AC: 138). Transfiguration does not affirm the ideal at the expense of reality, but is a way of rendering, shaping, "perfecting" reality so that it shines, so that one exalts it. To transfigure the body and the world is to affirm reality in transcending it; it is not to transcend the world in order to master it.

The meaning of transfiguration can be extended in another direction. At the same time that he criticizes Christianity and religion, Nietzsche acknowledges the crucial roles these have played in the development of human culture and the human soul. One might acknowledge this and still claim that Nietzsche's vision is nonetheless antireligious, following, for example, the model of Feuerbach, for whom religion has outlived its usefulness and is now a destructive force in human life. There is much in Nietzsche's writing to support this view. Yet, his view of the free spirit and the philosopher invoke and allude to practices, dispositions, and ex-

1989]). The only other uses of *transfiguration* in Nietzsche's published texts that I have found are D: 10, GM: 111, and TI: 83. In the first, Nietzsche writes of a "new transfiguration" that, it appears, would produce a new type of human being. In the second, sounding like Freud, Nietzsche writes of the transfiguration of sensuality into an aesthetic state. Finally, Nietzsche writes of Dionysian art and its powers of "representation, imitation, transfiguration [*transfiguriren*], transmutation." The word also appears in a few places in his notes. For example, he entitles a note from the spring of 1888, "The Transfiguration, the temporary Metamorphosis" (SW: 13, 309).

periences that, as Nietzsche is aware, are closely connected with asceticism and mysticism. He returns to the ascetic again and again, for the most part as a paradigmatic figure of life-denial, but also, in a more positive vein, as one who has great insight into the secrets of power and desire. Only by appropriating these insights is Nietzsche able to imagine the power to affirm life. In addition, and in spite of his criticisms of intoxication, Nietzsche testifies to the importance of ecstatic, even mystical states in the cultivation of an affirmative life, particularly in *Zarathustra* and in descriptions of the genuine philosopher.

Nietzsche assumes, in short, a kind of development or "metamorphosis" by which the disposition or the practices of the saint or ascetic are transformed to produce the free spirit or philosopher (GM: 115–16). Transfiguration is only possible given an overcoming of the self-deceptive misunderstanding of power that idealizes "communion" with transcendent divinity. The religious element of Nietzsche's thought takes shape in the transfiguration of the spiritual practices of asceticism and mysticism.

Spiritualization and Self-Denial

In subsequent chapters, I examine asceticism and mysticism in more detail; to conclude here, I establish concepts and definitions upon which this work will be based. First, Nietzsche's conception of spirit. Humanity, for Nietzsche, finds its meaning in spirit, that is, in the capacity for creative, intellectual shaping and beautifying of self and world: the capacity for transfiguration. But it will not do to rely only on the model of Jesus to understand spiritualization in the fullest Nietzschean sense, for Jesus was too naive and innocent. Nietzsche, the postcritical master of suspicion, knows that spirit in his day knows more, is more troubled, even sicker. There is always at least a hint of violence, cruelty, and dis-ease when Nietzsche writes of the spirit; and always some ambivalence when he writes about consciousness.[22] In *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche refers to spirit as "life cutting into life" (Z: 104). Walter Kaufmann points out that spirit thereby becomes "an instrument used by life in its effort to enhance itself" (1974: 271). Spirit is at once the sickness and the health of the human being, and tensions between nature, instinct, and spirit create a dynamic of the human soul that is the basis of Nietzsche's anthropology. Enhancement is painful, for spirit is based in an agonistic conception of life. This is to say that spirit *is* contest, ordeal, not to say that life is the contest between spirit and body, or that spirit attempts to master the body and all else that changes. In this sense, it is correct to see in Nietzsche an anticipation of the psychoanalytic concept of sublimation, but only if

[22] See, for example, AC: 134–35.

one keeps in mind that sublimation as Freud sees it is grounded in the repression of sexual instincts, which enables them to be expressed in socially acceptable ways; it is, in other words, a force for conformity or social acceptability. For Nietzsche, by contrast, sublimation, as spiritualization or transfiguration, involves an intensification or beautification of the instincts as it is expressed in freedom from conformity, in an agonistic relationship not just within the self, but between the individual and the community.

This is why the ascetic is such a crucial figure: it represents for Nietzsche an uncanny conjunction of power, spirit, and self-denial, which, he thinks, has much to teach us about the relation of renunciation and spiritualization. But how should we understand the self-denial involved in spiritualization, since so much of Nietzsche's thought denies denial? Basically, Nietzsche distinguishes spiritualization from the self-denial of the ascetic ideal, that is, from the idealization by which self-denial becomes a goal in itself and confers value on life.[23] This is the self-denial that dominates the *Genealogy*. The sophistication of this work lies in large part in the important distinctions Nietzsche makes between bad conscience, *ressentiment*, and guilt. As he indicates in the second essay, bad conscience is a "sickness" that results when human beings are forced to live together in peace by internalizing aggressive impulses and so directing them back upon themselves: this is the origin of bad conscience, and bad conscience is the origin of spirit. But for Nietzsche the bad conscience is a "promise" as well as a sickness (Nietzsche describes this sickness with a figure that has much meaning for him; it is a sickness like "pregnancy" is a sickness). In other words, it is only in bad conscience that human beings become capable of inward depth and self-cultivation.[24]

The danger of this condition, as Nietzsche writes in the first essay, is realized when the priest uses *ressentiment* and guilt to intensify bad conscience by *moralizing* the god-human relationship. Nietzsche argues that the ultimate perversion of bad conscience is the idea of a sin before God

[23] Clark (1990: 161) reads this turn back to this-worldliness as a turn back to "natural human existence." From the perspective of Clark's theory of truth, the term "natural human existence" is relatively unproblematic: it refers to the existence attested to by human senses and human experience. However, from the perspective of Nietzsche's claims about suffering and spiritualization, "natural human existence" is a strange matter, for spiritualization is only possible to the extent that nature turns against itself. The reader will note that I engage Clark's book on Nietzsche in a number of places in the following pages. I do so for the simple reason that I consider this book to be one of the best recent purely philosophical interpretations of Nietzsche.

[24] "Let us add at once that, on the other hand, the existence on earth of an animal soul turned against itself, taking sides against itself, was something so new, profound, unheard of, enigmatic, contradictory, and *full of future* that the aspect of the earth was essentially altered" (GM: 85).

that is so deep it can never be atoned for—except by God himself. This concept of sin radically separates the divine and the human, a separation that tears the human self apart in the hatred of all that in itself which causes the separation. The creative possibilities of spirit and bad conscience are subverted in this historical trajectory to the point where the enhancement and affirmation of the human itself becomes a sin.[25]

Though Nietzsche was an unwavering enemy of the power of the ideas of guilt and sin over the human soul, this did not lead him to envision a final reconciliation within the soul, an end to the painful internalization of bad conscience. In the months before his breakdown, Nietzsche claimed the essays in the *Genealogy* "are perhaps uncannier than anything else written so far" (EH: 312). This uncanniness lies, I think, in the way Nietzsche links the "sickness" of bad conscience with the enhancement of humanity. To understand Nietzschean affirmation requires that one grasp that human existence itself is "uncanny" (GM: 85) because its enhancement involves a turn against "natural" humanity.[26] Nietzsche mocks the Stoics' presumption to live according to nature when he asks, "Living—is that not precisely wanting to be other than this nature?" (BG: 15). His battle against sin and guilt do not involve the overcoming of bad conscience; instead, he imagines redirecting the bad conscience against "all the unnatural inclinations, all those aspirations to the beyond, to that which runs counter to sense, instinct, nature, animal, in short all ideals hitherto, which are one and all hostile to life and ideals that slander the world" (GM: 95). Nietzsche seeks to cultivate a "good conscience" that is able to revalue "nature," the "senses," and "instinct," yet he does not write of the *eradication* of "unnatural inclinations," nor of the fundamental self-alienation within human beings, "this animal soul turned against itself," that he calls the bad conscience. Cruelty directed against the self, for Nietzsche, remains essential to all human enhancement. He writes admiringly of "those well-constituted, joyful mortals who far from regarding their unstable equilibrium between 'animal and angel' as neces-

[25] As Nietzsche writes a few years later, "The concepts of guilt and punishment . . . [are] a priestly assassination! . . . *When the natural consequences of an act are no longer 'natural' . . . then one has committed the greatest crime against humanity.*—Sin, to say it again, that form par excellence of the self-degradation and self-desecration of man, was invented to make science, culture, every kind of elevation and nobility of man impossible; the priest rules through the invention of sin" (AC: 175–76).

[26] The English "uncanny" is used to translate Nietzsche's "*unheimlich*," which literally means something like "out of home," or "not homelike." Writing of the "free spirit," Nietzsche exclaims, "He looks back gratefully—grateful to his wandering, to his hardness and self-alienation, to his viewing of far distances and bird-like flights in cold heights. What a good thing he had not always stayed 'at home,' stayed 'within himself' like a delicate apathetic loafer! He had been *beside himself*: no doubt of that" (HH: 8). The uncanny becomes the ecstatic. I will pursue this link in later chapters, arguing that ecstasy, transcendence, and spiritualization all are involved in elaborating this turn against the natural.

sarily an argument against existence [find it] one more stimulus to life" (GM: 99). And he expresses disdain for nature unspiritualized with images such as the "herd," which he contrasts with his admired "free spirit." His "sovereign individual," one who is capable of making promises and taking responsibility for oneself, only gains this capacity by overcoming the "natural" tendency to forgetfulness (which Nietzsche figures as good "digestion").

The free spirit, the sovereign individual, and the philosopher, therefore, all represent forms of "sickness" that result when the will to power, the "unexhausted procreative will of life" (Z:115) is directed back against "human nature" in the process of spiritualization. The human being is a self-alienated being because, in the human, nature is torn, divided against itself. As Eric Blondel puts it, there is a "tragic gap between nature and itself *within man*" (1991: 48). In this respect "nature" and "spirit" are reflections of one another. Or, to put it differently, this gap *is* spirit, or what Nietzsche describes as the "distance" within the human soul. This self-alienation makes a certain kind (but not all kinds) of spiritual suffering inevitable; it also is the condition of possibility for human growth and spiritualization. Nietzsche's therefore is an uncanny "naturalism." It is true, of course, that Nietzsche seeks a reconciliation of human nature with itself, but only with the understanding that the term *human nature* itself refers to a conflict, a fundamental alterity—spirit—that forms the self: to be reconciled to human nature therefore is to affirm the conflict between "nature" and "anti-nature."[27] It is possible to deny life either by adhering to the faith in opposite values and the ascetic ideal, which locate the reality of life in a purely spiritual realm where consciousness masters body and nature, *or* by believing that human beings can somehow return to nature and live a life free of the conflict between spirit and nature. Both visions hope for a peace of soul that Nietzsche in the later writings calls "romanticism." Nietzsche, by contrast, speaks "of a 'return to nature' although it is not really a going-back but a *going-up*, up into a high, free, even frightful nature and naturalness" (TI: 111).

In the final section of the essay on the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche claims: "Man, the bravest of animals and the one most accustomed to suffering, does *not* repudiate suffering as such; he *desires* it, he even seeks it out, provided he is shown a *meaning* for it" (GM: 162). In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche offers one way of thinking about how suffering might be desirable by attributing the enhancement of humanity to "great suffering."

> The discipline and cultivation of suffering, of *great* suffering—do you not know that only *this* discipline has created all enhancements of man so far? That ten-

[27] See, for example, BG: 159 f.

> sion of the soul in unhappiness which cultivates its strength, its shudders face to face with great ruin, its inventiveness and courage in enduring, persevering, interpreting and exploiting suffering, and whatever has been granted to it of profundity, secret, mask, spirit, cunning greatness—was it not granted to it through suffering, through the discipline of great suffering? In man *creature* and *creator* are united: in man there is material, fragment, excess, clay, dirt, nonsense, chaos; but in man there is also creator, form giver, hammer hardness, spectator divinity, and seventh day: do you understand this contrast? And that *your* pity is for the "creature in man," for what must be formed, broken, forged, torn, burnt, made incandescent, and purified—that which *necessarily* must and *should* suffer? And *our* pity—do you not comprehend for whom our *converse* pity is when it resists your pity as the worst of all pamperings and weaknesses? (BG: 154)

Nietzsche's affirmation of "instinct," and "nature" does not preclude this harsh forging of the self in a certain kind of self-inflicted suffering. His problem, then, is not the elimination of suffering in general, or the suffering of the soul in particular; it is, rather, a problem of revaluing suffering, of transforming the self-denial of the ascetic into an affirmative practice of renewal and enhancement. Nietzsche looks beyond the ascetic ideal by reinterpreting the conflict between "nature" and "anti-nature" within the human soul with the understanding that there is no pure nature, instinct, or body; there is only the constant interchange that constitutes body and spirit. Nietzsche's affirmation does not consist in a simple "yes" to nature or "this world," but in their painful, empowering enhancement.

Power and Ecstasy

There is something ironic about Nietzsche's own glorification of power and the way that glorification has been received by his readers (or by those who do not read him). For it is precisely because human beings have been enamored and driven by the promise of absolute, divine power, and/or the power of the masterful ego, that Nietzsche's glorification of human power, with its limitations and conflicts, becomes so important. Nietzsche's attack on the idea of sin and his affirmation of will to power and egoism are crucial components of the view that there is *no* absolute power, that human beings are finite, vulnerable, and of limited power. Tearing ourselves apart with sin and guilt has meant turning vulnerability and limitation into absolute powerlessness and depravity and, in response, worshiping absolute power. From this perspective, Nietzsche does not pathologically absolutize human power; to the contrary, he attempts to affirm, beautify, and maximize the power that is our lot as human

beings. When he does write about the divinization or perfection of humanity, then, Nietzsche is not elevating the self or humanity to the place or power of the Christian God. Instead, he is writing about spiritualization and the capacity human beings have for feeling great power and joy in striving beyond themselves, in creating beyond themselves, and so blessing themselves and their world. Such striving can be affirmative only if it resists the temptation to claim absolute power; that is, only on the condition that it recognize that joy is found in the striving and creating of desire itself, not in any eschatological totality.

Nietzsche denounces Christianity for its denial of the value of human power. But in the midst of his histories of guilt and the self-laceration of the soul, he invokes the Greeks and Jesus to show how "the conception of gods in itself need not lead to the degradation of the imagination," and that it is possible to "deify" the "animal in man" (GM: 93; AC: 157). This possibility depends on a contrast between the metaphysical dualism of power brought to its logical extreme in the Christian tradition and an affirmative, god-creating instinct that idealizes the human, and even a plurality of types of humanity (GS: 191). The god concept, in this sense, involves idealization and worship as affirmation: the nobles idealize themselves in their gods, and they give thanks for their life. Such idealization is not absolute, for there is a kind of mutuality between gods and humans; the gods are more human, humans more godlike than they are in monotheistic traditions. And here, one can see how even Nietzsche's Jesus undermines the monotheistic trajectory by embodying the divine here and now. In both cases, the complete human, with its conflicts and fallibilities, and the life of body and nature itself, is being idealized by being made beautiful and noble. The mutuality between god and human allows the fullness of human life—rather than only the "spiritual"—to be reflected in the divine ideal.

In his final year of writing, Nietzsche compares Dionysus and "the Crucified" and reminds us that paganism was "a form of thanksgiving and affirmation of life . . . a type of well-constituted and ecstatically overflowing spirit." "Dionysus" is the name for Nietzsche's spiritualization, qualifying it religiously. The Dionysian, Nietzsche claims, is the "religious affirmation of life" (TI: 120), a healthy, grateful intoxication that results in a creative, affirmative spiritualization of self and world. In such a state, one feels blessed, feels oneself and one's world as perfect, divine. There is a strong aesthetic sense, and a corresponding devaluation of the "moral," in Nietzsche's concept of pagan idealization or "deification." It is important to make the link with creativity here, for the feeling of blessedness is made possible through the difficult process of artistic creativity as spiritualization. As I will argue below, one must be careful not to simplify Nietzsche's notion of the "religious" as a feeling by making it a purely

subjective state. It is also a practice, an encounter with the world in which one participates in shaping the world, in making it divine in an affirmative overflowing.

Nietzsche's late (re)turn to tragedy and Dionysus represents a transfiguration of the ecstasy and creativity he finds in pagan religion. "Before me this transposition of the Dionysian into a philosophical pathos did not exist: tragic wisdom was lacking" (EH: 273). Nietzsche seeks to inscribe the Dionysian into philosophy. Dionysian ecstasy is a path—philosophy as a spiritual practice—by which one finds oneself in a renewed relationship with earth and life. Though Nietzsche is profoundly suspicious of the human need for intoxication, with Dionysian ecstasy, as a participation with the power of life, he isolates an ecstasy, even a mysticism, that is the key to understanding affirmation.

Chapter Three

NIETZSCHE'S ASCETICISM

> Growing heavy.—You do not know him: though he hang many weights on himself he can nonetheless lift them with him into the heights. And you, judging him by the beating of your own petty wings, conclude that, *because* he hangs these weights on himself, he wants to stay *below.*
> (Nietzsche, *Dawn*)

> They greatly afflict their bodies, not because they do not love their bodies, rather, they want to bring their bodies to Eden in glory.
> (Ephraim the Syrian, "On Hermits and Desert Dwellers")

Nietzsche and Asceticism

THE MONSTROUS, mad power of the ascetic fascinated Nietzsche. In one of his earliest discussions of asceticism—from *Dawn*—Nietzsche writes with the piercing voice of a "solitary and agitated mind":

> Ah, give me madness, you heavenly powers! Madness, that I may at last believe in myself! Give deliriums and convulsions, sudden lights and darkness, terrify me with frost and fire such that no mortal has ever felt, with deafening din and prowling figures, make me howl and whine and crawl like a beast: so that I may only come to believe in myself!. . . Prove to me that I am yours; madness alone can prove it. (D: 15)

Nietzsche's fascination with asceticism developed into the point of his attack on Christianity, most famously in the *Genealogy's* essay on the ascetic ideal. This essay has exerted a huge influence on modern critics of religion, for many of whom asceticism has become the paradigmatic gesture of religious madness—a cramped, dour rejection of earthly delight and worldly power and passion. In intellectual circles, *asceticism* has become a pivotal term for comprehensive critiques of Western culture: Weber finds in the innerworldly asceticism of Puritanism the mechanism of modernity's "iron cage" (1985); Foucault argues that the monastic cell is reinstituted in the modern prison and factory (1979); feminist philosopher Mary Daly identifies asceticism as the "sadospirituality" through which patriarchy has formed the world's major religious traditions

Epigraph: Nietzsche, D: 97; Ephraim the Syrian, "On Hermits and Desert Dwellers," in Wimbush 1990: 72.

(1984).[1] Such diagnoses seek to disclose the pervasiveness, pathology, and ideological functions of socially constructed ascetic ideals in which forms of self-scrutiny, self-denial, and self-sacrifice are considered to be of supreme moral worth.

Despite the continuing power of the antiascetic critique, in recent years historians and religionists have begun to contest the simplistic association of asceticism with masochistic madness by attending to the empowering, liberating potential of ascetic practices.[2] Their work can help us distinguish between "asceticism" and the "ascetic ideal," a distinction significant for two reasons. First, it can be used as a critical lens to isolate and evaluate some of the shortcomings of Nietzsche's reading of Christianity, which essentially reduces it to the ascetic ideal. Second, it can help us see that Nietzsche himself offers resources for rethinking asceticism in a more constructive fashion, that he in fact anticipates the reevaluations of asceticism that some scholars and spiritual thinkers are undertaking today.

It is a mistake to read Nietzsche as simplistically as he reads Christianity, for despite his polemic against the ascetic ideal, his writing does not reject but transfigures asceticism. Living in the late twentieth century, we have become enlightened about the dangers and evils of repression and self-denial, but there is a tendency today, in the name of liberation, to equate all discipline and all forms of denial with life-suffocating repression. Nietzsche is more subtle than this, for he is convinced that life only grows through suffering and the "sacrifice of its highest types." Though he seeks an end to otherworldly goals and dreams, Nietzsche demands a discipline of affirmation that vies with the ascetic ideal in its severity of self-denial and self-mastery. Comparing these disciplines of the self, I argue that the self-cultivation Nietzsche develops in (and through) his writing is closely related to traditional forms of religious ascetic practice, and has particularly striking affinities with practices of body and soul developed in the same Christian tradition of which he was so critical.

Nietzsche as Ascetic

To suggest that Nietzsche is an ascetic is nothing new: Walter Kaufmann points out that "Nietzsche, unlike many of his readers, never loses sight of the fact that he was an ascetic" (1974: 258). But what is asceticism?

[1] For Nietzsche's influence on Weber and Foucault, see Stauth and Turner (1988). For the modern Western aversion to asceticism and to the spiritual significance of pain in the Christian tradition, see Asad (1993) and Rieff (1987). In *Saints and Postmodernism*, Edith Wyschogrod discusses the criticism of asceticism in Enlightenment naturalism (1990: 14). From the beginning of Enlightenment, and through the nineteenth century, the criticism of asceticism was an integral part of many attacks on religion, but with Nietzsche one begins to see the figure of asceticism play an important role in more general interpretations of Western culture.

[2] See especially Wimbush 1990 and Wimbush and Valantasis 1995.

For the most part, Nietzsche's commentators, though offering subtle interpretations of his "ascetic ideal," have failed to give equally careful consideration to his "asceticism." As recent examples, the insightful commentaries of Nehamas (1985) and Clark (1990) are each limited by the tendency to conflate asceticism and the ascetic ideal. This leads each of them to connect the ascetic ideal with a religious (read, simply, *other-worldly*) denial of life, power, and body. They can then distinguish moral and religious practices of self-discipline (ascetic ideal/asceticism) from Nietzsche's practices of self-mastery, which, they contend, are nonmoral and nonreligious (i.e., *this-worldly*)—and so, nonascetic. While both are thereby able to make sense of Nietzsche's effort to envision a new, affirmative way of life, they fail, I think, to account for the complexity of Nietzsche's attitudes not just toward asceticism, but toward religion in general.[3]

Clark offers what is perhaps the most challenging counter to the claim that Nietzsche is an ascetic by arguing that asceticism requires the self-deception made possible through a dualistic faith in opposite values. She recognizes the importance of discipline and even the internalization of cruelty in Nietzsche, but argues that the ascetic "needs the valuation and interpretation of life offered by the ascetic ideal in order to get a sense of power from self-denial." That is, the ascetic only gets power from self-denial by believing in a "true world," a life beyond this one, toward which one moves through self-denial. Since, however, as Clark argues, Nietzsche's monism locates all power in the power of life, in the will to power, the idealization of self-denial that depends on a metaphysical power is impossible and ascetic practices pointless (1990: 234). In short, Clark argues that it makes no sense to speak of an asceticism that is not self-

[3] Another strategy for dealing with asceticism in Nietzsche, one found in certain "postmodern" readings, is to underemphasize the central place of suffering and self-denial in his work. See, for example, Deleuze 1983. While, with Deleuze, I think we have to read Nietzsche as a thinker of affirmation, part of my purpose in arguing that Nietzsche is an ascetic is to counter those readings of Nietzsche that overemphasize the themes of style or play in Nietzsche's work at the expense of the themes of suffering and discipline. Such readings do not adequately thematize the "great seriousness" that grounds all his play. One interpreter who treats Nietzsche's asceticism in some depth is Geoffrey Harpham 1987. Harpham's reading acknowledges Nietzsche's asceticism but claims that Nietzsche is an ascetic in spite of and precisely because of his resistance to asceticism (as the ascetic ideal). "Although Nietzsche tries in the *Genealogy* to imagine the nonascetic, he can only replicate it" (219). In contrast to Harpham, I show that Nietzsche recognizes and affirms a "natural" asceticism. Leslie Paul Thiele writes that Nietzsche's skepticism and atheism are basically "spiritual, and even religious" positions and that the Dionysian faith that emerges from this religious passion is "the force behind Nietzsche's own ascetic tendencies" (1990: 143–46). Thiele offers a broader understanding of asceticism than any of Nietzsche's other interpreters when he treats it as knowing "the powers of the passions and the instincts" and says that Nietzsche made "their investigation, development, and sublimation his life's work" (146–47).

deceptive or that gains power without the metaphysical idealization of self-denial. From this perspective, the asceticism of the ascetic priest is the only sensible way to think of asceticism.[4]

Approaches like Clark's, which concentrate so exclusively on the issue of self-denial and its idealization, miss a number of crucial points. I will mention one important one here, and flesh out others in the remainder of the chapter. I do not want to claim that Nietzsche idealizes self-denial or that there are not religious figures we would want to call "ascetic" that do. But a careful examination of the phenomenon of asceticism in Christianity reveals practices of renunciation and self-discipline undertaken for complex, often psychologically and physiologically astute reasons far more subtle—and realistic—than critics of asceticism usually assume. To put it more succinctly, not all Christian ascetics are the dualists that Clark's conception of asceticism requires. If that is the case, then to confine our definition of asceticism to those who do self-deceptively idealize self-denial construes the term far more narrowly than the Christian tradition has.

A similar problem can also be found in attempts, such as Pierre Hadot's, to decisively distinguish asceticism from *ascesis* as it was understood in the Greek philosophical context. (This would be a strategy open to Clark as a way of acknowledging the importance of discipline for Nietzsche.) Hadot defines *ascesis* as "spiritual exercise" and contrasts it with asceticism defined as "complete abstinence or restriction in the use of food, drink, sleep, dress, and property, and especially continence in sexual matters" (1995: 128). This approach has the advantage of recognizing the affirmative significance of strenuous modes of self-discipline for ancient philosophers such as the Stoics, and even for early Christian ascetics, and for philosophers such as Nietzsche. At the same time, though, it only makes this distinction by defining asceticism (as in Clark) in such a way as to render it both relatively uninteresting and inherently self-deceptive. Such an approach either leaves us with few actual ascetics or requires us to radically simplify the practice of Christian ascetics. Moreover, Hadot seems to be placing great weight on the distinction between "spiritual exercise" as predominantly intellectual, and ascetic practices, like those listed above, which concentrate on the physical body. Again, while such a distinction is useful in certain contexts, it is not adequate, as I will explain, for understanding either the Christian or the Nietzschean case, where ascetic practice works precisely at the boundaries—and in fact works to open up the boundaries—between body and soul.

None of this is to say that there are not are warrants in Nietzsche's writing for a kind of conflation of asceticism and the ascetic ideal, for

[4] I respond to Nehamas at the end of this chapter.

he never settles on a clear distinction between them. In the essay on the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche almost always uses the terms *ascetic ideal* and *asceticism* interchangeably. In the essay's first discussion of the ascetic priest, Nietzsche argues that the priest's "monstrous" mode of valuation is the defining characteristic of asceticism as a whole; he writes about the earth as the "distinctively ascetic planet," and about the "ascetic life" as a "self-contradiction" (GM: 116–17). In other places as well, Nietzsche treats asceticism simply as a negative phenomenon, describing it as a form of suicide (GS: 131), and writing that the ascetic seeks to "extirpate" (as opposed to spiritualize) the passions (TI: 52). But he also views asceticism more positively. In *The Antichrist* he describes asceticism as "nature, need, instinct" of the "most spiritual human beings" (AC: 188). The single exception to the conflation of asceticism and ascetic ideal in the *Genealogy* occurs in Nietzsche's discussion of "philosophical asceticism" (GM: 112). There he asserts that "a certain asceticism, a severe and cheerful continence with the best will, belongs to the most favorable conditions of supreme spirituality." And, in a note from that period, he writes: "I also want to make asceticism natural again: in place of the aim of denial, the aim of strengthening; a gymnastics of the will; abstinence and periods of fasting of all kinds, in the most spiritual realm too; a casuistry of deeds in regard to the opinions we have regarding our strengths; an experiment with adventures and arbitrary dangers" (SW 12: 386).[5] Despite his criticism of the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche makes room for a "certain asceticism," which he relates closely to spiritual power and the practice of philosophy.

Taking this cue from Nietzsche's notes, I will refer to this asceticism as "natural asceticism." As I argued in the previous chapter, however, Nietzsche seeks to return human beings to nature, but only as a way of cultivating an affirmative spiritualization: the "transfiguration" of body into spirit. "Natural asceticism" involves a cultivation of spirit through a struggle of "nature" with and against itself.[6] By contrast, in its refusal of the reality of suffering, in its imagined paradise of another world of Truth or Peace, the ascetic ideal denies the reality of the conflict *within* nature at the heart of the human soul—and must posit imaginary, and absolute, powers to offer an imaginary solution. Paradoxically, in order to overcome this conflict, the ascetic ideal exacerbates it, inflicting suffering upon the self that further tears apart spirit and nature. Its goal, however, is not the strengthening of both nature and spirit, but rather the mastery of spirit, as antinature, over nature. It does this through a self-surrender that

[5] See also the note entitled "On the Asceticism of the Strong" (SW 13: 476).

[6] Kallistos Ware also makes this point, and invokes the idea of "natural asceticism" in arguing that *enkratia* (self-control) does not necessarily involve "violence to our natural appetites" but can instead be a means to "transfiguration" (1995: 10). With respect to the idea of the transfiguration of the body, see Patricia Cox Miller 1995: 282.

is thought to open a space for the absolute power of the divine. The ascetic ideal depends on a dualistic, rather than a dialectic, relation between spirit and nature, human and divine. It is possible to distinguish between a dualistic, mortifying asceticism (the ascetic ideal, or priestly asceticism) and a dialectical asceticism of empowerment (natural asceticism).

Recent theoretical and historical work on asceticism helps us to think beyond asceticism as a dualistic denial of life or self. But this is not to deny that asceticism has attracted and offered a vehicle for some spectacular despisers of the body, self, and life. Rather it is to think about asceticism in a way that encompasses practices by which people can integrate bodily and spiritual life, explore contours of spirit and desire, and resist and transform powerful modes of socialization. More generally, with the term *asceticism*, I indicate a wide range of what Foucault calls "practices of the self," that is, practices and disciplines of desire by which a person cultivates his or her subjectivity within a web of relations between person, culture, and nature. With the help of these recent studies, I suggest one needs to take seriously the life-affirming possibilities of asceticism.[7]

I confine my discussion to scholarship on Western pagan and Christian ascetic traditions. My purpose is not to construct a universal definition of asceticism, nor even to isolate the essence of a phenomenon we might call "Western" or "Christian" asceticism (though I will suggest that we can make certain kinds of distinctions between ascetic traditions). Instead, I will sketch an "ascetic thematics" by which I elucidate certain central modes of discipline/renunciation/cultivation that theorists and historians have highlighted in constructing Western asceticism. I argue that asceticism, in this sense, becomes a useful heuristic for considering Nietzsche's work because it provides a perspective that allows us to see his relationship to Western religious traditions and his own constructive thought in a new light.

New Perspectives on Asceticism

Body, Dualism, and Self-Denial

It is rarely denied that asceticism expresses a certain "madness" with regard to the body. Yet, historians such as Margaret Miles, Peter Brown, and Caroline Walker Bynum point out that Christian asceticism does not and has not necessarily involved hatred or denial of the body. In general, they argue, ascetics have attended so closely to the body precisely because they have been highly attuned to its power in the spiritual life of human

[7] Foucault describes *ascesis* as "the labor that one undertakes by oneself on oneself in order to be transformed, or in order to have this self appear, which happily never happens" (James Miller 1993: 258).

beings. It is this spiritual life, and not the body, that is the primary focus of asceticism. While the body certainly is the *site* of many ascetic practices, the *object* of these practices is the liberation, salvation, or transformation of the person. For example, Margaret Miles argues that fundamental Christian doctrines—such as the doctrines of Creation, Incarnation, and Resurrection—affirm the permanent connectedness of the body and the soul, and so precludes metaphysical dualism (1990: 95). Thus, "Ascetic practice consonant with Christian faith requires that the only condition in which human beings can turn to the source of life and being is as unities of body and soul in which the body is always the 'spouse,' the soul's intimate companion" (1981: 35). Discipline imposed on the body can teach discipline to the soul, such that the experience of both becomes intensified. The body becomes "the intimate partner of the soul in learning, suffering, and salvation" (1981: 35) in enhancing life through a reorientation—a turning—toward "fullness of life," which is spirit.

The basic struggle within the Christian soul is not between the body and soul, but between "spirit and flesh."[8] These two conceptual pairs are not equivalent, for while the first might be seen in terms of a distinction between the material and the spiritual parts of the self, the second pair are not so much distinct parts of the human being as principles of orientation for the whole human being. Thus, as Miles points out, ascetics such as Saint Antony do not confine themselves to bodily disciplines but are always involved with disciplines of the soul or psyche as well. And the point of these disciplines (at least for some Christian ascetics) is not that denial is valuable in itself, but that it is a way of training and turning the body/soul to spirit instead of flesh. Asceticism, then, is not first of all a matter of castigation or punishment, but a matter of the liberation and empowerment that comes when one shifts one's orientation from the immediacy of a certain worldliness to the divine. Miles argues that it is the attempt to "break the hegemony of the flesh over the body so that the spirit, hitherto uncultivated, unexercised, and unstrengthened, can begin to possess it" (1981: 48).

Caroline Walker Bynum also argues that interpreting Christian asceticism as inherently dualistic does not do justice to Christian spirituality, even in the case of some of the intense and sometimes revolting ascetic

[8] Like Miles, Peter Brown acknowledges that despite the theological affirmation of the body in Christian doctrine, the opposition between spirit and flesh developed, in practice, to a dualism separating body and soul. Brown argues that the distinction between spirit and flesh articulated in the letters of Paul found many conflicting interpretations in the early Church, some of which led this complex distinction to be simplified into the distinction between body and soul. Consequently, the body took on the threatening aspects of the flesh and became the focus of Christian fears, pitting body and soul against one another and making possible a theological affirmation of ontological dualism that does not follow necessarily from the distinction between spirit and flesh (1988: 148).

practices she has found in the eucharistic piety of medieval women mystics. Bynum follows Max Weber in defining asceticism in terms of "discipline and method" rather than dualism and self-punishment: she argues that asceticism can be "a systematic, disciplined, determined self manipulation" aimed at meaning and empowerment (1991: 73). Even practices such as self-starvation, rolling in broken glass, and self-flagellation, she claims, cannot be construed simply as an internalization of misogyny, the hatred of the female body, or simply a misguided attempt to inflict as much pain as possible for pain's sake. These spectacular practices, according to Bynum, were rooted in a complex web of motivations and ideas. Among them, these practices were means by which women could gain some control over their environment—like contortionists, turning their narrowly circumscribed roles and lives into spectacular "gymnastics" of the spirit. Their practices also resisted moderating influences on the spirituality of the medieval Church. And through the body, these ascetics cultivated spiritual union with God, "plumb[ing] and realiz[ing] all the possibilities of the flesh" in a "profound expression of the doctrine of the Incarnation" (1987: 245, 294–95). That is, their suffering was an imitation of Christ, and not for the purpose of saving themselves, but, like Christ, for the purpose of saving others. These women "fus[ed] with a Christ whose suffering saves the world" by making the body the site of a spiritual practice in which pain and pleasure are experienced simultaneously (1987: 211).

"Living Flame": Ascetic Desire

Quoting Abba Joseph, one of the Desert Fathers, Bernard McGinn reminds us that ascetics often figured the perfection of spirit in terms of "fire" or "flame": "If you will, you could become a living flame" (1994: 137). This supports the view that concern with spirit is more fundamental to ascetic practice than denial of the body; more generally, it suggests that asceticism is aimed not at the repression but at the reorientation of desire. As Geoffrey Harpham argues, asceticism is "a meditation on, even an enactment of desire" (1987: 45).

Michel Foucault and Peter Brown have delineated useful distinctions between ascetic attitudes toward desire in Greco-Roman culture and Christianity.[9] Both take issue with the common notion that "the pre-

[9] Making such distinctions is hazardous business. Given the great variety of practices and spiritualities in paganism and Christianity, and the continuities between these cultural complexes, I use historians like Foucault and Brown simply to distinguish patterns and tendencies. Though both argue that a unique form of asceticism emerges with Christianity, I do not claim that this is the only possible form of asceticism compatible with Christianity.

Christian Roman world was a sunny 'Eden of the unrepressed' " (Brown 1988: 21) and with the contrast with "repressive" Christianity that this notion implies. Like their Christian counterparts, Greco-Roman thinkers reflected extensively on issues of sexuality and desire and instituted careful ascetic regimens of body and spirit. But the visions of self, nature, and culture that provided a context for Greco-Roman and Christian ascetics did differ. Foucault writes of two "forms of subjectivation": a Greco-Roman "aesthetics of existence" and a Christian "hermeneutics of desire." Greco-Roman discourse on the "care of the self" posited *ascesis* as "an exercise of freedom" and "self-mastery" centering on the struggle with desire (even to the point of its complete extirpation) (1990: 69). In this context, there was not the suspicion of desire that would later mark Christian asceticism, for desire and the needs of the body were understood to be a natural part of the human being. What mattered most was that one had the strength, achieved through the training of body and soul, to be able to master desire and decide when and how it was to be satisfied, expressed, used. Such self-mastery was an attitude, evident to others, that would mark one as a free and noble man through the display of "a relationship with oneself [that] would become isomorphic with the relationship of domination, hierarchy, and authority that one expected, as a man, a free man, to establish over inferiors" (1990: 83, 93). As an "aesthetics of existence," asceticism was cultivation and performance of the (free, male) self, marking his preeminent place in society.

The Christian "hermeneutics of desire," according to Foucault, was based on a radically different view. Rather than conceptualizing the problem of desire in terms of a disorderly but natural aspect of human life, Christian thought and practice reflected the idea that the self had been invaded by an "Other," which had corrupted desire and will. Concupiscence was "alien" and traceable to the Fall, but it was also so completely enmeshed with the human heart that it was difficult to determine what belonged to one's "true" self and what was a result of corruption. The self thus became a battleground. "The conceptual link between the movement of concupiscence, in its most insidious and most secret forms, and the presence of the Other, with its ruses and power of illusion, was to be one of the essential traits of the Christian ethics of the flesh" (1990: 68). Consequently, ascetic practice centered on the minute inspection of desire: one had to peer into the depths of one's heart, "reading" it in order to determine the various sources of different desires. This Christian hermeneutics served an ascetic regime of purification and transformation through which all desire would be directed to God (1990: 70).[10]

[10] See also an essay by Foucault entitled "Technologies of the Self" (1988b: 16–49). In this connection, Bernard McGinn notes that, for Origen, the soul is transformed "in the very act of reading and appropriating the scriptural text" (1995: 64).

Brown uncovers a complexity of attitudes and ideas toward desire and purification in early Christianity, which Foucault does not address. Nevertheless, Brown's study of the body and sexual renunciation depends on a similar distinctions. Most important, he gives evidence to support Foucault's claims with respect to the Christian hermeneutics of desire. Brown writes:

> The monk's own heart was the new book. What required infinitely skilled exegesis and long spiritual experience were the "movements of the heart," and the strategies and snares that the Devil laid within it. . . . The shift from a culture of the book to a *cultura Dei* . . . was rightly hailed as the greatest and the most peculiar achievement of the Old Men of Egypt: it amounted to nothing less than the discovery of a new alphabet of the heart. (1988: 229)

Self, Society, and the Cultivation of Subjectivity

Miles, Brown, and Bynum each argue that Christian ascetic practices have served as means of resistance to the powerful socializing forces of human culture. Central to Brown's thesis in *Body and Society* (1988) is the claim that Greek and Roman writers understood human beings and their societies to be a part of the "great chain of being." The conception and practices of the body that proceeded from this *Weltanschauung* could be severe, but the strong connection with nature meant that the relationship between nature, self, and culture was mutually reinforcing. Foucault's claims for the "aesthetics of existence" illustrates this point nicely. Human society was built on the hierarchies and orders thought to be dictated by nature. The free, self-mastering male stood at the summit of this hierarchy and displayed this mastery through his *ascesis*.

Christian attitudes toward the body were based on a view of nature and of mastery that differed significantly from Greco-Roman views. For Christians, nature, like humanity, had been corrupted in the Fall. Thus human desire could be transformed only by removing the body from fallen nature's chain of being, only by removing it from striving for human or natural forms of mastery and submitting to God's mastery. While Greco-Roman ascetic thought and practice was organized around the idea that human desire could be "harnessed" or "administered," Christians demanded a "transformation" of desire. Brown's history shows that, up to Augustine, Christians thought that participation in society supported one's slavery to desire and sin (the flesh), and so tempted one to remain tied to a nature alien to the state of paradise.[11] Like their Greek counterparts, Christian thinkers saw Greco-Roman society as an extension of nature, part of the chain of being; since Christians sought to escape this

[11] According to Brown, part of Augustine's great significance was that he brought to

"fallen nature," the transformation of body and soul could be accomplished only through some sort of distancing from society.

Brown's argument focuses on the eschatological basis of the early Christian practice of virginity: human beings could participate in God's new creation (announced by Christ) by breaking the bonds to the old creation, "wrench[ing] the body free from ancient solidarities." For Christians of the first two centuries, this often involved sexual abstinence, and, in the later cases of the desert ascetics, it meant leaving the villages of Egypt for the barren vastness of the desert (1988: 436). Such physical denial and separation, however, were only a first step in the attempt to free oneself from the bonds of fallen nature, society, and sin. For it was only once "the florid symptoms of greed and sexual longing, associated with the ascetic's past habits, had subsided, [that] he was brought face to face with the baffling closedness of his own heart" (1988: 225). The move to the desert was therefore not primarily a gesture of denial; rather, it was the attempt to remove oneself from certain habits and temptations in order to be able to attend more carefully to one's own heart and the voice of God. And it was an attempt to break the cycles of nature on which human culture depended and to anticipate the coming Kingdom in the creation of a countersociety.

By removing themselves to the desert in order to be able to attend more carefully to the self and to the self's relationships with nature, ascetics became examples and inspirations to those who remained within society. Many ascetics did not completely abandon the society they had left behind, but returned, in person and in books about their lives, to inspire others to follow their quest. The ascetic in Christian Egypt became a "hero of the settled land" (Brown, 1988: 227). As Harpham points out, their exhaustive efforts to remake themselves in the image of Christ made them, in turn, images for others to follow (1987: xiv). As with the *ascesis* in the Greco-Roman context, Christian ascetic practices were performances representing an ideal self and its relations to nature and culture.

There were important differences between the ways in which pagan and Christian ascetics served as ideals. The differences are especially evident when one considers the asceticism of the pagan *philosopher.* In many respects, the boundaries between Greco-Roman philosophy and Christian asceticism are difficult to draw, and involve different issues depending on whether one is talking about Platonism, Stoicism, or Cynicism. Most important, it is necessary to keep in mind that early Christian monastics, especially in the Greek-speaking context where Christian monasticism

dominance that strand of Christian thought that rejected the flight from society. A similar reading of Augustine's influence on the tradition in terms of asceticism and martyrdom can be found in Elaine Pagels's book on the early centuries of Christianity, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (1989).

originated, understood themselves to be leading a philosophical life, along the model of the Greco-Roman philosophers. Hadot has described classical philosophy as "a way of life" rather than simply a mode of discourse, a spiritual way of life founded upon *ascesis* and *theoria theou* (vision of the divine). As Arnold Davidson describes Hadot's position, this practice was "so radical and all-encompassing as to make the philosopher *atopos*, unclassifiable, since he is in love with wisdom, which makes him strange, and foreign to the world of most mortals" (1995: 23). Both the pagan philosopher and the Christian ascetic therefore performed and embodied certain kinds of ideals through their renunciations and withdrawals. Brown, however, points out that although the philosopher of early antiquity renounced many of the ideals and ways of life of the citizen, he nonetheless "had made his own an ideal of the self whose potential other educated men had realized only imperfectly or fitfully." The classical philosopher, then, was *atopos* in the sense of transcending the social categories that constituted society, but this meant primarily that he was able to avoid some of the compromises to virtue required of those who actively participated in the life of politics and social power. He still represented the ideal of virtue for the citizen, and so played a valued role for the dominant culture (1980: 12). By contrast the early Christian ascetics, especially by embracing poverty and dwelling in the desert, identified with the marginalized of the culture of the Roman Empire, not with its leaders. In this sense, their asceticism was a more radical practice of the limits, one that "took up [a] position in the zone of anti-culture" (1980: 15).

Ascetic performances from the zone of anticulture can subvert modes of socialization and offer new ideals for human selfhood. They can provide a critical means with which to reflect on and resist forms of socialization, and they can be ways of experimenting with new constructions of self and community. Miles draws a distinction between the "socially conditioned self" and the "religious self," which, she argues, is a "consciously chosen self . . . created by the strategy of systematically dismantling the self automatically created by socialization" (1990: 95). The body plays a crucial role in this work as the "site and symbol of resistance" to society (1989: 57; 1990: 102–3). Herein, for certain scholars and activists, lies much of the historical and contemporary relevance of asceticism as a constructive and affirmative practice. In their studies of women in the Christian traditions, both Miles and Bynum point to the importance of ascetic practices in enabling women to resist dominant gender roles and refigure their lives as women. David Halperin (1995) has given shape to Foucault's suggestions for a "homosexual ascesis" or "queer mode of discipline" by which dominant modes of sexual identity can be resisted and new possibilities for pleasure, relationship, and embodied life can be explored.

Summary

Asceticism involves practices of self-discipline—both bodily and spiritual—by which relations between nature, culture, and self are articulated and enacted, transformed and performed.[12] To understand asceticism simply in terms of practices of self-denial is to extract particular acts and practices from their philosophical, religious, and cultural contexts and so to misunderstand the complex motivations and worldviews that ascetics embraced. To understand it *only* as the idealization of self-denial (which, in some, maybe many, cases it might be) is to ignore the role of desire in asceticism and its constructive aspects: asceticism as the empowerment or reorientation and reconstruction of desire and the self (Valantasis 1995: 547).[13] In both the Greco-Roman and Christian contexts, one finds practices in which the one's relationship to desire and culture is the object of highly self-conscious regimens of self-scrutiny and self-cultivation and/or transformation. Such an attitude toward self and culture must be distinguished from the relatively unself-conscious way in which many of us conduct our lives, even if we engage in practices of self-cultivation—from physical exercise, to education, to psychoanalysis. To be an ascetic is to self-consciously enact and embody a self on the cultural stage, a self that expresses the ideals of a culture or counterculture and offers a model for imitation and inspiration for others. Harpham, Brown, and Foucault all emphasize the display of the ascetic self and the importance of the ascetic's communication of his or her life, "in the flesh" or in writing. In its most general sense, asceticism is the cultivation and performance of an ideal self.

Apart from these continuities, the work I have summarized permits some general distinctions between Greco-Roman and Christian forms of asceticism. This involves, first, a distinction between Greco-Roman self-mastery, where one seeks to *control* or *administer* desire and nature, and Christian renewal, where one seeks to *transform* them. In the Christian context, human fallenness meant that many of the natural desires and impulses of the self were attributed to an "Other," the "enemy within" or "flesh." Thus, human nature and culture became problematic for Christians in ways that they were not for pagans because the break in the immediate connection between God and God's creation had twisted self and culture. Thus, a second distinction: where pagan *ascesis* occupies a space at the center of Greco-Roman society, Christian ascetics occupied

[12] For further reflections, see Richard Valantasis, "A Theory of the Social Function of Asceticism" (1995: 544).

[13] Valantasis argues, "At the center of ascetical activity is a self who, through behavioral changes, seeks to become a different person, a new self; to become a different person in new relationships; and to become a different person in a new society that forms a new culture."

the boundaries of society. Before Constantine and Augustine, Christian ascetics resisted society through practices of virginity or solitude; in the period of Christendom, they occupied the margins as monastics or mendicants. They sought a transformation that involved a struggle between fleshly desire and spiritual desire; here, the model of self-cultivation is not (simply) the creation of a beautiful, serene self, but a battle within the self against an enemy that must be isolated and eradicated. This battle is waged in close, persistent reading of the heart that enables resistance to corruption and the turning toward a new Kingdom. Although Christian asceticism does not necessarily entail (and theologically should never entail) a dualism that divorces the physical and the spiritual, the tension within the Christian ascetic is drastically intensified in comparison with the Greco-Roman ascetic.

Ascetic Themes in Nietzsche's Thought

It would be easy to assume that Nietzsche—anti-Christ and lover of antiquity—would be more closely aligned with Greco-Roman than with Christian forms of discipline and self-fashioning. But a closer look at asceticism in Nietzsche's writing will show that his relation to Christian forms of asceticism is a complex one. Although there is much about inherited notions of Christian asceticism that Nietzsche rejects and much about Greco-Roman practices of the self that he embraces, certain themes I have delineated above as characteristic of Christian asceticism play a powerful role in Nietzsche's thought. This is not to say that Nietzsche is a "Christian ascetic," but simply to suggest that Nietzsche's understanding of the self and of the way "one becomes what one is" is indebted, in a positive way, to Christian asceticism.

The Body and Philosophy: Transfiguring Spirit

Following Schopenhauer, Nietzsche was one of the first philosophers of the modern era to write with seriousness about the body. He generally condemns the treatment of the body in Western philosophical thought: "The unconscious disguise of physiological needs under the cloaks of the objective, ideal, purely spiritual goes to frightening lengths—and often I have asked myself whether, taking a large view, philosophy has not been merely an interpretation of the body and a *misunderstanding of the body*" (GS: 34–35). For Nietzsche, this misunderstanding has less to do with a failure to treat the body as an important philosophical topic than with a failure to recognize how the body penetrates all thinking and all spirit.

By thinking against the body, the philosophical tradition has attempted to think without the body, following the Socratic imperative to a mastery of consciousness. Nietzsche, by contrast, attempted to think with and through the body, reflecting closely on how his body enlivened and shaped his thinking. Doing so, he found one must attend to the "small things" of life—such as climate, diet, and physical exercise—to discover and cultivate the optimal conditions of spiritualization; he apprehended fluent transpirations between movement and thought (EH: 256); he correlated philosophical positions to specific bodily states; and he wrote in a style that resisted—vehemently, joyously, passionately—the bloodless composure and coherence of traditional philosophical style.[14] As Zarathustra puts it: "The awakened and knowing say: body am I entirely, and nothing else; and soul is only a word for something about the body. . . . Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, there stands a mighty ruler, an unknown sage—whose name is self. In your body he dwells; he is your body" (Z: 34).

For Nietzsche, soul and spirit are bodily through and through, not separate entities grafted onto or into the body. We might conceive of them as refined and lambent expressions of the bodily will to power, or what Zarathustra, in this passage, calls "self."[15] But Nietzsche's attention to the body does not yield physiological reductionism: he does not juxtapose spirit to material body, where the latter would imply an animal machine and the former a mere expression determined by the operations of that machine. Although he often writes "physiologically" and appeals to the pressure of instincts or drives in human life, he does not imagine a given bodily nature, nor does body serve as a philosophical foundation for his arguments.[16] Nietzsche resists such foundations by imagining a dialectical relationship between body and spirit. These are not discrete realities, but modulations and complications of each other. We might conceive of this body and this spirit as heterogeneous, overlapping fields of the self, which energize and shape one another. With reference to the experience of writing *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche comments on the way spirit affects the body:

[14] Stauth and Turner explore the significance of Nietzsche's attention to these "small things" in *Nietzsche's Dance* (1988).

[15] For Nietzsche, "soul" (*Seele*), as it is employed in this context, is a vague, almost romantic term that serves to designate the inner life—conscious and unconscious—of the human being (e.g., GM: 84). It is roughly equivalent to, and as vague as, the figurative use of "heart" in English. As I have indicated, "Spirit" (*Geist)* is a more important, though not always more precisely defined, term for Nietzsche. It can mean "reason" or "mind," but its full meaning for Nietzsche is broader and more dynamic, involving, most importantly, the ideas of self-consciousness and self-transcendence.

[16] For instance, see Nietzsche's discussion of the vital role the drives play in philosophy (BG: 13–14).

"The suppleness of my muscles has always been greatest when my creative energies were flowing most abundantly. The *body* is inspired" (EH: 302–3). Spirit invigorates the body, not as a ghost animating a machine, but as a piercing quality of responsiveness, the intensity and meaning of sensation, the focusing of awareness.

Nietzsche articulates the interplay between body and spirit with two concepts: "breeding" and "transfiguration." He argues that instincts and drives can be "bred" or "cultivated" in the interplay of body and spirit, culture and nature. Thus, he can write that Christianity destroyed the Greco-Roman "instinct" for knowledge and taste, and claim that his task is to regain the sensibility of antiquity "*not* as brain training" but as "body, as gesture, as instinct" (TI: 92).[17] This is one reason "interpretation" is so important to Nietzsche: interpretations are inscribed into the bodies that together compose culture—the Platonic-Christian culture of Europe *embodies* the ascetic ideal. Nietzsche's vision of "breeding" is possible because human nature and human bodies are malleable to interpretations and disciplines of spirit. Man is the "*as yet undetermined animal*" because human beings are still in the process of "ascending" to their nature (BG: 74).

Such ascent is manifested in the "transfiguration" of body into spirit. It is worth repeating, in a broader context, the passage on transfiguration I cited in the previous chapter:

> A philosopher who has traversed many kinds of health, and keeps traversing them, has passed through an equal number of philosophies; he simply *cannot* keep from transposing his states every time into the most spiritual form and distance: this art of transfiguration *is* philosophy. We philosophers are not free to divide body and soul, as the people do; we are even less free to divide soul from spirit. . . . [C]onstantly we have to give birth to our thoughts out of our pain and, like mothers, endow them with all we have of blood, heart, fire, pleasure, passion, agony, conscience, fate and catastrophe. Life—that means for us constantly transforming all that we are into light and flame—also everything that wounds us; we simply can do no other. (GS: 35–36)

Like the desert ascetics of early Christianity, Nietzsche seeks the transfiguration of body into flaming spirit. Philosophy, as Nietzsche understands it, is a discipline of close attention to "all that we are," through which one gives birth to spirit; it is an ascetic project, but one that does not oppose body and spirit, even though it may exact severe discipline from body and spirit for the sake of the shining body of a keen spirituality.

Zarathustra says that he loves only what is written in the body's blood; but he also says, "Write with blood and you will experience that blood

[17] But Nietzsche also expresses a debt to the breeding of the spirit accomplished by Christianity (BG: 101, 210).

is spirit" (Z: 40). Writing is Nietzsche's most important transfigurative practice. Writing out of the body creates spirit—more precisely, writing out of the *suffering* body creates spirit. The preface to *Human, All too Human*, offers a horrible and delicate image. The philosopher as psychologist "takes a host of painful things . . . and as it were *impales* them with a kind of needle-point:—is it any wonder if, with such sharp-pointed and ticklish work, a certain amount of blood occasionally flows, if the psychologist engaged in it has blood on his fingers and not always only—on his fingers?" (HH: 210). There is here expressed the refined and exacting cruelty of the most voluptuous ascetic. The philosopher uses writing to tattoo a pattern into the wounded body. Writing is the means by which the will to power inscribes spirit into itself, and is "consecrated as a sacrificial animal" (Z: 104) for the sake of greater spirit.

Beyond Hermeneutics and Aesthetics

On this account, philosophy, as a particular practice of writing, is always implicated with pain.[18] Knowledge is fundamentally painful for Nietzsche because it involves seeing through human illusions in order to confront without consolation the deep recesses of the suffering body. Writing and philosophy are practices of attention to the suffering—that is, the living—body. But so is the ascetic ideal. Early on, Nietzsche had connected the pain of philosophy with the power of asceticism. In *Dawn*, he writes that "happiness, conceived as the liveliest feeling of power, has perhaps been nowhere greater on earth than in the souls of superstitious ascetics." Nietzsche links this happiness to the "basic disposition" of the ascetic, which involves the "triumph over oneself and revel[ing] in an extremity of power." He then moves directly to consider knowledge, more precisely, "knowledge acquired through suffering." This sequence links the power of the self-denying ascetic and the necessary suffering of the genuine philosopher (D: 69). The quest for knowledge and the creation of spirit involves painful renunciation: pain is, for Nietzsche, the "mother" of thought and spirit and philosophy is an ascetic practice of knowing and transfiguring the body.[19]

Nietzsche attacks the ascetic ideal for the way it holds the body culpable for its own suffering. It is not surprising, therefore, that in his attempt to

[18] Nehamas is right to point out that, for Nietzsche, "writing is perhaps the most important part of thinking"; that thinking "is an action" and that, consequently, "writing is also the most important part of living" (1985: 41).

[19] Compare Adorno: "The existent negates itself as thought upon itself. Such negation is mind's element." Walter Lowe cites this passage and adds, "It is almost as if thought itself were an implicit gesture of repentance." Lowe explicitly connects this gesture of thought to Western asceticism, indicating an inherently ascetic cast to thinking (1993: 143).

develop a new response to human self-alienation and its attendant suffering, Nietzsche sought to express his ideals in nonmoral or aesthetic terms.

> To "give style" to one's character—a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye. . . . It will be the strong and domineering natures that enjoy their finest gaiety in such constraint and perfection under a law of their own; the passion of their tremendous will relents in the face of all stylized nature, of all conquered and serving nature. (GS: 232)

One might relate the complex attitude toward nature expressed in this passage to that which Foucault describes as the Greco-Roman "aesthetics of existence," for here Nietzsche expresses the value of a certain mastery over nature. Nature is something to be worked with, it is material for an artistic, philosophical creation; but at the same time, nature itself, as spirit, is the creative force, cutting and sculpting itself. Simply because nature is not confronted here by an ontologically distinct force or entity does not mean that nature's stylization of itself is not a matter of painful domination. To create, one must be able to master oneself the way an artist masters his or her material and technique.

Nietzsche does not conceive of the cultivation of self and culture simply in artistic terms, however. Whereas his artistic love of form and surface leads him to idealize the creation of a beautiful self, his pursuit of the history of values turns him into a "subterranean man," who mines the depths of human moralities in order to extricate and expose to light our twisted self-deceptions. Thus, he holds a tension between an artistic adoration of the surface and the disciplined removal of the "veils" that cover that surface (GS: 38). Along with, even at times apparently in conflict with, his praise of the "profound superficiality" of the Greeks, Nietzsche is impelled to look beneath the surface to uncover the historical and physiological conditions underlying desire, value, and culture. His goal is to "explore the whole sphere of the modern soul, to have sat in its every nook": "We modern men are the heirs of the conscience-vivisection and self-torture of millennia: this is what we have practiced longest, it is our distinctive art perhaps" (GM: 95).

As Nietzsche digs down into the modern soul, his closest subject—hideously exposed on the table—is himself. As a subterranean man, engaged in a project he describes as "my ambition, my torture, my happiness" (WP: 532), Nietzsche explores both the dark recesses of his culture and of his own soul as a product of that culture. "I have a subtler sense of smell for the signs of ascent and decline than any other human being before me: I am the teacher *par excellence* for this—I know both, I am both" (EH: 222). Although he seeks to avoid a decadent moralizing that

would sneer at the bad smells he excavates, he cannot avoid the techniques that Western culture has perfected for laying open the soul. Nietzsche sees in Christianity "the means through which the European spirit has been trained to strength, ruthless curiosity, and subtle mobility" (BG: 101). His attempt to think and write beyond the ascetic ideal cannot be undertaken solely through the regular exercise of an "aesthetics of existence," but must also mobilize the more scrupulous "hermeneutics of desire," fostered in the Christian tradition.

Though for Nietzsche the "will to truth" is not exclusively of Christian or Jewish origin, it has been developed in Christianity in a particularly subtle and ruthless direction, becoming a will to self-scrutiny that is matchless in its suspicious resourcefulness. Nietzsche is critical of the "evil eye" that people of Western civilization have cast on their natural inclinations. Yet, in reflecting on the courage required of the philosopher who strives for self-consciousness, Nietzsche argues that it is precisely through ruthless questioning, which cuts into the soul, that philosophers will gain insight into new human possibilities.

> Our attitude towards *ourselves is hubris*, for we experiment with ourselves in a way we would never permit ourselves to experiment with animals and, carried away by curiosity, we cheerfully vivisect our souls: what is the "salvation" of the soul to us today?. . . We violate ourselves nowadays, no doubt of it, we nutcrackers of the soul, ever questioning and questionable, as if life were nothing but cracking nuts; and thus we are bound to grow day-by-day more questionable, *worthier* of asking questions; perhaps also worthier—of living? (GM: 113)

Nietzsche is concerned to diagnose not only contemporary culture, but also his own entanglement, as a "man of knowledge," with the temptations of the will to truth and the ascetic ideal. By undertaking the tortuous untwisting of insidious desires and motives in himself, he reaches within to bring to light his intransigent temptations and illusions. Paradoxically, only by means of such ruthless techniques will the modern men of knowledge be able to discern and oppose the ascetic ideal. But the techniques are themselves ascetic.

They are also philosophical in a more modern sense. Contemporary philosophical commentators have devoted considerable energy to examining and debating the epistemological and historical ramifications of Nietzschean "perspectivism" and "genealogy." Such endeavors are certainly justified. Nietzsche's ideas about the different bodily and spiritual perspectives that shape the way we know, and the particular historicization of desire and meaning he accomplishes through genealogy, have significance apart from the particular way they were deployed by Nietzsche himself. However, to understand them in the context of Nietzsche's own

writing requires careful attention to their status as "practices of the self" aimed at a transformative spiritualization. Nietzsche is less interested in developing detailed theories of knowledge (so see, for example, his numerous snide comments about epistemologists) than in cultivating and utilizing different perspectives in order to have access to every nook and cranny of the modern soul. Nietzsche's genealogies, whether historically accurate or not, serve as vehicles for imagining different possibilities to the extent that they defamiliarize and open to reconstruction concepts and values we think we know so well. To think with Nietzsche is not only to render philosophical judgments about the validity of his methods, but to find ways to think *differently* about self, community, and history.

Self, Community, and Power: The Free Spirit

To become a self is to be socialized: each of us is constituted as a self only to the extent that we are implicated in webs of particular desires, expectations, and relations. But to become a self is also to become self-conscious, with at least some ability to reflect on and direct the forces at play in the constitution of self and community. Cultivation of self and community involves what Margaret Miles describes as "difficult disciplines of self-definition," where old comforts, hopes, and ways of perceiving and relating are overcome and/or transformed through long, persistent practice, which involves disciplined experimentation with and embodiment of new ways of life. Herein, I think, lies not only the contemporary political and religious significance of asceticism as a means of criticism and liberation, but one of the most important aspects of Nietzsche's own asceticism. This is displayed vividly in Nietzsche's rejection of the comforts, values, and ideals that have shaped modern Europe, made possible by the "No" that he burned into his own soul, and in his celebration of the "free spirit" who says "Yes" to life.

Nietzsche describes *Thus Spake Zarathustra* as "a dithyramb on solitude." Zarathustra loves the freedom of his desert solitude as Nietzsche loved the "free spirit." In this frustrating and fantastic book, Nietzsche displays his preoccupation with the themes of wandering, communication, and the lures and temptations of society. In the process, he demonstrates, in concept, narrative, and metaphor (and, certainly, parody), the central place of ascetic themes in his vision. Like the desert ascetics, who saw their move to the wastelands of Egypt as an imitation of Christ's sojourn in the desert, Zarathustra spends years of solitude in his cave and proclaims that "[i]t was ever in the desert that the truthful have dwelt, the free spirits, as masters of the desert" (Z: 103–4). Like Saint Antony, Zarathustra struggles with temptations and demons who, in Nietzsche's case, take the grotesque forms of dwarfs, dogs, and snakes. Resisting these

temptations, Zarathustra seeks a new self and a new hope. Like those early desert dwellers, Nietzsche saw solitude as an effort to break the grip of "nature"; it was the means by which he could distance himself from and resist a human society he called the "herd:" "this natural, all too natural . . . development of man towards the similar, ordinary, average, herdlike—*common*!" (BG: 217, 226).

The enmity Nietzsche posits between the philosopher and the herd means that one should not assume that his battle against the ascetic ideal is ever finished—it remains a problem. If the monotheism of the ascetic ideal tempts us to embrace the monomania of moral conformity, then the battle against it must be a constant one, not one that merely produces a new conformity. According to Nietzsche, the comfort of certainty and conformity is a permanent danger; it infiltrates our desires through the common language we speak and think (BG: 216–17). The weakness and sickness of the ascetic ideal idealizes a pure heart, without conflict, and the peaceable kingdom where all live with a common will. Nietzsche's resistance to the ascetic ideal is therefore also resistance to the forces in community that find their goal in peace and consensus. The struggle against the "common" is perennial, requiring the constant inspection of one's language and consciousness for the lures to conformity implanted within. There is a daunting tension in Nietzsche's work between, on the one hand, his vision of future society based on his "revaluation of values," and, on the other hand, a permanent overcoming, by the philosopher, of any stable regime of conformity.

In order to participate in the striving of life and the joy of desire, the philosopher must learn how to negotiate the line between culture and anticulture. The ability to struggle with this tension is for Nietzsche a sign of health and spirit—this struggle *is* freedom of the spirit. "The free man is a warrior.—How is freedom measured, in individuals as in nations? By the resistance which has to be overcome, by the effort it costs to stay *aloft*" (TI: 102). As he remarks in *Beyond Good and Evil*, a primary task of the philosopher is to be the "bad conscience" of his or her time, whose "enemy was ever the ideal of today." More positively, Nietzsche describes the philosopher engaged in searching "beyond good and evil" as a *Versucher*, a term that can be translated into English only by hovering between *tempter* and *attempter*. As the narrative of *Zarathustra* confirms, Nietzsche's solitude is not one that cuts him off from society, it is rather a means by which he occupies the boundaries or limits of human community in an effort to experiment with old and new values and to serve as an exemplar for those he lures away from the herd (Z: 23; HH: 8).

It is also a means by which he moves at the limits of the self, for there is a close parallel in Nietzsche between self and community. Indeed, he conceives the self as a kind of community: not a monarchy or dictatorship

commanded by consciousness, but a "subjective multiplicity," where willing is "a question of commanding and obeying, on the basis . . . of a social structure composed of many 'souls'" (BG: 20). The self *is* a constant power struggle that the philosopher must negotiate and influence by departing and returning to the self in a wandering that mirrors his wandering on the limits of society and culture. "[The free spirit] looks back gratefully—grateful to his wandering, to his hardness and self-alienation, to his viewing of far distances and bird-like flights in cold heights. What a good thing he had not always stayed at home, stayed 'under his own roof' like a delicate apathetic loafer! He had been beside himself: no doubt of that" (HH: 8).

The purpose of such wandering, and a key to understanding the free spirit, is what Nietzsche calls "self-overcoming." In "On Self-Overcoming" from *Zarathustra*, his first published discussion of the will to power (and an anticipation of the essay on the ascetic ideal), Zarathustra speaks to "the wisest" (Z: 113–19). He questions their claim to be driven by the "will to truth," offering a different interpretation of their desire: they are driven, he claims, by the "will to power," which he identifies with the "unexhausted procreative will of life." He then offers his thoughts on power, obedience, and life.

> But wherever I found the living, there I heard also the speech on obedience. Whatever lives, obeys. And this is the second point: he who cannot obey himself is commanded. That is the nature of the living. . . . And life itself confided this secret to me: "Behold," it said, "I am *that which must always overcome itself* . . . where there is perishing and a falling of leaves, behold, there life sacrifices itself—for power. . . . Whatever I create and however much I love it—soon I must be an enemy to it and my love; thus my will wills it. . . . There is much that life esteems more highly than life itself; but out of the esteeming itself speaks the will to power. Thus life once taught me; and with this I shall yet solve the riddle of your heart, you who are wisest. . . . With your values and words of good and evil you do violence when you value; and this is your hidden love and the splendor and trembling and overflowing of your soul. (Z: 115–16)

Zarathustra solves the riddle in the heart of the wisest by showing them that their will to truth is actually a will to power. He also asserts an intimate link between love and the will to power. The wisest, like Zarathustra, recognize the value of self-overcoming, but they think that their overcoming is a mastering or transcendence of life, when, in actuality, it is the movement of life itself. This movement, as Zarathustra says, must be repeated "again and again" in the "overflowing" of love, value, and creation. Desire is doubled in this process of self-overcoming: it is expressed in the love that "esteems" and creates, but it then turns back on itself, now not as desire for the object created or esteemed, but as the desire for desire itself that Nietzsche calls "power."

The problem with the wisest, from this perspective, is not that they sacrifice their love or engage in ascetic practices of self-denial and self-overcoming, but that they cannot admit to themselves their own lust for power; they cannot justify themselves without a justification beyond life. Nietzsche identifies the will to power with life's self-overcoming but distinguishes between a self-overcoming that springs from priestly *ressentiment* against life and one in which the philosopher turns away from him- or herself for the sake of enhanced power and life. For Nietzsche, then, human life is enhanced (empowered) by a self-overcoming enacted through the denial or sacrifice of that which one loves and creates. He writes, "Deeply I love only life—and verily, most of all when I hate life." Nietzsche's asceticism involves a constant attempt to decipher or interpret the text of the self by taking sides against the self; in this process, the philosopher sacrifices love and self for the sake of the increased love and power of spirit. Nietzsche's asceticism cultivates "the craving for an ever new widening of distances within the soul itself, the development of ever higher, rarer, more remote, further-stretching, more comprehensive states—in brief, simply the enhancement of the type 'man,' the continual 'self-overcoming of man,' to use a moral formula in a supra-moral sense" (BG: 201).

The decadent self seeks to impose a false peace and conformity on the instincts through the mastery of consciousness and the goal of transcendent life (TI: 43). Nietzsche, by contrast, honors internal contradictions and the "enemy within" (TI: 54). The ascending self, in Deleuze's words, opens itself up "to the multiplicities that traverse it from head to toe" (James Miller 1993: 245). In one respect, this is an exercise in depersonalization and so an encounter with alterity. Yet it also is the precondition of the freedom of the spirit because it makes it possible for "strong" and "illiberal" instincts or wills to struggle against the decadent temptations of conformity. Nietzsche's social vision is constructed out of a tension between a culture with a strict hierarchy and the *Versucher* of the philosopher of the boundaries. Similarly, the self of the Nietzschean philosopher only finds its freedom in the transfiguring tension between the mastery of strong and affirmative drives and the de-selfing that makes knowledge and spirit possible.

Conclusion: Nietzsche's Asceticism

Nietzsche's vision of philosophy resembles closely the classical vision of philosophy as spiritual exercise. In at least one crucial respect, however, his spiritualization resembles more closely the turn from flesh to spirit in Christian asceticism than the imposition of reason's mastery in the Greco-Roman context. Like the Christian ascetic, Nietzsche moves to demolish established ideals and envisions new ones; he seeks a radical transforma-

tion or reorientation of desire and meaning. Thus, Nietzsche's spiritualization, like Christian asceticism, exacerbates a division within the self, and complicates the relations between self, nature, and culture. The ascetic digs his hermitage in the crevices among these shifting and plastic forces. Deploying the "ruthless curiosity" and suspicion, which he attributes to Christianity, Nietzsche explores the multifarious and insidious ways the ascetic ideal captures body and spirit. While it is true that Nietzsche does not conceive of this self-division in theological terms (such as fall, guilt, and sin), he does construct an "enemy" out of the natural aversion to pain and the inclination to conformity, for both generate the fear that underwrites the ascetic ideal.[20]

Nietzsche's asceticism also differs from both Greco-Roman and Christian forms. Rather than seeking an end to self-cultivation in the hierarchies of nature, as in Greco-Roman culture—or in the peace of God, as in Christianity—Nietzsche envisions a never-ending struggle for creation, a continual self-overcoming and spiritual growth. He calls this "life." Insofar as he conceives of human nature as structured around an irreconcilable tear or gap within human beings, Nietzsche precludes traditional forms of spiritual reconciliation. The self is a permanent battleground of conflicting wills and ideals. This battle is not something to be resolved, despite the suffering and bewilderment it causes, for it is the condition of freedom and spiritual enhancement. Spirit depends, therefore, on exacerbating *productively* the tension of the self's fundamental self-alienation. In contrast with the spirituality of the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche imposes suffering upon himself in order to live and grow as a human self in this world. To live life, instead of the living death of the ascetic ideal, one must resist the consoling promises of Truth or God. Only through a discipline in which the self is constantly turning on itself, questioning itself, and overcoming itself can it resist these temptations, and continue in the way of the free spirit.

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In his influential book on Nietzsche, Alexander Nehamas dismisses the problem of Nietzsche's asceticism by describing Nietzsche's discipline and

[20] See BG: 217, 226. Although my primary purpose here is to draw some positive connections between Nietzsche and Christian asceticism, a more complete treatment would involve an exploration of Nietzsche's connections to the philosophical tradition of Cynicism. See Peter Sloterdijk's discussion of Nietzsche's cynicism (1987a, 1987b). In some of his final lectures, Michel Foucault claimed that Christian asceticism is directly connected to the Cynic's "agonizing and idiosyncratic approach to the truth": "The desert saint, like the pagan Cynic, wrenched himself away from everyday life and ordinary society, cutting the normal ties that bind a human being to family and friends. The goal . . . [was to] transfigure totally who one was and what one thought, creating, if necessary, through the most immoderate

self-denial as a simple case of "prudential self-control." This he distinguishes from the moralizing dogmatism of "asceticism" (as ascetic ideal) (Nehamas 1985: 116). Again, this attempt to save Nietzsche from the terrible specter of asceticism oversimplifies both Nietzsche and asceticism. It does correctly encompass the sense of *ascesis* as "training," which we might think of in terms of self-imposed discipline and pain for the sake of a certain fitness and health. And it helpfully points to Nietzsche's critique of morality. Yet it ignores important aspects of the ecstatic element of Nietzsche's thought, in two ways. First, it ignores the radically transformative character of Nietzsche's philosophy as spiritual practice. This practice, as I have indicated, requires severe practices of depersonalization or de-selfing in order to enable new possibilities of selfhood to be created. What, exactly, is "self-control" or "prudence" in this case? As radically transformative, Nietzsche's asceticism is much more than training, because it seeks not simply to maximize the possibilities of already existing capacities; it seeks new capacities and new possibilities. Moreover—possibly more disturbing and certainly less prudent—Nietzsche argues that human beings actually take pleasure in causing themselves pain, and experience an "over-abundant enjoyment at [their] own suffering." These are not simply "superstitious" or life-denying ascetics, nor, clearly, are they prudential utilitarians.

> The most spiritual human beings, as the *strongest*, find their happiness where others would find their destruction: in the labyrinth, in severity towards themselves and others, in attempting; their joy lies in self-constraint: with them asceticism becomes nature, need, instinct. They consider the hard task a privilege, to play with vices which overwhelm others a *recuperation*: . . . Knowledge—a form of asceticism [ellipses Nietzsche's]. (AC: 188)[21]

For Nietzsche, happiness and joy are found *in* the labyrinth and *in* self-constraint, not simply at the end of the labyrinth or as a result of power gained by self-constraint. A prudential asceticism is goal-oriented, but Nietzsche challenges us with a more complex perspective on renunciation and pain. He certainly is not rejecting the idea that his ascetic practices have a goal, but when the goal is "spirit" things get complicated. Nietzsche is saying something more, for when he celebrates the "pain of

and punishing of practices, a radically other sort of existence, manifest in one's body, unmistakable in one's style of life—turning one's bios, as such, into 'the immediate, explosive, and savage presence of truth' " (James Miller 1993: 361).

[21] For the will to knowledge as a spiritualized form of directing cruelty against oneself, see BG: 159. Nietzsche also expresses his distaste for prudence from a slightly different perspective: "But the genuine philosopher—as it seems to *us*, my friends?—lives 'unphilosophically' and 'unwisely,' above all imprudently, and feels the burden and the duty of a hundred attempts and temptations of life—he risks himself constantly, he plays the wicked game—" (BG: 125).

childbirth" and the "Dionysian mysteries" in which "pain is sanctified" (TI: 120), he brings religious considerations to bear. From a Dionysian perspective, the perspective of the process of creation, pain is experienced as an integral and necessary moment of life; in renunciation one experiences the power of life's creative force. This process Nietzsche describes as "the road to life . . . the sacred road." By celebrating the process—the way, the "labyrinth"—as sacred, Nietzsche consecrates each of its constituents as sacred, each signifying something necessary to life. That Nietzsche is not simply valuing pain because it is a means to creativity is also supported in the section immediately following the discussion of childbirth. There, continuing his reflections on the Dionysian, Nietzsche writes that the will to life rejoices in itself "through" the "sacrifice of its highest types" (TI: 120). In other words, the sacred nature of life is not experienced only in productivity or creativity, but also in the pain and destructiveness of sacrifice. In certain kinds of pain and suffering, Nietzsche's philosopher experiences the fullness and inexhaustibility of life; his asceticism thus is not simply calculation but celebration and worship, a way of realizing "in oneself the eternal joy of becoming." In the following chapters I take up the issue of mysticism and affirmation to make this connection more explicit.

Chapter Four

THE PROBLEM OF MYSTICISM IN NIETZSCHE

> In the Dionysian dithyramb . . . the entire symbolism of the body is called into play, not the mere symbolism of the lips, face, and speech but the whole pantomime of dancing, forcing every member into rhythmic movement.
> (Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*)

> Now I am light, now I fly, now I see myself beneath myself, now a god dances through me.
> (Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*)

> If you stand right fronting and face to face to a fact, you will see the sun glimmer on both its surfaces, as if it were a cimiter, and feel its sweet edge dividing you through the heart and marrow, and so you will happily conclude your mortal career. Be it life or death, we crave only reality.
> (Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*)

Nietzsche and Mysticism

Introduction

IN THE REMAINING CHAPTERS of the book, I discuss the mystical elements of Nietzsche's thought. These are central to Nietzsche's affirmative vision and are the proper context for understanding Nietzsche's asceticism. Yet they are more difficult to specify than the ascetic aspects, for Nietzsche did not treat mysticism, even critically, in nearly as much depth as he treated asceticism: one rarely finds the words *mystic* or *mysticism* in his writing, and the issue of mysticism has not been an important one for Nietzsche's commentators.[1] But I will argue

Epigraphs: Nietzsche, BT: 40; Z: 41; Thoreau 1991: 80.

[1] Nietzsche does explicitly mention mysticism at a few points: see GS: 182, 235, 269; BG 64; GM: 132. The mystical resonance in *Zarathustra*, or in Nietzsche's thought in general, has been noted, but little sustained attention has been devoted to this topic. Examples are Higgens (1987: 140–42) and Thiele (1990: 155). Joan Stambaugh has written a series of essays that offer the most extensive and suggestive treatment of Nietzsche's mysticism, particularly with respect to their philosophical implications. Focusing on *Zarathustra*, Stambaugh calls Nietzsche a "poetic mystic" and analyzes the place of classic mystical motifs such as *coincidentia oppositorum* and union with the cosmos in this work. Stambaugh (1994) also discusses parallels between Nietzsche's mysticism and Eastern religious and philosophical traditions. Most importantly, she draws attention to the significant element of

that mysticism, properly understood, can give us great insight into Nietzsche's thought. Mysticism, for instance, was a problem central to Nietzsche's engagement with Schopenhauer because Schopenhauer explicitly linked asceticism and mysticism in the figure of the saint, who only achieves the denial of life in the *unio mystica*. Mystical imagery and questions continued to retain their fascination for Nietzsche beyond his turn from Schopenhauer, as a reading of *Zarathustra* shows, and as one sees in the essay on the ascetic ideal where Nietzsche considers how ascetic practices make possible the intoxicating, ecstatic feeling of divinity. Such intoxication serves both as a means to power for the religious virtuoso and as a kind of tranquilizing consolation for people in general. For the saint or the contemplative mystic, intoxication involves self-surrender in the ecstatic transcendence of individuality and the feeling of divine empowerment. When used to warrant human, all too human truths motivated by the desire for revenge and/or escape, Nietzsche finds such intoxication despicable and destructive. Nonetheless, Nietzsche placed a high value on "elevated," ecstatic states. The problem for the interpreter is to determine just how Nietzsche draws the fine line between life-denying narcosis and life-affirming ecstasy, how we should link Nietzsche's ecstasy to "mysticism," and just how ecstasy and/or mysticism plays a role in Nietzsche's philosophy.

Schopenhauer and The Birth of Tragedy

Nietzsche's engagement with the problem of affirmation and denial emerges directly from Schopenhauer's treatment of asceticism and mysticism as practices of saintliness. In his grandly bleak masterpiece, *The*

passivity in Nietzsche's conception of philosophical thinking and artistic creativity. To take seriously this passivity, especially in the context of the tension in Nietzsche's thought with respect to the relation of power and intoxication, requires some major adjustment of the popular understanding of "will to power." For all its suggestiveness, though, Stambaugh's work remains sketchy, more an indicator of problems that require attention than an attempt to work through any of them in depth. One particular issue that needs to be addressed in more detail, which I attempt below, is the significance of the "mystical poetry" of *Zarathustra* for Nietzsche's vision of philosophy and affirmation. Irena Makarushka offers a provocative analysis of Nietzsche's identification with Jesus in *The Antichrist*, comparing it with the mystical experience of union. She also cites Lou Andreas Salome's discussion of eternal recurrence as a mystical idea (1994: 34, 47). Finally, Georges Bataille, in his inimitable way, treats Nietzsche as a mystic. I will not attempt to summarize Bataille's ideas, but will simply cite a few passages that he attributes to Nietzsche, but which I have not been able to locate. "The new feeling of power is the state of mysticism; and the clearest, boldest rationalism is only a help and a means toward it.—Philosophy expresses extraordinarily elevated states of soul" (1992: 175). "The definition of a mystic: someone with enough happiness of his own, maybe too much, seeking a language for his happiness because he wants to *give away* that happiness."

World as Will and Representation, Schopenhauer argued that the highest ethico-religious expression of life is its denial: all that is good, noble, and holy is made possible only insofar as one intuits the fundamental fact of suffering and, as a result, becomes the vehicle by which the will to life freely "turns" against itself. This turn is the paradigmatic ascetic gesture, a renunciation that Nietzsche would come to argue is impossible. Defined narrowly, asceticism for Schopenhauer is the "deliberate breaking of the will . . . the voluntarily chosen way of life of penance and self-chastisement, for the constant mortification of the will" (1969a: 392). But, as will be the case for Nietzsche, in Schopenhauer's treatment, asceticism is bound up with mysticism and sainthood. The intuition of the real nature of the will, the liberating insight upon which ascetic denial ultimately depends, is the basis of Schopenhauer's "mysticism" (1969a: 390). Moreover, the denial of the will and the mystical insight depend on saintly acts of pity: the renunciatory practices of the ascetic involve not just a turn against the self, but also the turn toward the suffering of others. Through pity, the ascetic/mystic/saint takes the world's suffering upon him- or herself and so truly comes to know—in mystical insight—the nature of the will in the experience of suffering.

Nietzsche's first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, emerges from his own reflection on Schopenhauer's central problematic: individuality as the source of pain and misery. Nietzsche proposed that the power of Greek tragedy was to be found in the way it made available the promise of individuality's blissful dissolution (BT: 73). In this respect, the mystical implications of the book are unmistakable. Later in his life, however, Nietzsche had harsh criticisms for the book, particularly for what he saw as its otherworldly escapism and the Schopenhauerian metaphysic that supported it. In the 1886 preface to the book, entitled "Attempt at Self-Criticism," Nietzsche claims that he had mistakenly identified the tragic effect in terms of "metaphysical comfort," an illusion-producing capacity that allowed the Greeks to forget the pain of existence. Looking back, Nietzsche counsels his readers to "learn the art of this-worldly comfort first" and "dispatch all metaphysical comforts to the devil" (BT: 26). Do his later criticisms of the book, and attacks on intoxication, attest, then, to a complete rejection of mystical sensibility? If so, how does one explain the presence, especially in the late writings, of a positive vision of artistic intoxication and of Dionysus—the god of intoxicated ecstasy? How does one explain the "dithyramb" *Thus Spake Zarathustra*?[2] It is worth exam-

[2] In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche describes *Zarathustra* as a "dithyramb." Walter Burkert informs us that the *dithyrambos* was a genre of choral lyric associated with the festival of Dionysus. The name *Dithyrambos* refers "equally to the god, his hymn, and his dance," and the Dionysian revelers were recognized by their "wild shouts" of "*dithyrambe*" (1985: 74, 102, 163).

ining *The Birth of Tragedy* to begin thinking about the place of mysticism in Nietzsche's thought.

The Birth of Tragedy is an examination of Greek tragic theater and the development of Greek art and philosophy. Nietzsche argues that tragedy developed from lyric poetry and the tragic chorus and links the death of tragedy to the rise of Socratic philosophy. His research led Nietzsche to challenge Aristotle's influential definition of tragedy. Where Aristotle claimed that tragedy effects a purgation of the emotions of fear and pity in the spectator, Nietzsche wrote of the "metaphysical comfort" created by the dissolution of and return to individuality. In these respects, *The Birth of Tragedy* was a work in classics and the science of aesthetics, Nietzsche's first major scholarly project (and, for all intents and purposes, his last) following his appointment as Professor of Philology at Basel University in 1869.

Yet from his first line it is clear that what Nietzsche means by "art" and his approach to its study has a decidedly nonscholarly element and radically expands the boundaries of modern aesthetics. He writes: "We shall have gained much for the science of aesthetics, once we perceive not merely by logical inference, but with the immediate certainty of vision" (BT: 33). This line anticipates Nietzsche's criticism of a philosophy divorced from the instincts and intuition, and it is closely linked to his early conviction that art is not just a human activity, but a metaphysical force. The book approaches art in "the metaphysical, broadest, and profoundest sense" (BT: 93). It also views art as religiously significant, for the gods Dionysus and Apollo are "artistic energies which burst forth from nature herself." This view of art and aesthetics rests on two fundamental claims. First, while tragedy as dramatic art form develops out of lyric poetry, the origin of tragedy as a Dionysian phenomenon ultimately lies in the Greek mystery cults. Second, the artist is a kind of mystic, a "medium through which the one truly existent subject celebrates his release in appearance" and returns to the bosom of the "primordially One" (BT: 52, 132).

The link between the mystery cults and tragedy is not simply a matter of the appropriation of certain divine figures and themes for the use in drama; the cults are much more intimately related to tragedy understood as a religious phenomenon based in "a mystic feeling of oneness" (*eine mystische Einheits Empfindung*). Nietzsche does not discuss the mystery cults at great length in *The Birth of Tragedy*, but in his notebooks from the period he describes the secrecy and ritual of the mysteries as a proto-dramatic form.[3] Specifically, he locates the origin of tragedy in the "orgias-

[3] More recently, Albert Henrichs (1993: 21) has written that "in the Bacchae, epiphany becomes theater, and the stage becomes the *locus sacer* for divine revelation, miracles, and visions."

tic festivals of Dionysus," where participants were possessed by the god and experienced the blissful shattering of the boundaries of the self. As drama, he sees tragedy as a kind of civic-religious ritual, no longer the cult of initiates but a citywide, dramatic vision of the god. Thus, his claim that "art and religion in the Greek sense are identical" (SW 7: 311). In *The Birth of Tragedy* itself, he argues that the origins of tragedy are "purely religious," and writes of the "mystery doctrine of tragedy," namely, "the fundamental knowledge of the oneness of everything existent, the conception of individuation as the primal cause of evil, and of art as the joyous hope that the spell of individuation may be broken in the augury of a restored oneness" (BT: 56, 74).

This "pessimistic" doctrine, however, is not fully communicated in the "tragic effect" that Nietzsche identifies. He argues that all tragic heroes are images of Dionysus, the "primal one," the "contradiction born of bliss and pain." But tragedy is not simply a Dionysian phenomenon. The portrayal of Dionysus can be achieved only through Apollo, the god of image and illusion. Dionysus is always masked, his revelation is always also a concealing. The tragic effect of metaphysical comfort itself depends on this simultaneous revealing and veiling of the pain of ultimate reality: the terrible made sublime. Here is the occasion for Nietzsche's famous pronouncement that life is justified only aesthetically. As a vision of Dionysus, tragedy shatters individuality in a mystical communion with the joyful/painful contradictions of the primal one. In this communion, one becomes aware of the ultimate terror, amorality, senselessness of existence. But, as art, tragedy also seduces one to this existence through the sublimity of Apollonian image, which, for the spectator at least, "cast[s] a spell over his eyes and prevent[s] him from penetrating deeper" (BT: 140). Rather than being left with the terror of ultimate reality, the spectator is left with an "overwhelming feeling of unity" (BT: 59). There is fusion with the primal being, but the magic of art is to relegate the pain of this unity to oblivion.

As a religious and dramatic phenomenon, the key to tragedy is the chorus and its music. Nietzsche's interpretation of the chorus blurs the boundaries between spectator, actor, and artist and so separates even further the Greek and modern conceptions of art. The "chorist lives in a religiously acknowledged reality under sanction of myth and cult" (BT: 58) and represents human beings as "timeless servants of their god" (BT: 64). The chorist, then, is an extension or development of the Dionysian initiate (BT: 62). The music of the chorus is the "dithyramb." In its prototypical form, tragedy is not "drama" in the narrow sense, but simply the dithyrambic dance of the chorus, a "community of unconscious actors who consider themselves and one another transformed." The chorus is

possessed by Dionysus and, in its music and dance, casts forth the god's image on the stage. The tragic drama is in this respect more like a religious ritual than a "show" or "production."

This possession, the union with Dionysus, is the "presupposition of all dramatic art" (BT: 64), for in the dithyramb "man is incited to the greatest exaltation of all his symbolic faculties" and so is able to express symbolically "the essence of nature" in both word and movement (BT: 40). Thus, the interesting link between the chorus and the dramatist/poet. The dramatist, Nietzsche argues, is both a "religious thinker" (BT: 68) and, like the chorus, also a "medium" for the voice of the primal one. Here, Nietzsche departs from Schopenhauer, for the latter's conception of the artist as affirmer of life relies on the idea of artistic contemplation in which the artist is dissolved *only to some extent* in the Will. The artist therefore protects himself from full experiential knowledge of the reality of metaphysical suffering, not penetrating as deeply as the saint. Nietzsche contends, by contrast, that the true artist *completely* "coalesces" with the "primordial artist." Moreover, he conceives of the expression of the primordial artist, for which the human artist is a medium, as a "celebration." In other words, it seems, Nietzsche is working with the idea that the "one truly existent subject" *affirms itself* through art, celebrates itself through the medium of the artist.

Where it is easy to see how Schopenhauer's conception of art might be subject to Nietzsche's 1886 rejection of "metaphysical comfort," it is not as clear that Nietzsche's is. The idea of celebration unsettles the idea of "metaphysical comfort," introducing an ambiguity into the concept that reverberates throughout the text and makes its effects felt in the rest of Nietzsche's work. Nietzsche describes "the mystery doctrine of tragedy" as pessimistic. But where Schopenhauer's philosophy is pessimistic to the point of complete denial of life, Nietzsche's is caught between the desire to escape individuality and the will's affirmation of itself. He thus finds wisdom in tragedy more positive than Schopenhauer's or the wisdom of Silenus'. To the extent that it involves hope for a "restored oneness," tragedy does provide metaphysical comfort. But this is not the only wisdom Nietzsche thinks tragedy expresses, for he at least offers hints of a different wisdom, which he describes in terms of the characteristic "cheerfulness" of the Greeks. He rejects the idea that this cheerfulness is a state of "unendangered comfort" (BT: 67) and argues instead that it emerges in a knowing confrontation with the suffering of life, that "the best and highest possession mankind can acquire is obtained by sacrilege and must be paid for with consequences that involve the whole flood of sufferings and sorrows" (BT: 71). To the extent that the artist presents this idea in the tragic hero, art comforts not through a forgetting, but through an affirmation, specifically of the idea that suffering, as an effect of wisdom,

leads to blessedness—for example, the blessedness that Oedipus finds in the final play of the Oedipus trilogy. This blessedness is not so much a "hope" for restored oneness as a recognition of the fact of oneness, of the fact of the close link between suffering and joy, pain and wisdom. The early Nietzsche is clearly more "metaphysical" than the late Nietzsche will allow, but, at the same time, he is already anticipating his mature vision in which the highest expression of life is not Schopenhauerian denial, but celebratory affirmation.

Tragedy and Philosophy

Nietzsche's first book was as much about the death of tragedy at the hands of philosophy as its birth in the spirit of music. The death of tragedy comes about with the "typical non-mystic," Socrates (BT: 88). It was Socrates, claimed Nietzsche, who inspired Euripides to make tragedy intelligible; that is, to replace the "instinctual" or "mystical" process of creativity, with a self-conscious, intelligible dramatic production. Where Greek religion and dithyrambic art had been the means by which the forces of nature and instinct had given voice to themselves and by which human beings could become these voices, with Socrates, art and philosophy are given a new basis in consciousness and consciousness becomes the *critic* of nature. This meant not only the end of tragedy, but the end of Greek religion and myth, for Nietzsche's Socrates represents optimistic faith in reason and the corrigibility of the wound of nature. Such a loss of myth inevitably means for a culture the loss of "the healthy natural power of its creativity" (BT: 135). Socratic philosophy is opposed to the instincts and to the intuitive connection with nature expressed in a positive relation with the instincts. In his "Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks," an unpublished but completed essay from the same period as *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche had reflected on the different vision of philosophy he found in the pre-Socratics. For those philosophers, intuition and rapture still played a positive role. Thus Nietzsche writes that Heraclitus grasps truth in intuition rather than logic and "in Syballine raptures gazes but does not peer, knows but does not calculate" (PTG: 69).

The distinction between the gaze of tragic wisdom and the lucidity of Socratic knowledge was for Nietzsche of crucial concern for his own nineteenth century. In what he perceived to be a time of cultural, religious, and philosophical crisis—a time of the loss of guiding myths—Nietzsche optimistically championed the rebirth of tragedy in the operas of Richard Wagner. Philosophically, Nietzsche saw the beginnings of this rebirth in Kant and Schopenhauer, because these intrepid philosophers had drawn the limits of optimistic, Socratic science (BT: 112). Though Kant vigorously resisted the idea of knowledge beyond phenomena, Schopenhauer,

as I have indicated, claimed that certain kinds of intuition into the very nature of things were possible. The early Nietzsche followed Schopenhauer with his claims about the rebirth of tragedy in a new Dionysian wisdom. But Nietzsche forges a closer link between art and religion, creativity and mysticism, than does Schopenhauer. This is especially apparent in the figure of the "artistic Socrates" for which Nietzsche expresses hope in *The Birth of Tragedy*. This figure unites the philosopher with the Schopenhauerian artist, saint, and mystic, one who possesses a wisdom that "turns with unmoved eyes to a comprehensive view of the world, and seeks to grasp, with sympathetic feelings of love, the eternal suffering as its own" (BT: 112). The rebirth of tragedy is the rebirth of philosophy as wisdom rather than science: "But how suddenly the desert of our exhausted culture . . . is changed when it is touched by the Dionysian magic! . . . Yes, my friends, believe with me in Dionysian life and the rebirth of tragedy. The age of the Socratic man is over. . . . Prepare yourselves for hard strife, but believe in the miracles of your god" (BT: 124).

Within a few years of writing this exhortation, Nietzsche broke with Wagner and increased his distance from Schopenhauer, turning to an at times skeptical, at times quasi-positivistic style of thinking in his works of the early 1880s. He grew more and more suspicious of "intoxication" and "romanticism" and began forging an antimetaphysical philosophy. The fruits of these years led Nietzsche, in 1886, to call for "this-worldly comfort" rather than "metaphysical comfort." Given the link between metaphysical comfort and mysticism in *The Birth of Tragedy*, it is tempting to dismiss the relevance of Nietzsche's early mystical sensibility for understanding his later work. To bolster such a reading, one might point out that with the rejection of Schopenhauer came a rejection of the idea of a primordial will into which one can dissolve one's individuality, and with Nietzsche's criticisms of Christianity and romanticism came the rejection of a metaphysical, dualistic faith in an otherworldly realm of existence, by means of which one can articulate hope for future bliss. It is tempting to read Nietzsche's late preface as a wholesale rejection of Dionysian ecstasy as grounded in a metaphysical, otherworldly hope. Turning from his early mentors, Nietzsche turns to a relentless philosophical attack on all forms of religious intuition, transcendence, faith.

But there remains the ecstatic dance and the dithyramb. Even in a work as adamantly "this-worldly" as *Human, All too Human*, one finds Nietzsche continuing to figure his philosophical journey in terms of ecstatic, magical moments. There, Nietzsche writes of "The Wanderer" who does not "let his heart adhere too firmly to any individual thing," and so often experiences "dreadful" nights. But the wanderer finds recompense, once and a while, in "joyful mornings," in which

> the Muses come dancing by him in the mist of the mountains, when afterwards, if he relaxes quietly beneath the trees in the equanimity of his soul at morning, good and bright things will be thrown down to him from their tops and leafy hiding-places, the gifts of all those free spirits who are at home in mountain, wood, solitude and who, like him, are, in their now joyful, now thoughtful way, wanderers and philosophers. Born out of the mysteries of dawn, they ponder on how, between the tenth and the twelfth stroke of the clock, the day could present a face so pure, so light-filled, so cheerful and transfigured. (HH: 204)

Two closely related patterns are inscribed in this passage. One is familiar; both will be repeated, often, in Nietzsche's writing; they will figure centrally in considering the place of mysticism in Nietzsche's later work. First, note the echo of *The Birth of Tragedy* in the close link of the dread of abyssal night and the shining gifts of the dawn. Second, the skeptical philosopher—the "free spirit"—finds, in the midst of a long journey of "searching and researching," a journey filled with renunciation and suffering, the gift of joyful creativity. Such gifts do not indicate that the wanderer has reached his destination—there is none, save, possibly, this dawn itself, that gives the wanderer the strength and resources to continue.[4]

The Study of Mysticism

Constructing Mystical Experience

Before moving to Nietzsche's later work, it will be helpful to consider in some detail how to use the term *mysticism*. As with *asceticism*, it is a mistake to rely uncritically on common modern conceptions of mysticism in evaluating Nietzsche's thought. This is not to say that Nietzsche's conception of mysticism is not implicated with modern views of religious experience and mysticism, only that these should not determine how we use the term *mysticism* or this evaluation. Rethinking religion means rethinking mysticism. I seek to open up the issue by problematizing common received notions of mysticism, in the hope that this will offer some lines of comparison with Nietzsche and others whom we might not, at first glance, see as comparable.

When I invoke the "modern" conception of mysticism, I refer to the widespread use of the term to indicate a dramatic experience of unity with

[4] This second pattern is reinscribed, along with some strategic remarks, in the notebooks from the period of *The Gay Science*.

> Are you prepared? You must have lived through every grade of skepticism and have bathed with joy in ice-cold streams—otherwise you have no right to these thoughts; I want to protect myself from the easy-believing and foolish. I want to *defend* my thoughts in advance. It should be the religion of the most free, cheerful and elevated soul—a loving ground of wisdom between golden ice and pure skies. (SW 9: 573)

or absorption in God, the divine, or ultimate reality, where one has access to some kind of ultimate knowledge. But it is only in the context of a long history of Platonic and Christian thought that we go from the Greek *mystikos* to this contemporary *mysticism*. Traced philologically through the root *my(s)*, which means "I close my eyes," the history of mysticism begins with the Greek mystery religions. In this context, *mystikos* referred to one who kept silent about the secrets of the initiations into the cult. Walter Burkert warns that it is misleading to think of the mystery religions as mystical in the contemporary sense of the word, for they did not necessarily involve "the transformation of consciousness" (1987: 7). He does claim, however, that they made possible the "encounter with the divine" (1987: 90). Pierre Hadot supports this idea, following Aristotle's claim that the initiates of Eleusis did not learn anything about the divine, but did experience it (1995: 28).

In the early Christian context, and particularly at the point of intersection between Christianity and Platonism, the term *mystical* comes to refer to certain ways of thinking about, writing about, and understanding God. This is "mystical theology," not, it must be emphasized, modern "mysticism." Specifically, the term refers to a way of interpreting the Bible by looking below its surface meanings to find the "spiritual" or "mystical" meaning of the text. It is clear that this use of the term retains the sense of something hidden and secret from the Greek mystery religions. But it also represents a kind of reversal, for in the early Christian context the point is not an "experience" of God, but an intellectual realization or revelation. Both Grace Jantzen and Denys Turner emphasize this point in their studies of Christian mystical traditions. Jantzen points out that in the early mystical hermeneutic, God, as Christ, is revealed in a way not accessible to ordinary readers of the Bible, but intellectually, not experientially (1995: 69, 138–39). Only in the context of late-medieval love mysticism, and specifically that practiced by women such as Hadewijch and Julian of Norwich, do we begin to see a pronounced experiential component in Christian mystical traditions. Turner concentrates on the medieval apophatic mystical theology stemming from the influential writings of Denys the Aeropagite. Turner's primary contention is that apophatic mysticism should not be construed experientially, whether as an experience of negativity, or of the absence of God. Instead, it should be viewed in terms of the *absence* of experience of God, the recognition that God is precisely that which is hidden from experience. For Turner, "It is better to say, as expressive of the apophatic, simply that God is what is on the other side of anything at all we can be conscious of, whether of its presence or of its absence" (1996: 264).

Michel de Certeau has argued that, although the adjectival use of "mystical" has a long tradition in Greek and Christian traditions, the noun

"mysticism" is a modern term that in some respects reflects the secularization resulting from the breakdown of the institutional and ontological horizons of Christendom (1992: 76, 121, 299). As such, it finds a significant parallel in the emergence of empirical science: in both, one sees a turn to experience, instead of tradition or institution, as the locus and authority of knowledge, both of the world and of God (1992: 129). Thus it is only in the modern period that mysticism has become largely a private, experiential phenomenon.[5] And, although mysticism develops as a Christian phenomenon, as personal experience of God comes to be valued, and as traditional or institutional structuring of the revelation of the divine weakens, the possibility emerges of an experience of the divine apart from the particularities of Christianity, or apart from religious traditions in general. The question then can be asked whether in mystical experience a truth beyond the traditions is experienced, something universally human that can be compared across traditions. The place of a generalized mysticism, a way of being "religious," or "spiritual" beyond all religious traditions, has been created.

Mysticism has occupied a privileged place in the study of religion from its beginnings in the late nineteenth century. In part, this is due to the modern fascination with religious experience; in part, it is due to increasing encounters between different religious traditions, for scholars and religious figures have been intrigued by the idea that in mystical experience something is encountered that transcends the particularity of religious traditions: truth and/or divinity beyond the interpretations provided by those traditions. In the "perennial philosophy"—the idea of a single, divine reality accessible only in the mystical transcendence of human particularity—resources have been found for comparing religious traditions and asserting a fundamental human unity. Recently, however, some scholars have begun to problematize "mysticism" as a construction and category, raising questions about the perennialist project and about mystical experience. Steven Katz, for example, has devoted numerous studies to showing the consequences and mistakes involved in failing to pay sufficient attention to the very particular contexts in which different mystical experiences take place.[6] The result of not attending to such contexts, he argues, has been to overemphasize, or simply assume, the similarity between experiences taking place in different times and places and traditions; or, as I have indicated, to claim that underneath all the "extraneous" additions of tradition and dogma, all mystical experiences—across

[5] De Certeau connects this shift with the emergence of empirical science and the breakdown of Christendom. However, Grace Jantzen's work (1995) on women's medieval love mysticsm suggests that such a shift may already have been occurring as women, disempowered by the tradition, looked to experience as a source of spiritual authority.

[6] See Katz, ed., 1978, 1983, 1992.

culture, time, and tradition—are essentially identical. Studying accounts of mystical experience from representatives of different traditions, and arguing that all experience is culturally and linguistically mediated, Katz takes the position that persons from different traditions have different "mystical" experiences. Thus, a Christian will experience Jesus Christ and a Buddhist will experience Nirvana; it is not simply the case that these people use "Jesus Christ" and "Nirvana" because they are the only terms they have to interpret an experience that, underneath the interpretations, is the same.[7]

This is not to say, however, that comparison between different experiences across time and tradition is useless or misguided, though Katz and others may imply or even assert such a position. It is to say instead that such comparison requires attention to detail and context, as well as a certain degree of abstraction from specific, in some respects very different, experiences. As Wayne Proudfoot argues, we can "employ the results of phenomenological analyses without subscribing to the conviction that these represent some fundamental uninterpreted experience" (1985: 124).[8] Since trying to assert a common object of mystical experience is a sure way to reduce the complexity and richness of individual experiences and their role in different lives and traditions, one way to accomplish such abstraction is to focus instead on the dynamics of mystical consciousness. For example, Jeffrey Kripal points out that a "dialectical approach" to mysticism can take seriously the different contexts of mystics—the different ontologies, histories, techniques, objects of their experience—*as well as* a common apophatic level of the experience "of" nothingness. To take seriously the latter is to acknowledge that at some level one must "withdraw the 'what'" of the experience; that is, prescind from claiming that one can offer an exhaustive account of the mystical experience by focusing on the *object* of experience. Doing so, one can avoid identifying a common core experience "of something" without rejecting the possibility that there are certain states or dynamics of consciousness common to different traditions and different times (1995: 19). Thus I am inclined to find some comparative use in approaches to mysticism such as Louis Dupre's, who writes of "the self [which] expands beyond its ordinary boundaries and is passively united with a reality which transcends its normal state" (1979: 361). This is vague, but it helpfully points to a dynamic of experience rather than an object of experience. If we are careful to allow for different meanings of "union" and other concepts such as "self," it provides some heuristic guidance for thinking about mysticism. I return to this issue below.

[7] For a critical response to Katz, see Forman 1990.

[8] For an example with respect to the issue of oneness or unification, see Gimello 1978, 177.

A careful use of "mysticism" as a category in the study of religion will be attentive to history and context, but we should not renounce the category in a misguided attempt to protect particularity. To do so would not only prevent comparison across traditions, but within them. Within Christianity, for instance, there are a multiplicity of mysticisms. Bernard McGinn has considered this multiplicity and argues that if we hold to a strict idea of union with God as the defining criterion of mystical experience, there are very few mystics in the Christian tradition. He suggests, as an alternative to union, the "presence" of God, and he points out that such presence has taken many shapes, including, in addition to "union," "contemplation," "ecstasy," and "birth of the Word in the soul." McGinn emphasizes the adjective "mystical" rather than the noun "mysticism" to indicate that we do not find *mystics* in Christianity, but *Christians,* whose lives have a more or less pronounced "mystical element." The mystical element of Christianity is "that part of its belief and practices that concerns the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the reaction to what can be described as the immediate or direct presence of God" (1994: xvii). McGinn thus lays the groundwork for comparison within the Christian tradition without sacrificing detailed attention to context.

In part, he is able to do this because he stresses the mystical life rather than a single Christian mystical experience. Indeed, he shows that for many Christian mystics, the mystical element of their thought and practice is not focused on dramatic experiences as the goal or the essence of their religious life. Many Christian mystics, such as Meister Eckhart, have been quite critical of the preoccupation with such experiences and are suspicious of their own. The point is not any particular experience, but rather the transformation of consciousness or awareness (McGinn 1994: xviii). Thus, McGinn prefers to speak of "mystical consciousness" rather than "mystical experience," and, with his emphasis on the mystical life, this means not a transitory state of consciousness, but the cultivation of habits or ways of consciousness. What happens on either "side" of any particular experience, the preparation for and response to all the experiences that make up one's life, is as significant for understanding mysticism as those particular experiences themselves. Acknowledging the preparation for mystical experience, one notes the intimate connection between mysticism and ascetic practices that concentrate desire and consciousness. And, looking beyond "mystical experience," one notes that the ultimate significance of any experience can be understood only in the context of the religious life as a whole—no single experience by itself completes the Christian life or can tell us anything definitive about God. Eckhart suggests that the proper cultivation of one's relation to God should result in God's presence in all experience. In support, contemporary historian and theologian Rowan Williams argues that the key to Christian spiritual life

is not any particular "mystical experience," but the way the mystic is able to lead a life of bringing God's love into the world (1990: 122, 136). Robert Gimello makes the point more generally. "The mysticism of any particular mystic is really the whole pattern of his life. The wonderful 'peaks' of experience are a part of that pattern, but only a part, and their real value lies only in their relations to the other parts, to his thought, his moral values, his conduct towards others, his character and personality, etc." (1983: 85).

In sum, I am charting a tendency in contemporary studies of mysticism to focus on practices by which one reorients the dynamics or modes of his or her experience in general. This reorientation is made possible when the boundaries of self and other, self and world, are disrupted or transformed in the context of being opened to the divine, or to "reality." This is not to deny dramatic experiences as part of the mystical life, or to say that such a life does not involve some kind of awareness or knowledge of the divine or ultimate reality or truth. But such awareness should be thought of in terms of a transformation of consciousness, not resulting simply from a particular experience, but deliberately cultivated in a life of study, discipline, and spiritual practice in which one transforms the way one experiences self, world, and God. In short, it is helpful to differentiate between "ecstatic experience" and "mystical life." In his study of the Hindu mystic Ramakrishna, Sudhir Kakar offers the ideas of "creative experiencing" and "experiencing experience" to point to a kind of openness to experience, a kind of *responsiveness*, that takes shape in the mystic's encounter with the divine. In the Hindu context, Kakar describes this responsiveness—"which is done 'with all one's heart, all one's soul, and all one's might' "—with the Sanskrit term *bhava*, which can be translated as "feeling" or "mood." *Bhava* is a *way* of experiencing, not a particular experience. In Ramakrishna's case, it is a way of "rekindl[ing] the world with fresh vision, discovering or rather endowing it with newfound beauty and harmony. . . .[It] deepened his sensate and metaphysical responsiveness" (1991: 18–19). In the Christian context, the analogy to the responsiveness of this *bhava* is love. At least some Christian mystics do speak of experiences of union, but more important, from the perspective I am suggesting, is the way the mystic becomes open to and so a vehicle for the love exemplified in Christ. In and through such love, the mystic moves toward the world and all experience, in a new, creative responsiveness to it.

What Does the Mystic Know?

If we think of mysticism as a transformation of experience in general toward an increased responsiveness, and de-emphasize the significance of particular experiences of particular "objects," then we also need to re-

think some of the difficult issues surrounding mystical knowledge. In his treatment of mysticism as the most important form of religious experience, William James was influential in raising the problem of the "noetic" element of mysticism. As James notes, mystical experiences are often reported to be "inexpressible" or "ineffable" and so "are more like states of feeling than like states of intellect."[9] At the same time, though, mystics also claim that these are states of knowledge, "states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect" (1985: 380). Following up on the long tradition in which the "mystical" resonates with a sense of mystery, secret, and hidden knowledge, this knowledge, as James puts it, is in some sense not accessible to our normal ways of understanding and not able to be articulated by our normal ways of speaking. What kind of knowledge or truth is at stake here? Much recent philosophical interest in mysticism is related to the question of what kinds of knowledge claims mystical or religious experience provide. Indeed, the modern construction of mysticism takes shape in large part through a confrontation with philosophical knowledge claims. As early as Kant, we find a philosopher protecting the boundaries of the knowable from extravagant mystical claims to a kind of privileged, immediate access to God. Kant's epistemological revolution forecloses knowledge of God in confining knowledge to the empirical world, to that which we "experience" through the senses. Kant rejects what he calls "intellectual intuition" and dismisses as spurious "mystical" claims to knowledge received in ways other than through the senses. The God Kant left room for was the God who was an idea of pure reason, a God we could think but not know. On Kantian grounds, the idea of mystical knowledge, as knowledge of God, becomes incoherent. Thus, relatively early in the modern period, mysticism is cast as the "other" of philosophy.[10]

As part of his historical critique of the experientialist approach to Christian mysticism, Denys Turner (1996) warns that it is a mistake, on mystical grounds, to try to comprehend Christian mysticism as an "experiential positivism." In other words, we should not view mysticism along the lines of an experience of the divine, which, if not sensory, is at least directly analogous to sensory experience in terms of an encounter between subject and object and in terms of the knowledge such an encounter produces. At least from the perspective of the apophatic tradition Turner examines, mysticism does not challenge the knowledge claims of philoso-

[9] For the continuing debate on the usefulness of the concept of ineffability, both with respect to the attempt to describe mystical experience and the process of cultivating certain kinds of experience, see Katz 1978, Proudfoot 1985, and Sells 1994.

[10] Apart from the fundamental philosphical claims made by Kant in his *Critiques*, see also Kant's essay "What Is Orientation in Thinking" (1991). As I have already indicated, Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, characterizes Socrates as an antimystic. See also Habermas's treatment of Derrida in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1986: 182–84).

phy. One of the common claims made by mystics and their interpreters is that mystical experience is ineffable; that is, always more than language can say. Indeed, mystical texts are often written in such a way as to point away from themselves or to subvert their own descriptive or conceptual function. Does this mean that there is actually propositional knowledge there, "in" the mystic, that he or she simply cannot communicate to others? Or does it suggest, instead, that the model of propositional scientific or philosophical knowledge is not an appropriate model for what the mystic "knows"? Consider James's assertion that mystical experiences are "more like states of feeling than like states of intellect" (1985: 380). Is there knowledge involved in being in a state of love or a state of joy? We would, I think, agree that the feeling of being in love entails far more than the knowledge that "I am in love with X." In fact, one may never "know" that one is in love, but may eventually find that such knowledge is not crucial, that what is crucial is a developing relationship, a certain "feel" for a particular way of being in the world. Again I would employ the distinction between specific experiences and "ways" of experiencing. Mysticism involves, primarily, a sense, both in body and mind, of *how* to experience; less crucial is knowledge gained from or grounded by particular experiences. If we were to think of mysticism along these lines, as a kind of opening or expanding of experience, a new awareness, other possibilities emerge for thinking about what mystics can and cannot know.

To elaborate, I turn to the work of philosopher Stanley Cavell. Cavell's thought emerges from encounters with thinkers whom one often sees described as mystical: Wittgenstein and Heidegger, and especially Emerson and Thoreau (whom Cavell does describe as a mystic). One way of placing Cavell as a philosopher is through his contributions to the romantic response to Kant and the problem of skepticism. Kant described his project as limiting knowledge to make room for faith, which among other things meant separating human beings from any direct knowledge of world and God as things in themselves. The romantic response to Kant sought to overcome the Kantian gulf between human beings and things in themselves. For my purposes, Cavell's most important contribution to this confrontation is the concept of *acknowledgment*, a concept with which he articulates a relation to the world that is more "primary" than Kantian knowledge (1981: 106). Cavell basically accepts Kant's view of knowledge as a constructive activity based in material provided by the senses. But he also develops the idea of a mode of thinking—acknowledgment—which is a kind of intellectual receptivity (1990: 39). Cavell argues that in Emerson and Thoreau we find resources for conceptualizing a kind of intuitive intimacy with the world which is neither Kantian "immediacy" nor knowledge, not concepts one constructs of any particular aspects of

the world, but rather an openness or responsiveness to the world as a whole, as something other than me (1981: 107). Cavell posits a "mutual attraction" between human and world, a form of "romance"; following Thoreau, he calls this relation a nextness, a neighboring of the world (1981: 106).

Cavell argues that the skeptical dissatisfaction with the lack of direct knowledge of things in themselves is part of the human condition as finite creatures. The traditional philosophical response to this condition has been to try to satisfy this desire through a better, more exacting foundation for our knowledge, or the replacement of our ordinary language with a special, exact set of words, or with something beyond language altogether. Cavell argues, however, that such strategies not only cannot succeed but end up obscuring the intimacy with the world that we have through acknowledgment. The more we try to grasp the world through knowledge, the more, to use an image from Emerson, it slips through our hands. With Heidegger, Cavell envisions a kind of thinking that is not grasping, but receptive: thinking as thanking.

The distinction Cavell makes between intimacy and immediacy reflects his debt to ordinary language philosophy, and especially to Wittgenstein. Where certain philosophers view the mediation of our ordinary language as precisely that which separates us from the world and each other, Cavell, following Wittgenstein, argues that language connects us to the world and to each other. Words, on this view, represent an "agreement" between human beings and the world. Only in and through ordinary language do humans encounter the world and each other at all. Language constitutes, rather than limits, our relation to the world (Cavell 1990: 22). It affords us intimacy. Philosophy, then, is not the search for a transparent language or foundations for knowledge, but a kind of "therapy" (Cavell's word, after Wittgenstein) or "spiritual exercise" (my word), a testing and contesting of word and self by which human beings realize their intimacy with the world. This intimacy is "deeper" than knowing; it is a condition of knowing. So Cavell argues that we must struggle with words by living them beyond habit and necessity, hearing them from all sides, listening for their resonance, resisting, as Nietzsche recognized, the conformity to which they tempt us. We must examine with the thoroughness of a philosopher all the conditions of our words, not simply our habitual, narrow uses of them (1988: 14). When we do not test our words by examining their conditions, we face a double danger: either we repudiate our conditions altogether, desiring an inhuman intimacy; or, alternatively, we believe ourselves too narrowly constrained by conditions, subjecting ourselves to various kinds of false necessity. The task of philosophy, therefore, is to examine the conditions of our words, the conditions of our relation to the world. Clarifying them, returning to them out of our desire to tran-

scend our conditions, means acknowledging ourselves and our relation to the world.

In this sense, then, it is important not to romanticize (too much) the concept of acknowledgment by casting it as a kind of fuzzy, "mystical," extrasensory capacity (1988: 8). It is first of all a discipline that attends carefully to the way we use and abuse language; a way of locating ourselves in relation to language and the world. And certainly, if one is convinced that mysticism is all about extraordinary experiences beyond words, Cavell's orientation to the problem of language and the ordinary seems to take us in precisely the opposite direction from mysticism. Cavell immerses us in words, in everyday words, telling us not to try to escape the way they condition us and so deny our humanity. Insofar as the skeptic desires and the mystic accomplishes a closer relationship to the world and/or God, more immediate than our words, and tries to realize this relationship, he or she denies language and the human.

But is not such denial the first move of the mystic? Yes and no. Cavell does not deny that a certain denial of the human and a certain desire for transcendence moves the search for immediacy. But in striving for immediacy, the skeptic, the foundationalist (and, I would add, certain mystics), deny intimacy, the deepest relationship with reality that human beings can have. This does not mean that Cavell denies transcendence. On the contrary, he seeks to refigure it as a movement more deeply into our humanity and its relation to what is external to it, Other. This is a movement toward finding fullness of life *within* the ordinary, not in a flight to the extraordinary. There is a turn toward the extraordinary in Cavell, but this turn has to be accompanied always by a return to the ordinary, in what he describes as a reinhabiting of the world.

It may seem that this intimacy is not enough to be counted as mystical, that, indeed, a more complete, even an absolute immediacy is what is called for. Discussing Thoreau's "neighboring," Cavell writes: "You may call this mysticism, but it is a very particular view of the subject; it is not what the inexperienced may imagine as a claim to union, or absorption in nature" (1981: 106). As I have argued, though, this concern with experiential immediacy is largely a product of the modern encounter between philosophy and religion. What I find so provocative about Cavell—and I will develop this further below—is that he is trying to conceive of a kind of receptivity that is part of all experience. This receptivity is shaped in an acknowledgment of the otherness of the world, a world apart from me. This I think is close to the mystical idea of God as Denys Turner presents it: "God is what is on the other side of anything at all we can be conscious of, whether of its presence or of its absence" (1996: 264). Cavell helps us think of mysticism as a practice of placing oneself in the life

of the world by encountering it in the reality of its otherness, which is a precondition for acknowledging it in its relation to us. In doing so, he provides resources for thinking about an affirmative (in Nietzsche's sense) mysticism.

What Does the Mystic Write?

Also suggestive in this context, and also to be picked up again below, is Cavell's focus on testing and contesting of words—acknowledgment as a practice of reading and writing. The issue of the reading and writing of mystical texts is a crucial one. Scholars of mysticism, for the most part, unless they are mystics themselves, do not have direct access to the mystical life or experience, but rather to "mystical" texts. Thus some scholars define mysticism not in terms of certain types of experience, but in terms of certain kinds of writing. Carl Keller has defined "mystical writing" as "texts that deal with ultimate knowledge," and he has specified a number of literary genres in which such writing is found, including aphorism, biography, report on visions, instruction, prayer, religious poetry, and fiction (1992: 77, 79). This list already suggests that defining such texts as "dealing" with ultimate knowledge is ambiguous. How does a poem or a prayer "deal" with ultimate knowledge? Do they make propositional knowledge claims—about God, for example—that can be tested for their validity? There is a similar problem with relating such writing to mystical experience. Keller argues that it is "impossible to chart the passage from the text to the experience." Taking a less extreme position, McGinn (1994: xiv) argues that it is necessary to articulate a "mystical hermeneutics," for it is rarely a simple matter to determine what is "experience" and what is "interpretation," "elaboration," or "reflection" of or on that experience.[11]

This problematic can be illustrated by Nietzsche's writing. Below, I concentrate on the way Nietzsche writes about certain kinds of extraordinary experience. Many of these are to be found in *Zarathustra*, and the questions one must raise with respect to mystical poetry should be raised here as well. Are Zarathustra's speeches and songs *accounts* of experience? If so, whose? Nietzsche's? Zarathustra's? Both in *Zarathustra* and elsewhere, Nietzsche surrounds his "accounts" of experience with warnings about the difficulty of being able to capture one's experience in words:

[11] Kevin Hart puts it nicely when he claims that mystical experience is "refracted" rather than "reflected" in texts and that "the texts themselves are endlessly refracted by other texts, by entire traditions of textual practices. Although what we may take to be a preexperience may institute a text it cannot function as the origin of the text's significations" (1989: 180–81).

"Our true experiences are not garrulous" (TI: 92). If, then, Zarathustra does not provide a description of his experiences, are his songs and speeches, like much mystical poetry, better seen as a *product* or *expression* of such experiences and/or of a particular kind of life? If so, are they simply expressions of the joy or awe that accompanies the experience, or are they an attempt to communicate some sense of the experience to others, or to provoke them toward their own experience through a certain kind of linguistic performance? Finally, one also might ask whether Nietzsche's writing is in some sense *constitutive of* his experiences or of a mystical way of experiencing. In other words, can writing itself be a kind of mystical practice?

There is no simple correspondence between mystical writing and mystical experience. Mystical language is liminal language, particularly in apophatic traditions. Michael Sells has examined apophasis in his fascinating study, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (1994). For Sells, the apophatic writings of figures such as Plotinus, Ibn Arabi, and Marguerite Porete struggle with the issue of divine transcendence of a monotheistic God: as the absolutely unlimited, how can God be referred to in language, which, as reference, always delimits? Conceptually, apophatic writing is often doctrinally radical, or, better, adoctrinal, for it twists itself away, in complex series of affirmations and negations, from the categories and definitions that it is the purpose of doctrine to maintain. This interweaving of affirmations and negations, argues Sells, moves toward the "transreferential"—without dispensing with naming the ultimate, this writing continually "unnames" and "unsays" and thereby points beyond reference.[12] This has the effect of unsaying distinctions between presence and absence, transcendence and immanence, divine and human, ordinary and extraordinary.

For Sells, apophasis is not simply writing that struggles conceptually with this problem of unnameability and unsaying, it *performs* it. This is a performance of "referential openness," in which reason is allowed "to lead beyond itself" (1994: 58) to the "mystery" to which so many mystical texts refer. This Sells describes as a "meaning event," which "does not describe or refer to mystical union but effects a semantic union that recreates or imitates the mystical union" (1994: 9). It is this event, and not any presumed experience or knowledge of author or reader, that defines a text for Sells as apophatic or mystical. The "meaning" of an apophatic

[12] Derrida (1992b) and others argue that Christian mystics, even the most radically apophatic, must posit God as a hyperessentiality and thus do not escape ontotheology. For a well-informed discussion of Derrida's text, which essentially supports Derrida's major claim, see Caputo 1997: 33 ff. Kevin Hart, however, writing before Derrida's essay, argues that apophasis is a form of deconstruction and thus is a "supplement" of positive theology, rather than simply playing a role within it (1989: 202). This position would seem to raise questions for Derrida's assertions about negative theology's "hyperessentiality."

text, therefore, can only be glimpsed in the constant movement and referential openness pointing toward mystery. The mystery is not a secret doctrine, which could be stated—to the right person at the right time—but an openness, an abyss of groundlessness, at the heart of a tradition's doctrine (1994: 8).[13] To say, nonetheless, that meaning is in some sense there—glimpsed—is to say that the assertions of doctrines, despite the tension caused by their negation, give a point of departure, a perspective on the boundary of meaning and nonmeaning, knowledge and mystery. Sells shows, for example, that the turns of John the Scot Eriugena's writing lead language to "overflow" with meaning so that the "reified and substantial deity momentarily recedes," affording a glimpse of God as a "nonentified divinity" (1994: 62).

Apophatic writing is, for Sells, a kind of performance designed to evoke a certain experience in the reader. For Michel de Certeau, it is something more, actually a practice or exercise—an *ascesis*—by which the writer shapes, concentrates, and even experiences his or her relation to the divine. De Certeau treats mystical discourse as a "labor of transcending limits" and—influenced by both Lacan and Derrida—he suggests that the object of the mystical life is to be found *within* the text of speaking and writing, and not prior to it. "The Other that organizes the text is not an outside the text. It is not the (imaginary) object that one might distinguish from the movement by which it is sketched" (1992: 15).[14] This is not to deny that mysticism involves a kind of experience, but to note that such experience is shaped in and through utterance. What de Certeau calls "mystics"—as opposed to traditional mystical theology—involves the production of a new language, an "experimental knowledge," which takes shape in a new kind of speaking and writing no longer grounded in the institutions and doctrines of the past. Mystics, a form of writing, seeks to speak in a way that is *founded* in being, rather than *adequate* to being; in other words, mystical language is not first of all theological description or reference; it is, instead, language that speaks out of a certain way of life and through which, at least in part, that life is shaped and led (1992: 113, 135). "Mystics *is* a 'manner of speaking,' figured as a kind of 'walking' or 'gait,' especially as a 'wandering': he or she is a mystic who cannot stop walking and, with the certainty of what is lacking, knows of every place and object that it is *not that*; one cannot stay *there* nor be content with *that*."

This wandering language marks its destination at every moment in pointing beyond itself through an unsaying. Sells claims that the funda-

[13] For the importance of the "secret" in mystical writing, see also Sells 1994: 216, de Certeau 1986: 82, 91, and McGinn 1994: 1, 319.

[14] See also his claim that "the beginning of the mystic experience is thus to be found in the very operation . . . by which discourse takes up position" (1992: 187).

mental semantic unit of mystical discourse is the confrontation of two sentences in paradox; de Certeau argues that the fundamental unit is the trope, specifically the metaphor—a single word or phrase in which two meanings collide. For both, then, the smallest semantic unit is always doubled—and it is in the strain and strangeness produced in this doubling that a glimpse of the "beyond" is produced. For de Certeau the trope or figure is a turning, a conversion, that departs from the "proper" sense of our words and introduces deviation into discourse. This deviation or departure allows the glimpse of a different meaning. Metaphor, then, "is exit, semantic exile, already ecstasy," tropes are "machines for voyages and ecstasies outside of received meanings" (1992: 142–48). Such figures are at once signs of desire and detachment: desire for the beyond and the means of setting oneself "adrift" from past connections. They are therefore not just expressions of a particular kind of desire for that which is beyond language and the subjectivity constructed in that language; they are a way of connecting with that which is beyond language through language, of "*being* language's *other*" (1986: 96–97).[15]

With this, let me return to Cavell, for he develops the concept of acknowledgment in elaborating reading and writing as spiritual practices. Viewed this way, and through Cavell's reading of Emerson, the significance of metaphor as both apophatic and affirmative becomes evident. Cavell uses "reading" and "writing" in both literal and figurative senses. Reading is the way of receiving the world and our language, a discipline of attention to the conditions of our words. We are always already embedded in both language and the world, in the world through language and specifically through the conditions or agreements that make possible the intimacy between word and world (1988: 38). In reading we test and contest our words, our inheritance of language and the world, and, following Wittgenstein, our form of life. We thereby find ourselves in the world, locating ourselves in and through the conditions of language, which are our conditions for being in the world.

Writing, for Cavell, is a process of giving inflection to the language we receive. In this way language lives, and we find ourselves, as this voice, here and now, in the present. Reading and writing, on Cavell's view, are therefore not separate activities, but implicated with one another. Language is only fully received in our taking it up, in enacting our part of the relation with the world, bringing it to life.[16] Writing too, then, is a contest:

[15] De Certeau himself notes a link between Nietzsche and his mystics. Writing of Saint Teresa, he reflects on "a disappearance (ecstasy) or death that constitutes the subject as pleasure in the other. 'I is an other'—that is the secret told by the mystic long before the poetic experience of Rimbaud, Rilke, or Nietzsche" (1986: 96).

[16] Like Katz, Cavell is concerned with our inheritance of language, but articulates, I think, a deeper, more complex relationship with language than Katz's constructivism allows. He is thereby able to say more about the way a certain receptiveness to language games is also the way to transfiguring self and language.

our inflections of language, the active component of our reception of language, is a way of testing language by expanding it, not simply resigning ourselves to its conditions. As is the case in many mystical traditions, and especially in apophatic traditions, Cavell is aware of the ways in which words trap us, habituate us, and tear us away from reality, making intimacy impossible. Our words continually lead us to desire a grasping relationship with the world, so we must just as continually unsay them, silence them, so that we may listen to the world and through this relationship bring new words to life. Cavell considers the relation, or the mutual implication, of philosophy and poetry. Where the skeptic seeks to transcend conditions, and where one enslaved to habit contracts his or her conditions, the philosopher-poet tests conditions and expands them in figure and metaphor (which, of course, depend on mutual agreement as to the literal meaning of words, their conditions, in order to work). "In the realm of the figurative, our words are not felt as confining but as releasing, or not as binding but as bonding" (1988: 148). Metaphor, so to speak, pushes against the conditions of language without rejecting them, represents, therefore, the tension between the ordinary and extraordinary, through which we try to bring life to our intuitions, to our reception of the world. For Cavell, the way we find oneself alive in language is to keep language alive, by finding oneself reborn into language at every moment.

In this context, it is important to think carefully about what apophasis is. As Michael Sells treats it, apophasis makes signification possible only in the tension created between saying and unsaying: statements do not have their significance in themselves, as self-contained propositions, but only in the dynamic of the process of alternation between saying and unsaying, and for Cavell, departure and return. The apophatic movement is not so much the exhaustion or transcendence of language, but a mode of thinking and writing by which the deadening habits of language are resisted so that words are able to continually relate us to the world here and now. And apophasis is mysticism not as extraordinary experience, but as practice, a way to live deliberately.

A Mystical Hermeneutic: Passion for the Real

Of the mystical life, Meister Eckhart wrote: "If a man thinks he will get more of God by meditation, by devotion, by ecstasies or by special infusion of grace than by the fireside or in the stable—that is nothing but taking God, wrapping a cloak round His head and shoving Him under a bench. For whoever seeks God in a special way gets the way and misses God, who lies hidden in it" (Forman 1990: 113).

In both the Christian and the Buddhist traditions, spiritual practices of transcending self and intensifying life enable, ideally, a spontaneous commitment to living beings (enacted in love or compassion). To the ex-

tent that we can talk about transcendence in each case, transcendence does not involve a release or escape from the world as such, but from the habits and words that construct the world according to self-centered needs and anxieties: one transcends a certain way of being in the world, one is released toward the other. There are numerous concrete figures in these traditions who exemplify a fruitful and complex tension between transcendence and immanence, the desire for salvation from the "world" and a loving, affirmative engagement with it.[17]

Thoreau writes that "God himself culminates in the present moment" (1991: 79). Can we reimagine mysticism, then, in terms of a process of placing or finding the human in relation to that which is really real? A transcendence that is not transport to another realm, but to another inhabitation of this realm (Cavell 1989: 107), not an effort to remove oneself from the world, not encountering God or ultimate reality as an escape from the world, but a way of intensifying and realizing life here and now? A transformation of the way one experiences the world instead of an otherworldly experience? We find such mysticism in Eckhart's counsel to seek God in the stable, in the Beguines and their loving service to others, and in Thomas Merton's insistence that "it is in the ordinary duties and labors of life that the Christian can and should develop his spiritual union with God" (1996: 9). From this perspective, the precise outlines of the "object" of mystical experience are less important than a dynamic of "transcendence" and "immanence" by which one returns, awakened, to the world, through a departure from it.

For de Certeau, mystic discourse is a wandering writing based in the turning of the trope, a "manner of speaking" about a passion and a manner of speaking passionately. The object of this passion is clear: it is a passion *for* God—which, as it works toward union, also becomes a passion *of* God. I find a similar "manner of speaking" in Nietzsche's writing, though I will not attempt to argue that we find there a passion for God. The issue, though, is not the object of the passion, but the passion itself. Even de Certeau is caught between passion and the object of the passion. On the one hand, he distinguishes between the form and content of mys-

[17] The best comparison along these lines would be between Christian love mysticism and Mahayana Buddhism. Thus, Robert Gimello writes: "Mahayana enlightenment is said to be a way of life, a pattern of conduct, a manner of acting. The human ideal of Mahayana, the bodhisattva, is precisely the being who does not abide in or succumb to his own salvific experiences, but rather turns them compassinately to account in his work among and for all sentient beings" (1978: 190). And Louis Dupre on Christian love mysticism: "As the incarnational consciousness spread to all creation, divine transcendence ceased to imply a negation of the created world. Thenceforth God's presence has been found within rather than beyond creation. Precisely this immanentization of the divine accounts for the earthly quality of Christian love mysticism and for its followers deep involvement with human cares and worldly concerns" (1987: 255).

tics, the form being a language of departure, the content being God. Yet his analysis of mystic language leads him to acknowledge that the object of this language "is never anything but the unstable metaphor for what is inaccessible. Every 'object' of mystical discourse becomes inverted into the trace of an ever-passing Subject" (1992: 77). Mystic texts, he writes, "tell of a passion of what *is*," yet "the Other that organizes the text is not an outside of the text" (1992: 15). With respect to Nietzsche's work, I will use the term *passion* to point to a form of desire and a way of speaking, writing, living this desire, and which, as a translation of "affirmation" or "the eternal joy of becoming," I will call "a passion for the real." The passion for the real does not make an object of the real (as apophasis refuses to make an object of God), but, as passion, as a form of suffering, it is a responsiveness to the real, a participation with it.

Where de Certeau's mystics write a passion for God that is always at the same time a departing from any positive statement about God, Nietzsche writes passion for an affirmative relation to this world and one's own life that always both invokes and turns away from the real. Much of the passion of Nietzsche's writing is reflected in its "unsaying," in the multiple voices that shake the idea of a unified philosophical voice, in the hyperbole that casts suspicion on "Nietzsche's" seriousness, and in the clash between measured philosophical prose and other forms of writing. All this represents a kind of "letting go" and a certain transcendence of "self" and "truth" by which Nietzsche aligns himself with, speaks with the voice of, life. In the intensity of its concentration and the explosiveness of its release, Nietzsche's writing figures a certain kind of ecstasy; in its liminality it points away from its own truth claims by alerting us to the tension between concealing and revealing that it harbors. In both de Certeau's mystics and in Nietzsche, one finds such passions of self-transcendence lived in a wandering and a writing that involve at once a search for and an inscription/evocation of a "real." This "real" cannot be circumscribed as an object; it is as much a "how" of becoming as a "what" of being.

Mysticism, as I am construing it here, is not about the human *achievement* of the nonhuman, but about a *meeting* between the human and what is other than human—here and now. One of the paradoxical things about mysticism is that it involves both activity and passivity; even though it involves rigorous human practice, it also involves a kind of passivity that is not so much achieved as happens. The passion for the real is not accomplished in grasping it, in knowing it, but in a certain kind of awakening to or receiving of it. The practice involved is a matter of confronting one's false necessities and false hopes—one's fantasies, as Iris Murdoch would call them. Cavell, like Murdoch and Freud, and like mystics from various religious traditions, sees spiritual practice as a process of confronting and overcoming the narcissistic fantasies that separate us from reality. This is

a painful process of purification, a process that involves surrendering to the facts of human existence without hope for reward or consolation, but simply for "truthful obedience."

It is necessary to take seriously mystical forms of engagement with the world. It also is necessary to consider Nietzschean forms of transcendence. Both manifest complexities that defeat any simple distinctions between "this-worldliness" and "other-worldliness." In 1883, as he was making notes for the third book of *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche cited a passage from Emerson's "Circles": "The one thing which we seek with insatiable desire is to forget ourselves, to be surprised out of our propriety, to lose our sempiternal memory, and to do something without knowing how or why; in short to draw a new circle. Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm. The way of life is wonderful: it is by abandonment" (SW 10: 486).

I locate the mystical element of Nietzsche's thought in the way he writes a certain insatiable desire, abandonment, and creativity on the limits of his philosophical discourse. Emerson's abandonment is Nietzsche's "forgetting." To "forget" the self, the "I," is to forget philosophy's attempt to grasp and comprehend the world; self-forgetting is a limit, an ecstasy, an abandon by which the world and self are released in an experience of reality beyond the intentionality of the philosophical reach. It is to step into the mode of "creative experiencing": "Oh, how we now learn to forget well, and to be good at *not* knowing, as artists!" (GS: 37).

In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss the central place of ecstatic, mystical experience in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. In Chapter 5, I examine the way Nietzsche writes "the eternal joy of becoming" into his philosophy. In Chapter 6, I return to the problem of suffering to argue that especially in Nietzsche's approach to this problem, one finds a complex interweaving of transfiguration, transcendence, and immanence.

Zarathustra and Mysticism

Nietzsche writes:

> He must yet come to us, the redeeming man of great love and contempt, the creative spirit whose compelling strength will not let him rest in any aloofness or any beyond, whose isolation is misunderstood by the people as it were a flight *from* reality—while it is only his absorption, immersion, penetration *into* reality, so that, when he one day emerges again into the light, he may bring home the *redemption* of this reality. (GM: 96)

Despite Nietzsche's philosophical shifts after *The Birth of Tragedy*, there remains a significant mystical element in his thought. This is most

obvious in *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* which Nietzsche himself described as a "dithyramb" (EH: 306) and as "devotional literature" (SP: 82).[18] *Zarathustra* contains numerous episodes that read like mystical poetry; it returns again and again to dramatic experiences of ecstatic vision and communion, and it is the book in which Nietzsche's writing finds its most poetic and celebratory expression as it strains between exuberant Yes-saying and prophetic denunciation. The book narrates the "searches and researches," the trials and the joys, of a teacher/sage who struggles with his hopes for humanity, with the difficulty of communicating with his fellow human beings, and with his love of life. This love gains depth and strength in the course of the narrative. At the heart of *Zarathustra*, as Nietzsche later claimed, is the difficult "idea" of eternal recurrence. Some commentators have treated *Zarathustra* as a philosophical text with a veneer of poetry and narrative that can be wiped away to reveal a "doctrine" of eternal recurrence at the center of the text. I will argue, however, that before thinking about the philosophical significance of a doctrine or concept of eternal recurrence, it is necessary to consider Zarathustra's experience of eternity.

Zarathustra's Eternity

Thus Spake Zarathustra is divided into four books, in which Nietzsche draws and redraws lines between "supreme experience" and "suffering, pain and agony" in varying figures of ecstasy. Among the comings and goings and the speeches of Zarathustra in the first two books, Nietzsche includes a number of episodes that relate experiences and visions, setting a mystical tone and anticipating later, climactic events.[19] At the very start, Zarathustra's proclamation of the *Ubermensch* also proclaims Dionysian ecstasy. "Behold, I teach you the *Ubermensch*: he is this lightning, he is this frenzy" (Z: 14). And, with his announcements of the "coming" *Ubermensch*, with his own comings and goings, and with his dancing, Zarathustra himself is a mask for Dionysus, as Nietzsche points out in *Ecce Homo*: "My concept of the 'Dionysian' [in *Zarathustra*] became a *supreme deed*" (EH: 304).

Zarathustra's wisdom and vision are of heroic proportions, and as the book progresses this wisdom leads him to the terror of his most "abysmal thought." In the third book, intimations of this thought force Zarathustra to return to the solitude of his mountaintop and cave, where he can "con-

[18] One should also note Nietzsche's *Dithyrambs of Dionysus*. In "Fame and Eternity," he writes "eternal Yes of being, eternally am I thy Yes: for I love thee, O eternity" (DD: 67).

[19] "O heaven above me, pure and deep! You abyss of light! Seeing you, I tremble with godlike desires. To throw myself into your height, that is *my* depth. To hide in your purity, that is *my* innocence" (Z: 164).

verse with his soul." This conversation portrays deep a struggle within Zarathustra's soul, which finally leaves him in a deep trance. When he awakens, we learn for the first time that his abysmal thought concerned his realization that the small man, the sort of human being he had hoped to overcome, will recur eternally.[20] He tells his animals of his ordeal: "The great weariness with man—this choked me and had crawled into my throat. . . . 'Eternally recurs the man of whom you are weary, the small man' . . . All-too-small, the greatest!—that was my disgust with man. And the eternal recurrence even of the smallest—that was my weariness with all existence. Alas! Nausea! Nausea! Nausea!" (Z: 219).

Earlier, Zarathustra had struggled with the past, with the fact that while the future remains open, the will is constrained by its inability to change what has already happened. The will must therefore teach itself to embrace the past and say, "Thus I willed it." But in the abysmal thought, Zarathustra encounters a different despair, for the thought of eternal recurrence seems to have closed off not the past, but the future. Despite Zarathustra's great will for the transforming *Ubermensch*, he comes to realize that the "smallest" is going to recur eternally. The thought of this specific recurrence brings Zarathustra to the point of nausea. His quest for an affirmative humanity, his will for a new humanity, is seemingly at an end as he comes to realize that his will cannot, in a fundamental way, change the future.

But this point of despair and nausea is also a turning point for Zarathustra: finding his hopes for the future dashed, he turns to "eternity." In the final sections of Book Three, we find songs about the overcoming of despair and about love for life and eternity in "The Other Dancing Song" and "The Seven Seals (Or, The Yes and Amen Song)." In the course of "The Other Dancing Song," Zarathustra dances and converses with life—personified as a woman—and displays newfound wisdom that has resulted from his confrontation with the most abysmal thought. This song actually finds its first expression in Book Two's "The Dancing Song," where Zarathustra had despaired over his inability to "fathom" life. There, Zarathustra is looking for answers, and blames life when he cannot find them, putting a series of accusatory questions that serve as that song's refrain: "Why? What for? By what? Whither? Where? How? Is it not folly still to be alive?" (Z: 110). By contrast, in "The Other Dancing Song," Zarathustra no longer hurls penetrating questions at life, but follows life's labyrinthine lead, dancing *with* her. It seems that Zarathustra, as Nietzsche does in *Human, All too Human*, views the dance itself as a kind of answer to the problem of life—not an answer in the sense of a solution, but in the sense of a response. That is, Zarathustra has discovered, by the time of this second dance, that the important thing is not distanced,

[20] Nietzsche's original intention was for Book Three to be the end of *Zarathustra*. See Hayman (1982: 270).

objective knowledge that "fathoms" life, but rather engagement with life in a letting go of the boundaries of the knowing self, which enables one to participate with and love life. Zarathustra shows evidence of a new, and more complex, attitude toward life, one that involves a dance of love and hate, joy and suffering. "I fear you near, I love you far; your flight lures me, your seeking cures me: I suffer, but what would I not gladly suffer for you? . . . Who would not hate you. . . . Who would not love you" (Z: 225). After this dance/song, Zarathustra and Life pledge their mutual love for one another, Life claiming she loves Zarathustra on account of his wisdom, and Zarathustra saying, "Then life was dearer to me than all my wisdom ever was."

At this point of Book Three, something strange happens. The dialogue with Life comes to a halt, and the figures of Zarathustra and Life recede. The reader is left with only a short, untitled poem/song, whose words come forth from no apparent source. For convenience's sake, I will call it "the midnight song":[21] "One! O man, take care! Two! What does the deep midnight declare? Three! I was asleep—Four! From a dream I woke and swear: Five! The world is deep. Six! Deeper than day had been aware. Seven! Deep is its woe; Eight! Joy—deeper yet than agony: Nine! Woe implores: Go! Ten! But all joy wants eternity—Eleven! Wants deep, wants deep eternity. Twelve!" (Z: 227–28).

The "midnight song" tolls in stillness and anonymity, hollowing out a space in the text for a cryptic song of woe and joy. The tolling will recur at the end of Book Four, and below I will attempt to draw out some of its significance. Here, I simply remark on an anomaly. In each of the sections of *Zarathustra*, with the exception of this song and the one that follows it ("Seven Seals"), the speaker/singer is identified clearly in the text. These sections, however, are conspicuous for the absence of a specified voice.[22] This can be explained by the fact that Zarathustra, after his

[21] The importance of the midnight setting for this song should not be underestimated, especially by those interpreters of Nietzsche who place so much emphasis on his epistemological reflections in *Twilight of the Idol's* "How the 'Real World' at Last Became a Fable" (TI: 50–51). The climax of this fable is described by Nietzsche as "Mid-day; moment of the shortest shadow; end of the longest error; zenith of mankind; INCIPIT ZARATHUSTRA." This, then, is the "great noon" that Nietzsche celebrates in other writings as a moment of great affirmation. But the climaxes of *Zarathustra* in Books Three and Four take place at midnight, the "opposite" of the great noon, and usher in a new dawn. As always, enlightenment in Nietzsche is haunted by darkness and passion. Cf. Ricoeur on the "tragic view of the divine": "The sphere of the sacred, then, admits the polarity of night and day, the passion of night and the lawfulness of the day" (1967: 220).

[22] In *Zarathustra* each chapter ends in one of three ways: the vast majority are speeches or songs spoken/sung by Zarathustra, all of which conclude with either "Thus spake Zarathustra" or "Thus sang Zarathustra"; alternatively, some end with the voice of the narrator, describing, for instance, Zarathustra's journey; finally, a few sections end in conversation, either Zarathustra's internal dialogue or a conversation between Zarathustra and another character. In all these cases, the voice is identified clearly.

confrontation with his abysmal thought, after his dance with life and his pledge with love, undergoes an ecstatic experience, born of the painful experience of the abyss.

The tolling of the midnight bell is a prelude to a song of love, "The Seven Seals (Or, the Yes and Amen Song)." This is a song about the love for eternity: each section of the song ends with the refrain, "Oh, how should I not lust after eternity and after the nuptial ring of rings, the ring of recurrence? Never yet have I found the woman from whom I wanted children, unless it be this woman whom I love: for I love you, O eternity. *For I love you, O eternity!*" It is also a song of affirmation: the singer sings of watching a "heavy cloud . . . prepared for lightning and the redemptive flash, pregnant with lightning bolts that say Yes and laugh Yes." Finally, it is a song of participation: the singer "hangs on the mountains," dances "star-dances," sails on the sea, jumps into "rose slopes and hedges of lilies," and soars in the sky. In each of these respects—love, affirmation, and participation—the song attests to Zarathustra's ecstasy, even to the experience of a mystical union with all that is: he is lost to himself, he, Zarathustra, is no longer singer or agent, rather he is being sung, the anonymous voice of life is singing *through* him.[23]

Or dancing through him: "Now I am light, now I fly, now I see myself beneath myself, now a god dances through me" (Z: 41). Zarathustra has been struck by the frenzy, the Dionysian lightning bolt, precisely at the point of the descent into the abyss that causes him to surrender or radically refigure his hopes for the *Ubermensch*: in this surrender, he finds himself beyond himself. These final sections of Book Three inscribe the pattern of Dionysian ecstatic vision/dance that Nietzsche had delineated in *The Birth of Tragedy*: "In song and dance man expresses himself as a member of a higher community; he has forgotten how to walk and speak and is on the way toward flying into the air, dancing. . . . He feels himself a god, he himself now walks about enchanted, in ecstasy, like the gods he saw walking in his dreams" (BT: 37).

For some commentators, the crucial event at the end of Book Three is not this ecstatic experience but the doctrine of eternal recurrence articulated earlier, when Zarathustra awakes from his abysmal dream. Yet it is the animals, not Zarathustra, who, at this point, declare a "doctrine" of

[23] Peter Berkowitz (1995) argues that ultimately Zarathustra turns away from the visions represented by the climaxes to Books Three and Four. With this, he argues, Nietzsche shows how the self-deification and absolute mastery represented by Zarathustra's *Ubermensch* is not attainable. But note that the ecstatic vision of Book Three comes only *after* Zarathustra confronts the abysmal thought that essentially defeats his original hope for the *Ubermensch*. In contrast to Berkowitz, I argue that Nietzsche embraces the visions at the end of Books Three and Four, and that it is precisely there that we see a self-transcendence that undermines not deification, but the idea that the self, as an individual, can be perfected and become god. In other words, the deification represented here does not take the form of a human being assuming the mastery of the monotheistic God.

eternal recurrence. When he wakes, Zarathustra speaks of nausea and the eternally recurring small man. His animals respond to this by declaring Zarathustra the teacher of eternal recurrence: "Behold, we know what you teach: that all things recur eternally, and we ourselves too; and that we have already existed an eternal number of times, and all things with us." The animals continue, in words that form an interpretation of eternal recurrence as a cosmological doctrine. But Zarathustra's response to the declaration is evasive. He avoids affirming or denying the abstract, even metaphysical language used by the animals, first teasing the animals for having "made a hurdy-gurdy song" of his struggle by calling them "buffoons and barrel organs" and, then, falling into silence.[24]

This silence returns, in the form of a secret, one section later in "The Other Dancing Song." After Life has declared her love for him, and has scolded him for not loving her from the heart, Zarathustra whispers a secret to her, to which the reader is not privy. We only observe Life's surprised reaction: "Nobody knows that." At which point Zarathustra declares his love for life. Nietzsche portrays Zarathustra as having discovered something in his struggle and convalescence, but does not put it into words—or, more subtly, as secret, puts it into words that do not speak. One might speculate that Zarathustra's secret is that life recurs eternally. In the context, it does make sense that Zarathustra's most affirmative encounter with life would follow directly on his climatic encounter with his abysmal thought and that the key to his transformation would be his knowledge of eternal recurrence. But, again, Nietzsche veils Zarathustra's realization in the silence of the secret, refusing to have him state eternal recurrence—or whatever it is that he has learned—in a discursive, philosophical way. Aside from the secret, Nietzsche offers only ecstasy and poetry: Zarathustra's realization is "experienced," but only ecstatically; that is, as something that happens when one is not oneself; therefore, it can be figured or symbolized—in a dance or a song of love—but it cannot be the stuff of philosophical doctrine. The point, then, is not to articulate what lies behind the secret, but to follow the dance and the desire.

Questions remain nonetheless. In "The Seven Seals," the singer sings of "Yes-saying" and the love of eternity. What does love for "eternity" signify? In "The Other Dancing Song," Zarathustra had sung of the love of "life." Is the love of eternity also a love of life, or does this song express some remaining reluctance or inability on Zarathustra's part to fully affirm earthly, temporal life, as Heidegger suggests?[25] Such a suspicion might be supported by the central image of a birdlike spirit soaring above

[24] This point is made by both Shapiro (1989: 82) and White (1990).

[25] Heidegger (see Allison 1985) argues that rather than escaping the desire for revenge, Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence, and his thought as a whole, is the culmination of a tradition of Western thought that expresses the spirit of revenge.

all that is heavy and earthbound. Despite Nietzsche's many polemics against "otherworldliness," is it possible that this love for eternity is a desire to escape the earth and life? To answer these questions, it is necessary to turn to the fourth and final book of *Zarathustra*.

Joy

In Book Four, Zarathustra encounters the despair of various "higher men" and gathers them in his cave to converse and celebrate with them in a last supper. In the process, he engages in yet another struggle: to overcome his pity (*mit-leid*, or "suffering-with") for these higher men. The book is filled with absurd, comical characters and, on the whole, seems a parody. Yet the laughter that Zarathustra recommends to the higher men is not his final teaching. Following the riotous supper, in which much wine is consumed, Zarathustra undergoes another visionary experience in "The Nightwandering Song."[26] This song reprises the ecstatic songs at the end of Book Three: as it opens, Zarathustra's spirit flies ahead and comes to rest on the "high ridge" that was the scene for the opening lines of "The Seven Seals" (Z: 318). And again, the midnight bell tolls, drawing Zarathustra to mysterious depths where he experiences a moment of perfection: "Did not my world become perfect just now?" When the moment passes, Zarathustra speaks to the higher men, not in his own words, but whispering the "words" of the bell. "Here," says Zarathustra, "things are heard that by day may not become loud."

This is another vision bounded by deferral and silence, in which the reader and the higher men are told of suffering, joy, and eternity. Still, it is possible to draw some conclusions about the relation between eternity and the world left obscure by the end of Book Three. The song contrasts experiences of suffering and joy.

> All that is unripe wants to live: woe! Woe entreats: Go! Away, woe! But all that suffers wants to live, that it may become ripe and joyous and longing—longing

[26] This title of the song, *Das Nachtwandler-Lied*, suggests more than Kaufmann's translation, "The Drunken Song." Of course, Kaufmann's translation captures the important doubling of Zarathustra and Dionysus. But when Nietzsche writes that Zarathustra stands "like a drunkard," the German is unambiguous: Zarathustra is *wie ein Trunkener.* By contrast, *Nachtwandler* has the primary meaning of "sleepwalking." Significantly, *wandeln* means "to change" or "to walk," and *die Wandlung* is a "change" or, as a religious term, a "transubstantiation" or a "consecration." In this section, the wandering, the transformation, and even the consecration ("did not my world become perfect?") are as important, I think, as the drunkenness. After hearing the tolling of the midnight bell, Zarathustra calls to those around him, "Let us wander in the night" (*lasst uns in die Nacht wandeln*). It is worth noting, with respect to note 22 above, that Nietzsche also invokes sleepwalking at a crucial point of *The Gay Science*, where he considers the tension between the Enlightenment imperative to daylight and the "spirit and power of the dream": "We somnambulists of the day! We artists! We ignore what is natural. We are moonstruck and God-struck" (GS: 123).

> for what is farther, higher, brighter. "I want heirs"—thus speaks all that suffers; "I want children, I do not want *myself*." Joy, however, does not want heirs, or children—joy wants itself, wants eternity, wants recurrence, wants everything eternally the same. (Z: 322)

Nietzsche figures two modalities of desire: suffering desires life, though not its own, and joy desires eternity. In its desire to be rid of itself, woe becomes a creative, striving force; joy, on the other hand, wants everything to remain "eternally the same." Suffering wants what is not; joy affirms what is. In fact, joy gives us the simplest definition for Nietzsche's affirmation: the desiring embrace of what is, saying "Yes" in declaring all that is to be good.

As the song progresses, however, these different desires become related in a moment of perfection in which this "Yes" embraces suffering itself.

> Just now my world became perfect; midnight too is noon; pain too is a joy; curses too are a blessing; night too is a sun—go away or you will learn; a sage too is a fool. Have you ever said Yes to a single joy? O my friends, then you said Yes to *all* woe. All things are bound together, entangled, enamored; if ever you wanted one thing twice, if ever you said, "You please me, happiness! Abide, moment!" then you wanted *all* back. All anew, all eternally, all bound up, entangled, enamored—oh, then you *loved* the world. Eternal ones, love it eternally and evermore; and to woe too, you say: go, but return. *For all joy wants eternity* . . . so rich is joy that it thirsts for woe, for hell, for hatred, for disgrace, for the cripple, for *world*—this world, oh, you know it. . . . All eternal joy longs for failures. For all joy wants itself, hence it also wants agony. (Z: 323)

From beyond his perfect moment, Zarathustra signals that joy's love for eternity includes the desire for suffering; this is desire as love for the process, the eternal cycle by which it comes to be, a cycle that includes growth, flowering, and death, this love is constitutive of joy. Joy "longs" for failure and agony, it desires the struggle and conflict out of which suffering becomes creative: in this final song, Zarathustra, therefore, comes to love and affirm the recurrence of even the small man. The perspective of eternity and the experience of joy are more inclusive than the perspective or experience of woe; implicated in the experience of joy is the recognition of the way in which joy and woe are bound up together. Love for eternity is, *at the same time*, love for the becoming of the world. Thus, in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche writes that Zarathustra is one who "having being, dives into becoming; the soul that has, but wants to want and will" (EH: 305). Joy, world, and eternity are bound up momentarily in a perfect, fruitful union of love. In the perfect moment, the joy of eternity floods the present of the world, so that the present is affirmed by all that leads to it and from it.

Immanent Transcendence

Note the "listening" and the "wandering" in "The Nightwandering Song": Zarathustra is being overtaken by something over which he has little control and which throws his identity into confusion. The common image of the strident, ever-wakeful, invulnerable Nietzschean *Ubermensch* is radically qualified in these pages through the tenderness, hesitancy, and even passivity that are part of Zarathustra's ecstasy.[27] In and through this experience, Zarathustra overcomes the temptation of pity for the higher men, but he renounces his pity not in a self-aggrandizing, Darwinian assertion of superiority, but in a mystical declaration of love for the world. In contrast to interpretations of Nietzsche's will to power that see it (correctly) as a principle of immanence but that conclude (incorrectly) that this means that it is only a never-ending drive to historical self-transcendence, Zarathustra's mysticism involves a notion of transcendence in which the surpassing is not forward in time but toward a timeless grounding in the eternity of joy and love.[28]

Nietzsche describes a movement of transcendence toward eternity that is completed only in a return to the world and the finite self. Through this transcendence, one inhabits a transfigured self and world, seen through the eyes of love. Such love does not distort the reality of self and world, for "woe," "hatred," and "the cripple" remain: the love for eternity is mystical love for the real.[29] "The world" is not transcended as false or incomplete, as it would be in certain monistic religious systems (or as it is in Nietzsche's own, mature reading of *The Birth of Tragedy*); nor is the experience of eternity seen as a hint of better things to come, as it might be in certain understandings of Christianity. In other words, this transcendence is not a movement of self or spirit away from the earthly and finite. It is instead an expansion of awareness in which one's life in the earthly

[27] Earlier in the book, Zarathustra attributes the phrase "just now the world became perfect" to the happiness of the woman who "obeys out of entire love" (Z: 67).

[28] Yovel introduces the helpful term "inner transcendent dimension" in his discussion of transcendence in Hegel, Spinoza, and Nietzsche (1989: 111–2; 126). Yovel also is right to point out that Nietzsche rejects Hegel's telos and Spinoza's, "eternal substance and laws of nature" as the ground underlying the world of flux; that is, as the inner transcendent dimension of existence. Yet, in his attempt to preclude all pantheistic and mystical elements from Nietzsche's thought, Yovel attributes to Nietzsche a "defiant affirmation" that places him at odds with the universe. This claim does not do justice to the experiences of ecstasy in *Zarathustra*. There certainly is a kind of defiance in Nietzsche's affirmation, but it is the defiance of a certain kind of love, of *amor fati*, one that refuses resentful conclusions of suffering, pain, and disappointment. I develop this theme in Chapter 6.

[29] Rosset claims that "beatitude," "blessedness," *Seligkeit*, is the central theme of Nietzschean philosophy. This is "the simple and unadorned experience of the real" (1993: 25).

and finite is experienced differently, from a new center "beyond" itself or "deeper" than itself. "Eternity" is not a different realm of existence more real than our illusory, worldly realm, but rather the space of the "eternal joy of becoming" (TI: 120). Although Nietzsche rejects the comfort of metaphysical dualism, he continues to value an ecstatic abandon that has as its goal a certain reoccupying of the self, a resettling of or rebinding of the self to itself and world. An abyssal movement, a distancing of self from self, an ecstasy: a movement at/of the limits of the self through which one participates with the world's becoming.

Chapter Five

ECSTATIC PHILOSOPHY

> The music hoped for and heard, echoes in the body like an inner voice that one cannot specify by name but that transforms one's use of words. Whoever is "seized" or "possessed" by it begins to speak in a haunted tongue. The music comes from an unknown quarter, inaugurates a new rhythm of existence—some would say a new "breath," a new way of walking, a different "style" of life. It simultaneously captivates an attentiveness from within, disturbs the orderly flow of thought, and opens up or frees new spaces. There is no mystics without it. The mystic experience therefore often has the guise of a poem that we "hear" the way we drift into a dance.
> (Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*)

> Everything I have so far written is foreground; for me myself it always begins with the dashes.
> (Nietzsche, in a letter to his sister, Elisabeth Forster Nietzsche)

Introduction: Mystics and Metaphysics

IT IS ONE THING to claim that *Zarathustra* contains writing that one might describe as mystical or ecstatic poetry, it is another to claim that there is a mystical element pervading Nietzsche's thought in general. What is the relevance of *Zarathustra* for Nietzsche's later work? One might argue that the ecstatic poetry of Nietzsche's enigmatic "gift" is actually a parody of mystical affirmations, or an ironic warning against overexuberant hopes and loves. Given Nietzsche's attack on ascetic practices and mystical states in the *Genealogy*, such an interpretation cannot be dismissed. Yet, Nietzsche's later writing, viewed with a discerning eye, also supports a different interpretation. Nietzsche sought to rethink the task of philosophy. It is not surprising, then, that his writing stands out from the canon of Western philosophy—especially as that canon existed in his lifetime—for its stylistic diversity and resistance to straightforward argumentation, studied objectivity, and system. Nietzsche's is writing highly controlled in image and in the concentrated insight and thought of the aphorism; it is also writing that at least appears to let go of many of the restraints that determined "good taste," "scholarship," and "philoso-

Epigraphs: de Certeau, 1992: 297; Nietzsche, 20 May 1885.

phy" in nineteenth-century Europe. Nietzsche possessed, as he himself commented, "the most multifarious art of style." The reader is vividly reminded of this not only by the presence of *Zarathustra* at the center of his corpus, but also by the poems and songs at the margins of his "philosophical" texts, as well as the irony, hyperbole, and metaphor that figure throughout them. Nietzsche's writing draws attention to itself as liminal writing: writing situated at the boundary between philosophy and poetry, body and consciousness, emotion and reason; writing that in a significant and precise sense seeks to create an opening whereby the philosopher brings self and culture beyond themselves. Thus I name Nietzsche's revision of philosophy "ecstatic philosophy." In this chapter, I examine Nietzsche's ecstatic philosophy and then, in the final section of the chapter, begin the move from ecstatic philosophy to mystical writing. The mystical writing I have highlighted in *Zarathustra* should be taken seriously because it is inscribed in Nietzsche's later texts as well.

The mystical element of Nietzsche's affirmation is closely related to his antimetaphysical view of philosophy, which he continued to refine in the works that span the last four years of his active life and which finds its definitive statement in the attack on metaphysical dualism in *Twilight of the Idols*. To counter this dualism, expressed in the west's millennia-long religious and philosophical obsession with "being," Nietzsche invokes "becoming." As he does so, however, Nietzsche recognizes that the philosophical criticism of being recoils back on the mastery of philosophy, forcing the philosopher to acknowledge the limits of conceptualization. This ecstatic opening takes Nietzsche's writing in a mystical direction, to the figures of eternity and Dionysus. These figures do not occupy the central conceptual place of the books in which they appear; they are drawn at the edges and ends of Nietzsche's writing. There, they turn Nietzsche's philosophy out into the intoxicated overflowing of affirmation, and they qualify by deepening, not negating, the worldliness and historicity of Nietzsche's genealogical unmaskings.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche charged Socrates with antipathy to mysticism, yet also expressed the hope that one day an "artistic Socrates" would be possible (BT: 92). He wondered, in other words, about a philosophy that does not deny the positive and productive role of the Dionysian, or the "instincts," in the apprehension of reality and the living of life. Does Nietzsche's late philosophy embody this hope? Dionysus is all but absent from the writings Nietzsche published between 1872 and 1884.[1] By the time of *Ecce Homo*, however, he could proclaim, "I have the right to understand myself as the first tragic philosopher—that is, the most extreme opposite and antipode of a pessimistic philosopher. Before me

[1] However, Laurence Lampert (1986) persuasively argues that in many respects Zarathustra is a Dionysian figure.

this transposition [*Umsetzung*] of the Dionysian into a philosophical pathos did not exist: tragic wisdom was lacking" (EH: 273). In the mature works, the artistic Socrates becomes the Dionysian philosopher—the philosophical "disciple" of Dionysus. To understand the Dionysian as a philosophical pathos is to understand Nietzsche's writings as "gay science," where the cold demystifications of philosophy become woven into the practice and expression of the "eternal joy of becoming." And it is to understand how "tragic wisdom" is Nietzsche's expression for an affirming acknowledgment with which he supplants the pessimistic "wisdom of Silenus."

Becoming Dionysian

Dionysus

In a provocative study of *The Birth of Tragedy*, John Sallis argues that Nietzsche, even in his first book, was already engaged in a critique of Schopenhauer and a "twisting away" from metaphysics (Sallis 1991). Working from the philosophical ground cleared by Deleuze, and, above all, by Derrida, Sallis argues that the opposition between Apollo and Dionysus is one of tension rather than sublation or reconciliation. The crucial concepts for Sallis are *excess* and *ecstasy*. Dionysus determines the course of tragedy through a "logic of ecstasy" in which limits—of individuality, of reason, of metaphysics—are at once transgressed and delimited in an ecstatic movement. As a "state" of being outside oneself, ecstasy is a state in which the limits of the self are exceeded. But in this very transgression, ecstasy disrupts the opposition that distinguishes inside from outside, the self from the not-self; it disrupts as well, therefore, the opposition between self and other and self and thing.[2] More generally, then, ecstasy is in tension with the concept of being that structures metaphysical dualism.

Since limits themselves are a function of the Apollonian, the principle of individuation or determination, the Dionysian blurs the opposition that separates it from the Apollonian: the Dionysian disrupts "itself." But Sallis argues that from the perspective of the logic of ecstasy, there is no "itself," no being, as such, to the Dionysian. As that which is "opposed" to the Apollonian, the Dionysian "is" only as excess, in ecstasy: it "is" movement "beyond." The Dionysian cannot be experienced *as such*, but only in the flashing, excessive space on the margins of its Apollonian man-

[2] I might add the opposition between the religious and the secular. Sallis's (1991) is a brilliant reading of *The Birth of Tragedy*, but it also is a perfect example of a certain blindness among Nietzsche's commentators. Sallis writes of ecstasy, mysticism, gods, personifications of nature, healing, revelation, redemption—but registers no recognition of the possibility that a religious problematic could be involved in unpacking the text.

ifestation. The identity of the Dionysian, writes Sallis, is "abysmal": realized only in "the movement, the figure," not "in some originary being over against the individual, who in Dionysian ecstasy would then return to this origin. For there is no origin." There is no origin, there "is" abyss; there is no primal "one," there "is" excess. It might even be said, to elaborate on the discussion of mystical experience in the previous chapter, that the ecstatic, excessive experience of the Dionysian is no experience at all, since the "I," that which "has" experience, is disrupted in this excess. "Ecstatic experience" is an oxymoron; ecstasy takes place in the anonymity of the "event," rather than in experience.

In its abysmal disruption of metaphysics, Nietzsche's first book anticipates his later work: Dionysus returns as a figure of ecstasy or excess. The late Dionysus is not a concept that Nietzsche subjects to analysis or speculation, but rather an invocation that marks the limits between becoming and what can be thought or said. And it is the figure with which Nietzsche marks his efforts to exceed the deadening dogmatism of "the Crucified."

Accordingly, Dionysus appears almost exclusively at the end of the texts in which he appears, specifically, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *Twilight of the Idols*, and *Ecce Homo*. At the end of *Beyond Good and Evil*, in an exceptionally lyrical passage, Dionysus appears as a philosopher and an (at)-tempter god (or "god of experimenters), leading "every soul" deeper within itself and into new hopes and new dissatisfactions. As Kaufmann points out, the portrait Nietzsche draws here—Dionysus as philosopher-god—evokes Socrates as much as it evokes the Dionysus of *The Birth of Tragedy* (BG: 234, n. 43). But aspects of the early Dionysus remain, for this later one is "the great ambiguous one . . . to whom I once offered, as you know, in all secrecy and reverence, my first-born—as the last, it seems to me, who offered him a sacrifice" (BG: 235). More specifically, as tempter and attempter, this Dionysus leads one beyond established ways of thinking and valuing and into one's own depths where one finds oneself "newer to oneself, broken open . . . full of new will and currents, full of new dissatisfactions and undertows" (BG: 234). Dionysus takes one deep within oneself, confronts one with the excess, the alterity within. In this opening to new voices and new thoughts, which pluralize and energize, Dionysus teaches one how to listen.

At the end of *Twilight of the Idols*, Dionysus is the subject of some of the most explicitly religious passages in Nietzsche's published writing. There, he writes of a "faith" (*Glaube*) he has "baptized" (*getauft*) with the name of Dionysus and which he describes as a "joyful and trusting fatalism." He invokes the will to life of the pre-Socratic Greeks as an affirmative will to "eternal life" and claims that in the name *Dionysus*, this will is "experienced religiously" (*religios empfunden*). In a text that

argues conceptually against the privilege of *being* over *becoming* in philosophical discourse, Dionysus registers an experience of becoming that subverts the boundaries of self and time: in the Dionysian state, Nietzsche writes, one realizes "in oneself the eternal joy of becoming." As in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Dionysus represents an experience/event of becoming and renewal, a religious experience of gratitude and joy. This religiosity is further defined, through contrast, in *Ecce Homo*, where Dionysus marks the end of Nietzsche's writings. The final line of Nietzsche's final work reads, "Have I been understood—*Dionysus versus the Crucified*.—"

Dionysus makes another appearance in *Ecce Homo*, this time in the middle of the text, in the discussion of *Zarathustra*. Here, Dionysus names a certain excess of *Zarathustra*, a text that resists assimilation to Nietzsche's philosophical work and that, from Nietzsche's own hyperbolic point of view, is of ultimate importance not only for his own work but for all of humankind. In *Ecce Homo*, Zarathustra is now interpreted in the name of Dionysus. "My concept of the 'Dionysian' here became a *supreme deed*; measured against that, all the rest of human activity seems poor and relative" (EH: 304). Nietzsche relates Dionysus to Zarathustra in two ways. First, Dionysus/Zarathustra is a soul on the boundary of being and becoming, a soul that "having being, dives into becoming; the soul that *has*, but *wants* to want and will" (EH: 305). Second, Dionysus/Zarathustra is the spirit who bears the heaviest weight and stares into the deepest abysses, yet is "the lightest and most transcendent," "a dancer" who finds in the most abysmal idea—eternal recurrence—"one reason more for being himself the eternal Yes to all things, 'the tremendous, unbounded saying Yes and Amen' " (EH: 306).

Becoming

I am exploring the connections between the mystical sensibility in *The Birth of Tragedy*, the visionary and affirmative writing of *Zarathustra*, and Nietzsche's later philosophy. Attention to the role the figures "eternity" and "becoming" play in his attack on metaphysics will help articulate these connections. In an elusive and highly condensed chapter of *Twilight of the Idols*, entitled, "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable: The History of an Error," Nietzsche draws the broad outlines of a "history" of the metaphysical opposition between the true (*wahre*) and apparent (*scheinbare*) worlds.[3] In just over a single page, Nietzsche adumbrates six stages of the religious and philosophical history of this opposition, from *ressentiment* and metaphysics in Plato to "the high point of humanity," which he designates "INCIPIT ZARATHUSTRA." The final three stages

[3] He had treated this opposition previously as a key to understanding the faith in opposite values (BG: 1, 9–10, 46–47).

mark the decline of the idea of the true world: the fourth stage is characterized by the positivist claim that the concept of the true world is unthinkable;[4] the fifth by the recognition that the concept of the true world has become useless and, "consequently," refuted; and the sixth—"INCIPIT ZARATHUSTRA"—by the fact that "with the true world we have also abolished the apparent world" (TI: 51).[5] With these three latter stages, Nietzsche registers his rejection of positions that, at one time or another, he had seriously considered, particularly Kant's: although we can no longer claim to know anything about the true world, we still must posit one; and Schopenhauer's: we can intuit the "true world" of the will.

This history presents many difficulties and complexities; here I will confine myself to the final stage and the question of appearance. What does Nietzsche mean by overcoming the true-apparent distinction? This can be answered only by placing the "Fable" in the context of the immediately preceding section of the book. There, Nietzsche claims that to distinguish between the true and apparent worlds, and to value the former, is a sign of decadence. This is because a philosophy of stable oppositions and eternal truth, of faith in opposite values, places ultimate value on a dualistic stasis whereby "the higher [truth, beauty, consciousness] must not be allowed to grow out of the lower" (TI: 47). Nietzsche's frequent characterizations of Western philosophy as "vampirism" or "Egyptianism" convey his belief that philosophy preserves the illusion of eternity and order only by alienating thought from its origins in the body and life. To abolish the "true world," therefore, is to avoid the bewitching lures of consciousness and language, which depend on a degree of stasis in order to work at all, and to return to the living, growing, healthy body as the origin of thought. Every philosophical "position" or "word," as Nietzsche puts it in an earlier text, is a "mask" (BG: 229). But philosophy masks the excess of becoming, not a true world or thing-in-itself

As an exemplification of the healthy body, Nietzsche extols the "Dionysian artist." In doing so, he complicates matters, for he writes that this artist "esteems appearance [*der Schein*] higher than reality." That is, at the same time that Nietzsche rejects the opposition between the true and apparent worlds, he puts another distinction and another concept of appearance into play: the distinction between appearance and "reality."

[4] I use "unthinkable" in the Kantian sense of "thinking." For Kant, the true world can be thought, but it cannot be known. In discussing the fourth stage, Nietzsche uses the term *unbekannt*, which Hollingdale translates as "unknown." In German, though, there is a distinction between knowing in the sense of knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) and knowing in the sense of familiarity (*bekannt*), which English is not as adept at indicating. In the third stage, Nietzsche seems to indicate the true world as thinkable in the Kantian sense; in the fourth stage, then, *Bekannt* seems to indicate something like unimaginable.

[5] For insightful treatments of this crucial and controversial text, see Clark 1990; Heidegger 1991a, 1991b; and Rosen 1993.

Given Nietzsche's rejection of the apparent world/true world opposition, the appearance he attributes to the Dionysian artist must be something other than simple untruth or illusion. He confirms this by describing this new appearance as "reality *once more*, only by way of selection, reinforcement, and correction." Thus, rather than invoking two oppositions, Nietzsche contrasts an *opposition* between the philosophical sense of appearance and philosophical truth, on the one hand, with the relative *difference* between an artistic appearance and reality, on the other: artistic appearance *is* "reality once more." In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche offers a sense of what such a difference might entail when he posits a relative difference between truth and falsity. There, he had opposed metaphysical dualism by treating the true-false distinction in terms of "different degrees of apparentness, and, as it were, lighter and darker shadows and shades of appearance—different 'values,' to use the language of painters" (BG: 46–47). Nietzsche substitutes for the absolute metaphysical opposition between true and apparent worlds, a relative, artistic distinction between appearance and reality. To the extent that he does this as a philosopher, however, Nietzsche's nonmetaphysical, artistic "concept" of appearance also ultimately subverts the distinction between philosophy and art.[6]

Complications remain, however, for Nietzsche views artistic appearance as a "correction" of reality. But is not the idea that one can "correct" reality not indicative of weakness for Nietzsche? This issue needs to be approached from two perspectives, one is metaphysical/epistemological, the other is psychological.

First, the metaphysical/epistemological issues. Nietzsche's appeal to a Dionysian conception of art undercuts the philosophical distinction between truth and appearance by rejecting the idea that there is any intelligible ground or transcendent reality—Truth—"beneath" the process of appearance. As he puts it in *The Gay Science*:

> This youthful madness in the love of truth, [has] lost [its] charm for us: for that we are too experienced, too serious, too merry, too burned, too *profound*. We no longer believe that truth remains truth when the veils are withdrawn; we have lived too much to believe this. . . . Those Greeks were superficial—*out of profundity.* And is not this precisely what we are again coming back to, we daredevils of the spirit who have climbed the highest and most dangerous peak of present thought and looked around from up there—we who have looked *down* from there? Are we not, precisely in this respect, Greeks? Adorers of forms, of tones, of words? And therefore—*artists*? (GS: 38)

[6] Below, when I write of Dionysian art, it should be understood that such an artist is also a philosopher.

There is no ground; for Nietzsche there is only "becoming," a never-ending movement or flux out of which all phenomena appear. In countering philosophical claims about Being with his ideas about becoming, Nietzsche asserts a vision of what he describes as "the total character of the world" (*der Gesammt-Charakter der Welt*; GS: 168), which he calls "chaos." *Becoming*, as Nietzsche understands it, avoids metaphysics, at least in two specific senses of the term. First, becoming is not the ontological ground of appearance in the sense that it serves as a foundation or source to which all being can be traced. Instead, becoming is always both a concealing and a revealing, a shifting and a layering of surfaces, a continuous flux: becoming "is" abyss. Second, becoming is not the epistemological ground of appearance, understood as the means for comprehending and explaining the reality of appearances: becoming "is" chaos.[7] These claims point us in the direction of Cavell's concept of acknowledgment: one acknowledges, one does not know, "the total character of the world" as "chaos." Acknowledging becoming as our condition, the artist-philosopher relates to the world in a way that does not force him or her to think in terms of a dualistic contrast between reality and appearance. Acknowledgment thinks beyond what Emerson calls a "paltry empiricism," which would locate reality only in that which can be grasped by the senses, for, as "reality *once more*," becoming is something more than "mere appearance," more than that particular empirical reality that one ordinarily encounters as "this world." Though Nietzsche argues that there is no (metaphysically) true *world*, this does not exclude the position that there is something about our relation to this world that is not grasped by sense capacities and constructed by our understanding, but which still can, nonetheless, inform our use of reason and language.

Still, to the extent that Nietzsche does posit a "total character of existence," one might argue that he posits an "essence" of reality, and so remains a metaphysician.[8] As such, he substitutes for the philosophical and religious dualisms that have dominated Western thought what I will call an ecstatic monism. But this monism does not involve "essence" in the strict philosophical sense, for its "character" is to be without character or

[7] The figures of abyss (*Abgrund*) and chaos (*Chaos*) figure throughout Nietzsche's books and notes, particularly from the first edition of GS. For abyss, see GS 290. For chaos, see GS 168.

[8] Stanley Rosen (1993: 141) distinguishes between metaphysics in the Aristotelian sense as the study of Being *qua* being (which, for Nietzsche, is already committed to dualism) and metaphysics as claims about the whole beyond the empirical. It is in this last sense that Nietzsche remains a metaphysician. Salaquarda makes the related claim that Nietzsche rejects metaphysics as dualism, but follows F. A. Lange's idea of metaphysics as "*Begriffsdichtung*." Salaquarda also argues that Nietzsche differs from Lange in that the scientifically thematized world is itself not "given" but the product of interpretation (1989: 267).

principle. In Sallis's sense of the word, it "is" excess: reality is always "more." Thus it is an *ecstatic* monism: because "knowledge and becoming exclude one another" (WP: 517), because becoming is no-thing, is abyss, "it" cannot be known or held by the philosophical gaze. Nietzsche does, however, suggest that it can be glimpsed like a flash of lightning, in an awareness marked by the "once more." This insight is not the product of philosophical reflection or scientific objectivity; it does not comprehend reality. It is not even something "experienced" or "had" in the full, subjective sense of these words. It is something acknowledged in the course of, as the condition of, a certain kind of practice of relating to self and world. The real can only be embodied or performed in a practical, artistic engagement, a participation in the flux of life. This participation, claims Nietzsche, is a sign of the Dionysian artist, who "realizes" in himself "the eternal joy of becoming," who "adores" appearance.

Below, I will suggest that a key to this practice or performance is to be found in the role of metaphor in Nietzsche's writing. In and through metaphor, the artist who affirms reality "once more" maintains a tension between the particularity of appearance and the awareness of the abyss of becoming at the boundary of each and every appearance. Appearances, phenomena, are reality, yet there is for Nietzsche always a "more," there is always that which is *between* (not behind or above) different appearances.

Nietzsche continues to use a conception of reality, but it is one that does not function as a ground or foundation for his thought; instead, it demands the constant movement of thought. Thus, the question of the "correction" of reality is not, in the end, an epistemological or metaphysical question. It is only resolved for Nietzsche through the psychological distinction between a Dionysian affirmation of "appearance" and a weak, metaphysical condemnation of appearance. Appearance, Nietzsche's revised, nonmetaphysical, idea of appearance, *is* reality—"once more." Reveling in the eternal reiteration of the "once more," the Dionysian artist renounces the mastery over life sought by the philosopher-priest and so the morally inflected choice between the true and the false. In an early section of *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche treats the pretension to be able to evaluate and correct life as the paradigmatic gesture of Socratic philosophy. For the philosopher, correcting life means taking a position outside of life, or, in what amounts to the same thing, finding the ground of reality, in order to judge and correct life. As we have seen, Nietzsche rejects this pretense and argues that to assert a ground that "is" reality, is to reveal the decadent fear of life at the heart of one's vision of reality. By contrast, the affirmation of the groundlessness of becoming is a sign of the health of one who lives wholly and enthusiastically—and realistically, that is, in

the acknowledgment that we live by our interpreting, valuing, creative activity.

Artistic "correction," then, does not pretend to stand outside the flux of becoming, but rather is a certain kind of response to the flux from within it. The Dionysian artist-philosopher is committed to life as an endless process of reinterpreting, revaluing, transfiguring that finds its goal precisely in the constant "once more" of this process of creation. Such activity does not "correct" reality with Truth, but instead corrects one appearance/reality with another by creating out of the first, affirming it in a movement of idealization, what Nietzsche describes as "deification." Thus Nietzsche makes a psychological distinction between two kinds of the artistic "will to immortalize." This will, he asserts, can find its origin in the "tyrannical" and vengeful will of one who "would like to turn what is most personal, singular, and narrow, the real idiosyncrasy of his suffering, into a binding law and compulsion." Or, it can be an expression of "gratitude and love," a "dithyrambic . . . art of apotheosis" (GS: 329). Rather than asserting mastery, such art affirms; it says "*Yes* to all that is questionable and terrible in existence" (TI: 49).

This distinction between wills makes possible, finally, a clear statement of the difference between the Dionysian artist/philosopher of Nietzsche's later work and the Dionysus of *The Birth of Tragedy*. Consider the passage cited above from the preface to *The Gay Science*. There, truth is experienced as abyss, not as ground. For the philosopher, who needs ground to stand on, preferably ground that is "nowhere," this experience is terrifying and confusing. But in the return from the abyss to the surface, the artist "adores." In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche had claimed that one is "comforted" by the spectacle of the hero, by the shining beauty of the Apollonian image of primal suffering. This beauty makes one forget the pain of primal suffering. In the late work, however, Dionysian art celebrates the "once more" by deifying appearance without excluding other appearances, other deifications. Thus, it celebrates the plural, dynamic character of reality. This reality is not a world of *mere* appearance, as if there were some thing or world more real behind the appearance, but of *affirmed* appearance, that is, appearance created out of an affirmative stance toward becoming. In contrast to Nietzsche's first book, this return is not made out of necessity in order to hide from view the terrible truth of Dionysus; it is a return out of love and gratitude for this world.

There is a second crucial difference between the Dionysian of *The Birth of Tragedy* and that of the late work. In his first book, Nietzsche had not freed himself completely from Schopenhauerian pessimism: thus, life is suffering, but metaphysical comfort seduces us to live. He later rejects this pessimism, not by rejecting the idea that life is suffering, but by rethinking

suffering.[9] For Schopenhauer, suffering comes from lack, a desire or need one yearns to fulfill. Nietzsche poses an alternative: a "suffering from overfullness." "There are two kinds of sufferers: first those who suffer from *the overfullness of life*—they want a Dionysian art and likewise a tragic view of life, a tragic insight—and then those who suffer from *the impoverishment of life* and seek rest, stillness, calm seas, redemption from themselves" (GS: 328). The vectors of these two kinds of suffering are distinct. The suffering from impoverishment leads one to seek satisfaction, fulfillment, or completion: suffering desires to end desire, it seeks rest. By contrast, suffering from overfullness leads one to desire desire, to desire want; the Dionysian soul "*has*, but *wants* to want and will" (EH: 305). Becoming, therefore, does not mark the end of philosophy or writing, as the goal to which they are the means, but marks instead the love and desire out of which one philosophizes and writes in the first place.

At the Boundaries of Philosophy

Michel de Certeau has argued that mysticism is less a discourse on God than a "manner of speaking" that follows the "excess" of desire and the rhythm of the dance (1992: 113, 299). Nietzsche's Dionysus, the excess or ecstasy of the "once more," is revealed in a way of writing. Nietzsche does not so much philosophize *about* Dionysus or the eternal joy of becoming; rather, he enacts the Dionysian in writing that performs the ecstatic nonthought, nonexperience of the "once more." At the center of Nietzsche's corpus is *Zarathustra*, a book that Nietzsche describes as "dithyrambic." The excess of the dithyramb is, in a sense, the model for all of Nietzsche's writing, for even his philosophical texts are unusual for their celebration of metaphor, figure, narrative, for their cryptic, fragmentary style, and for their overt, often polemic engagement. They also are in many places interrupted and bounded by nonphilosophical or nonargumentative, nonconceptual writing such as poetry, song, and quasi-autobiographical narrative. These devices help Nietzsche to trace and exceed the boundaries of philosophical thought in his writing.

Experience and Text: Moments from the Life of Philosophy

Nietzsche often invokes and even offers some accounts of what he calls his "elevated states." It appears that Nietzsche during his lifetime did undergo at least one dramatic experience that we might call mystical: the moment, in August of 1881, "6,000 feet beyond man and time," when

[9] Because he continues to hold this position on suffering, he sometimes still refers to his position as pessimistic, though he is not consistent on this point.

he first "receives" the thought of eternal recurrence.[10] But whether or not we agree that Nietzsche did have "mystical experiences," it is clear that invoking "tremendous moments" or elevated states plays a crucial role in his writing. These are present in the series of prefaces he wrote in 1886–87, in the heavily stylized, autobiographical *Ecce Homo*, in the closing sections of his later writings, and in his notebooks—that is, generally on the boundaries of his "philosophy." While they do not play an active role "in" Nietzsche's philosophy—as warrants for truth-claims, for example—they do serve as sources for thought and help to define the philosopher: "A philosopher is a human being who constantly experiences, sees, hears, suspects, hopes, and dreams extraordinary things; who is struck by his own thoughts as from outside, as from above and below, as by *his* type of experiences and lightning bolts" (BG: 230).

Nietzsche offers one of the most extended and revealing of these accounts when he describes the experience of writing *Zarathustra*, a time during which, as he tells us, the "Yes-saying pathos *par excellence*, which I call the tragic pathos, was alive in me to the highest degree" (EH: 296). Nietzsche recalls that "Zarathustra overtook me," and that the main idea of the book, eternal recurrence, struck him like lightning (EH: 298).[11] From this, he describes "*my* experience of inspiration."

> If one had the slightest residue of superstition left in one's system, one could hardly reject altogether the idea that one is merely incarnation, merely mouthpiece, merely a medium of overpowering forces. The concept of revelation—in the sense that suddenly, with indescribable certainty and subtlety, something becomes *visible*, audible, something that shakes one to the last depths and throws one down—that merely describes the facts. One hears, one does not seek; one accepts, one does not ask who gives; like lightning, a thought flashes up, with necessity, without hesitation regarding its form—I never had any choice. A rapture whose tremendous tension occasionally discharges itself in a flood of tears—now the pace quickens involuntarily, now it becomes slow; one is altogether beside oneself. . . . Everything happens involuntarily in the highest degree but as in a gale of a feeling of freedom, of absoluteness, of power, of divinity.—The involuntariness of image and metaphor is strangest of all; one no longer has any notion of what is an image or a metaphor: everything offers itself as the nearest, most obvious, simplest expression. It actually seems, to allude to something Zarathustra says, as if the things themselves approached and offered themselves as metaphors. ("Here all things come caressingly to your

[10] See Kaufmann 1974: 323f.

[11] I have already remarked on the difficulty of asserting connections between mystical experience and mystical writing, and I will reassert that here I am interested in identifying those aspects of Nietzsche's "philosophy" that warrant the ascription of mystical writing. Still, it is not completely besides the point to note hints of Nietzsche's own "mystical" experience.

> discourse and flatter you; for they want to ride on your back. On every metaphor you ride to every truth. . . . Here the words and word-shrines of all being open up before you; here all being wishes to become word, all becoming wishes to learn from you how to speak"). (EH: 300–301)

Nietzsche traces two kinds of boundaries in this passage: between time and eternity and between writing and experience. The lightning of inspiration is powerful, striking in the flash of an instant, in the "Moment," it opens one to eternity. The "Moment" for Nietzsche is a brief but deeply significant event in one's life to which he returns again and again in his writing. "Life consists of rare individual moments of the highest significance and countless intervals in which at best the phantoms of those moments hover about us" (HH: 189). The Moment is ecstasy, for in the Moment one is overtaken, stricken—"I never had any choice"—and one experiences a flowing beyond the boundaries of the self. In a late notebook entry, Nietzsche writes: "Five, six seconds and not more: you suddenly feel the presence of the eternal harmony. . . . You seem to be in contact with the whole of nature and you say, 'Yes, this is true!' as God, when he created the world, said 'Yes, this is true, this is good' at the end of every day" (SW 13: 146).[12]

The Moment is fleeting, yet, in the sense that it contacts all of "nature" or "world," it is also eternal: both in and out of time, the flashing of eternity in the present. The first mention of eternal recurrence in *Zarathustra* takes place in a dream in which Zarathustra encounters a gateway called "Moment," where two paths meet, one going backward into eternity and the other forward (Z: 157–58). As Alan White has argued, eternity in this sense is not the eternity of time stretched out to recur over and over, not a cosmological recurrence, but "the omnipresence, the ubiquity of the moment within my earthly life, which is my only life" (1990: 100). Nietzsche elaborates on this idea in a famous passage from *The Gay Science*, in his first extended reference to eternal recurrence in his published writing. The reader is asked to imagine being visited by a demon who tells us that "this life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more." Nietzsche then poses a question: "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' " (GS: 273–74).[13] In both of these dreamlike scenarios, Nietzsche is asking us to attend in a concentrated way to our life; that is, to concentrate our life into a moment. In particular, he is asking whether we have experienced a "tremendous

[12] See also GS: 231 and SW 9: 554.

[13] I shall return to this question in the next chapter.

moment" that can transform a demonic scenario into an occasion for a declaration of divinity. Such moments, he thinks, raise a question for the whole of one's life: can the affirmation of the moment be carried through one's life, and, if so, how? In this sense, they are present at every other moment of life.

Nietzsche's account of inspiration also invokes the boundary between experience and writing, for it blurs the line between Nietzsche's own elevated, inspired state and the ecstatic experiences of the character Zarathustra. Nietzsche borrows images central to the ecstatic songs of joy in *Zarathustra*—lightning, the flood of tears—to describe the inspiration under which he wrote the book.[14] He even writes into this account one of the most clearly mystical passages from *Zarathustra*, where "all being" and the "things themselves" speak through the writer. Numerous boundaries are laid down and exceeded here: between self and not-self—Nietzsche-"overpowering forces," Nietzsche-Zarathustra, Zarathustra-being—and between writing and experience. As he writes about writing *Zarathustra* and about Zarathustra's mystical experience, Nietzsche writes about his own experience of inspired writing. His ecstatic experiences strike in and through his writing.

One will be tempted, however, to invoke another boundary—between body and spirit—in order to point out how Nietzsche also undermines his accounts of ecstatic states. In general, his philosophical writing is strongly characterized by a radical suspicion of intoxication, ecstasy, and mysticism. And this suspicion is clearly present in the passage cited above: Nietzsche qualifies his discussion of inspiration with tortured, ambiguous phrases such as, "If one had the slightest residue of superstition left in one's system, one could hardly reject altogether the idea that one is merely incarnation"; he notes that concepts like "revelation" are merely descriptive; and he will say only that one "seems" to be in contact with the whole of nature. In short, Nietzsche may, in places, describe his experiences in terms that gesture toward the mystical and the divine, but this does not entail that, as a philosopher, he would argue that such experiences are what they "seem" to be. By the same token, however, Nietzsche never in any definitive way reduces his "spiritual" experiences to bodily or material states.[15] He may write that words such as *revelation* only "describe" the experience, but he is far from offering an "explanation" of the experience, especially one that would reduce one's experience to a single, master-interpretation: "It is perhaps just dawning on five or six minds

[14] Recall that in the first section of the "Seven Seals," the singer tells of "lightening bolts that say Yes and laugh Yes, soothsaying lightning bolts" (Z: 228).

[15] Eric Blondel argues that "where we might expect a physiological reductionism [Nietzsche deploys] epistemologically a metaphysics of interpretation, whose 'physiological' discourse in reality is merely metaphor" (1991: 219).

that physics, too, is only an interpretation and exegesis of the world . . . and not a world-explanation" (BG: 21).[16] Indeed, in this passage from *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche seems to be pointing to the very moment of creativity, where the critical faculties are suspended, and, insofar as "things themselves" present themselves as metaphor, the world speaks of its plurality.

Suspicion has its place in Nietzsche because experience is always ambiguous. But one should not forget that chronic suspicion of one's own ecstatic and visionary states is far from alien to the mystical life. The greatest mystics have often been exceptionally acute psychological observers and analysts who insisted on the need to examine one's own experiences with great care and realism—they generally did not use any particular experience as a theological warrant, nor did they find the goal of the mystical life in these experiences themselves. As Meister Eckhart indicates, attachment to such experiences, making them the goal of life or desiring them as a way of removing oneself from the everyday, is a temptation to be resisted: "If a man were in rapture like Saint Paul, and knew a sick man who needed some soup from him, I should think it far better if you abandoned rapture for love" (Williams 1990: 136). Though ecstasies and raptures may mark the "tremendous moments" of life, one must know how to give them up, how to live through them and beyond them.

Nietzsche's suspicion is directed not toward experience itself but to the way such experiences reflect and are integrated into one's life. The point of his suspicion is not to reduce ecstatic experiences to physiological causes, but to examine the way of life connected to them: Is it a declining or ascending life, an overfull or needy life, an affirmative or denying life? In the case of the ascending life, suspicion is an ascetic practice, integrating transforming ecstatic experience with the whole of one's life through persistent, methodical, and realistic reflection on that experience. Such reflection must resist the temptation to turn any experience into an idol. For Nietzsche, life strives for expression, language, consciousness and, in doing so, seeks beautiful "word-shrines" for itself; but, for it to "become" and remain alive, it must destroy its shrines with insistent unmasking, a demystifying that reduces shrines to ashes for the sake of rebirth.

Nietzsche's Dionysian wisdom, the "knowledge" that emerges out his "mysticism," is not contained in any particular experience. Rather, it

[16] See also GM: 129 and GS: 335–36, where Nietzsche writes: "Do we really want to permit existence to be degraded for us like this—reduced to a mere exercise for a calculator and an indoor diversion for mathematicians? Above all, one should not wish to divest existence of its *rich ambiguity*. . . . Assuming that one estimated the *value* of a piece of music according to how much of it could be counted, calculated, and expressed in formulas: how absurd would such a 'scientific' estimation of music be! What would one have comprehended, understood, grasped ot it? Noething, really nothing of what is 'music' in it!"

manifests itself as a comprehensive awareness, cultivation, and communication of the context or life in which rapturous moments of creativity take place. It is a practical knowledge, a way of life and a way of writing—which Nietzsche calls "philosophy"—by which one continually orients oneself to the real, even though an integral part of that orientation is knowing that the real is always "beyond," not something to be grasped. Nietzsche's elevated states are only moments, flashes in which the real overtakes one on the boundaries of awareness, text, and self.

Wandering and Abandonment: At the Boundaries of Time and Culture

For Nietzsche, another way of saying that the philosophical life is a life of writing is to say that it is a life of wandering. The philosopher is a "wanderer": "restlessly and aimlessly on his way as if in a desert" (HH: 8); "homeless" (GS: 338); one of the "argonauts of the ideal" (GS: 346); and one of "the most spiritual human beings . . . [who] find their happiness . . . in the labyrinth" (TI: 140).[17] As wanderer, the philosopher is one who occupies many different points of view or perspectives, and who experiments with different ways of life. Wandering, then, as a process and as a practice, is a focal point for considering Nietzsche's complex, deeply ambiguous vision of the relation of the philosopher to his or her time and culture.

Consider the narrative of sickness and convalescence that Nietzsche relates in numerous places, particularly in the preface to *Human, All too Human*. It tells a "passionate history of the soul," a tale of wandering through different conceptions of the philosophical life and different values. On this journey, Nietzsche experiences both sickness and health. Together, these experiences enable him to overcome the sickness of "his time." In this sense, wandering refers to the exploration of human life and culture from different perspectives—different bodies and different lives. The knowledge gained thereby enables the philosopher to develop a comprehensive and masterful soul, to take a certain kind of metaperspective and rank human experiences and types. All this is necessary for the development of the genuine philosopher, one who can create and give new values and so lay the foundation for a new, healthy culture. On this account, Nietzsche's wanderings (he describes his early works as "travel books") take the shape of a journey, one with many detours, but, nonetheless, one with a definite beginning and end. Thus, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, the "beyond" of the book's title might indicate a future culture and the future philosophers who will usher in this new stage of human history.

[17] Cf. de Certeau: "He or she is a mystic who cannot stop walking and, with the certainty of what is lacking, knows of every place and object that it is not that; one cannot stay there nor be content with that" (1992: 14, 299). See also Mark Taylor 1984: 149–57.

It is the task of the philosopher to find worthy companions with whom to turn away from the decadence of the present and begin the task of imagining and embodying the future.

There is, however, another vision of philosophical wandering traced in Nietzsche's texts. When Nietzsche invokes Dionysus as the "tempter god" and the philosopher as the *Versucher*, the tempter-attempter, who "lures" many away from the herd, another kind of "beyond" beckons, one in tension with the first. Dionysus tempts the philosopher to a departure, a detachment, that is not simply the beginning of a journey destined to discover a new culture in a new time, but is a wandering, attempting, or searching that is its own end.

At the end of the fifth book of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes of being "homeless" and departing from the shores of the present and familiar into uncharted waters, "new seas." He casts himself and his hoped-for companions as the "argonauts of the new ideal" who, by means of a "great health," distance themselves from their "time" in undertaking this search (GS: 342–43). This great health, however, is not something that one simply attains, as a means to an end, or as the end itself, for it is something that "one does not merely have but also acquires continually, and must acquire because one gives it up again and again, and must give it up" (GS: 346). Nietzsche complicates the search for the new ideal, as I already suggested with respect to the *Genealogy*, by demanding the continual departure from the established and secure for the passion of the new and unknown. This is a "strange" ideal that beckons Nietzsche and his companions, always running ahead, luring them to announce and renounce the great health. The constant departures and reversals of Nietzsche's writing indicate, in fact, that the ideal is "discovered" precisely in never being fully achieved, in the constant renewal of the passion that finds joy and strength in the attempt, in the experiment. The ideal, then, is not any particular creation or achievement, not a future that is ever "present," but rather a capacity of openness or responsiveness to the future and the unknown. To wander, as Nietzsche notes as a prelude to the discussion of the great health, is not to journey, but to dance (GS: 346; HH: 204). The philosopher, on this reading, is not one to institute or rule a new culture, but a figure of the boundaries, an "untimely" figure of instability, transgression, creation, writing against the ideas and values of his time. "Whenever a great thinker wants to make of himself a binding institution for future mankind, one may be certain that he is past the peak of his powers and is very weary, very close to the setting of his sun" (D: 216; GS: 131).

Nietzsche's is a struggle against the complacency, even the death, of the "common," which constitutes culture. The inertia toward the common is manifested in the idealism of philosophy that always reduces the strange to the familiar, and in language, which is only possible, on Nietzsche's

account, on the basis of common experience. Language and consciousness on this view do "not really belong to man's individual existence but rather to his social or herd nature." Thus, "given the best will in the world to understand ourselves as individually as possible, 'to know ourselves,' each of us will always succeed in becoming conscious only of what is not individual but average" (GS: 299). Culture and language—even consciousness itself—therefore depend on and reinforce commonality while devaluing, and even counting as "evil," experiences that are genuinely individual. Nietzsche seeks to disrupt "the common," attempting himself and tempting others to cultivate rare elevated states of creativity and lives of affirmation. As I have argued, this requires an ascetic's disciplined resistance to the "natural" tendency of the herd. "One must invoke tremendous counter-forces in order to cross this natural, all too natural *progressus in simile*, the continual development of man toward the similar, ordinary, average, herdlike—common!" (BG: 217).

There is a constant tension in Nietzsche's thinking, therefore, between the timeliness of his analysis—both its orientation to a future and its sense of the present as a turning point in history—and the timeless joy of eternity that continually overtakes him. Writing both within and without time, Nietzsche writes both for and against culture. He seeks a future for Western culture, yet he pursues a philosophical practice that seeks to make the familiar strange, resisting habit in an effort to inspire creative participation in becoming. This disruption is never stable or final, for Nietzsche must always return to words and concepts. To live beyond the ascetic ideal is therefore to hold to the boundaries of culture and meaning, on the verge of meaninglessness or nihilism. Nietzsche finds life in the act of giving meaning and striving for goals, but he finds a certain death in being imprisoned by that which he gives and creates. If one tries to maintain meaning, to rest in stability, one is no longer living in the striving, growing sense that Nietzsche values as becoming; if one sacrifices that which one loves and values—that which is meaningful, one's own "great health"—then the process of bestowing meaning can begin again. The philosopher must be a "tragic artist" who manifests "the will to life rejoicing in its own inexhaustibility through the sacrifice of its highest types" (TI: 120). Or, as Nietzsche writes, in a poem entitled *Ecce Homo*: "I consume myself, and glow" (GS: 67). While the philosopher as value giver cultivates the most comprehensive perspective, the philosopher as tragic artist and abysmal thinker finds power in the eternal joy of becoming.

Thinking the Abyss, Writing Unsaying

"Our true experiences are not garrulous. They could not communicate themselves if they wanted to, they lack words. We have already grown

beyond what we have words for" (TI: 92). The problem of communication reverberates through all Nietzsche's writing: he despairs over his failure to make himself heard by his contemporaries, yet he insists on silence, masks, secrets, and the inability of language to communicate elevated states. Communication, for Nietzsche, is not futile, but it always conceals as much as it reveals. In his drama of communication, Nietzsche performs a self trying to maintain its connection with the Dionysian "beyond." The reader is lured by this performance, continually forced back to the boundaries of concept, argument, perspective, forced to think again, to think "once more." Nietzsche describes his writing as having "a knack for seeking out fellow-rhapsodizers and for luring them on to new secret paths and dancing places" (BT: 19). He seeks to communicate the joy of becoming by transfiguring the dancing of the Dionysian ecstatic into the dancing of the pen (TI: 75).

This dance communicates as a kind of apophatic writing. Conceptually and graphically, with suspicion, shifting perspective, and aphorism, Nietzsche surrounds his writing with silence and space. In the crossing of his affirmations and his demystifying unmaskings, in the movement from one aphorism to the next, he points us to something other than what is said. The profound man is one who "instinctively needs speech for silence and for burial in silence and who is inexhaustible in his evasion of communication" (BG: 51). To hold onto the experience of eternal joy that marks Nietzsche's most elevated states, to hope that such states are the "truth" or the "end" of life is for Nietzsche just one more consolation and falsification. Nonetheless, as I argued above, it is a mistake to assume that he simply wants us to confront the bland, human, all too human "reality" of ordinary life. Instead, these moments in Nietzsche's writing resist one another, performing a kind of "unsaying" that continually brings the reader back to the movement of life—its cycle of joy and suffering, its becoming. Like the ascetic, as Geoffrey Harpham puts it, this writing on the boundaries addresses the problem of "how to be alive to the spirit and dead to the world at the same time. In other words, how to be both living and coherent" (1987: 16).

There are some rather obvious modes of unsaying in Nietzsche's texts. In the final section of both *The Gay Science* and *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche looks back on what he has written—in one case with humor, in the other sorrow—to take leave of the ideas he has lived through in the text. Having been "said," that is written, "immortalized," Nietzsche says that they are on the verge of losing their life. So, he takes his departure from them, continues his wandering. In each case, Nietzsche leaves his philosophical writing and moves to poetry and song, repeating, in a different register, the movement, at the end of Book Three of *Zarathustra*, from "abysmal thought" to joyous song. Nietzsche abandons philosophy

for affirming song, but it is only through his philosophy that he gets to that point.

Nietzsche also writes unsaying within his philosophical texts, especially with respect to the problem of (the impossibility of) self-knowledge. Dionysian self-knowledge is "knowledge" of the self as strange to itself, divided from itself in a way that disrupts Socratic self-knowledge in ecstatic awareness and abandonment of love, value, ideal.[18] If one attempts to know oneself as a persisting entity or as a soul, one only becomes "entangled in the snares of grammar," for the stabilizing force of language, reason, and thought continually takes us away from that which is most ourselves. Knowing oneself as becoming, one knows oneself as already having become "something else." Self-knowledge, therefore, insofar as it can be mediated by language at all, requires an apophatic subversion of language. What Nietzsche's unsaying tries to communicate are not concepts, but rather the elusive experience of the emergence of language and thought from the chaos of becoming, the moment and the power of creation.[19] In this experience, one finds oneself—over and over—just as often as one loses oneself.

Mysticism and Metaphor: Contesting Spirit

> Upward flies our sense: thus it is a parable of our body, a parable of elevation. . . . Thus the body goes through history, becoming and fighting. And the spirit—what is that to the body? The herald of its fights and victories, companion and echo. . . . Watch for every hour, my brothers, in which our spirit wants to speak in parables: there lies the origin of your virtue. There your body is elevated and resurrected; with its rapture it delights the spirit so that it turns creator and esteemer and lover and benefactor of all things. (Z: 75–76)

[18] In a poem from the series that opens *The Gay Science*, entitled, "The Solitary," Nietzsche writes: "Even to lead myself is not my speed / I love to lose myself for a good while, / Like animals in forests and the sea, / To sit and think on some abandoned isle, / And lure myself back home from far away, / Seducing myself to come back to me (GS: 53–54).

[19] And such experiences are not only not communicable to others, but even to oneself. In the preface to GM, Nietzsche seems to echo Emerson's "Experience." Emerson's essay begins, "Where do we find ourselves?" and one of its central themes is the elusiveness of "reality," the difficulty of grasping and feeling the "sharp peaks and edges of truth." Nietzsche begins the preface to the *Genealogy* with what could well be taken for a reply to Emerson: "We are unknown to ourselves, we men of knowledge—and with good reason. We have never sought ourselves—how could it happen that we should ever *find* ourselves?" (GM: 15). As in Emerson, the theme here is experience, the experience of "we knowers," one that knowers find difficult to grasp because they are always too immersed in themselves—which really means too far outside of themselves, "away from home"—to see what is happening to them and around them. As knowers, then, it is precisely "our" experience, "ourselves" that we find most elusive; we are "necessarily strangers to ourselves."

On Reading and Writing

In his reading of *Walden*, Stanley Cavell shows Thoreau reading and writing as he lives, deliberately. Cavell takes note of the way that Thoreau tests and contests words and syntax as a way of attending to the conditions of his words, unsaying them, as it were, in order to make them speak. "We must be reborn again in order to speak" (Cavell 1981: 15). Thoreau's mysticism, for Cavell, is found not primarily in the moments of absorptive ecstasy that Thoreau describes, but in the way all experiences of the world are shaped through the incessant demand to make life come alive in each moment—to make real, to realize the real. In fact, the "experiences" of ecstatic absorption, Thoreau writes, function as figures for something he tries to bring to every moment of life in the process of finding oneself in words and wording forth the world. That is, in reading and writing Thoreau endeavors to find the way each word he reads or writes links him, here and now, to the world and so to his life. "To discover what is being said to us, as to discover what we are saying, is to discover the precise location from which it is said; to understand why it is said from just there, and at that time" (Cavell 1981: 64).

But to be reborn to words and world also means to die to old words and old meanings. Reading and speaking our conditions, our words, we find ourselves "face to face to a fact." At the same time, the flow of words, the succession of time is always carrying us away from that present (Cavell 1981: 63): it is lost just as it is found and so must always be recovered, reinhabited. As Cavell reads it, Thoreau's "experiment" ("for the present was my next experiment of this kind") requires a constant turning, a constant disinvestment of the past, a dying to the past, as a precondition to rebirth. "It is through words that words are to be overcome. (Silence may only be the tying of the tongue, not relinquishing words, but gagging on them. True silence is the untying of the tongue, letting its words go)" (1981: 44). Writing relinquishes words, in a surrender that is at the same time a liberation. "Not till we are lost, in other words, not till we have lost the world do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations" (1981: 50). In contrast to religious or philosophical (skeptical) repudiations of this condition, Thoreau accepts the loss of the world, and so, disinvesting himself of the past, acknowledging its otherness, is able to acknowledge the world that is always newly dawning (Cavell 1988: 172; 1989: 84). It is only in this loss that one finds life, because it is only in this loss that one opens oneself for new words, a new place of inhabitation. Always departing, "the writer is always coming to us from a sense of loss" (1981: 51).

Departing, the writer is always also turning back toward the world and the dawn: as Thoreau writes, the world is always "revealing itself by turns"; that is, by turnings of speech, tropes. This brings us to Emerson

and his dismissal of a "paltry empiricism" (Emerson 1982: 310) and mere "aesthetics" in favor of a grand empiricism, "a science of the real" (1982: 265). Cavell notes that with this distinction between empiricisms, Emerson is warning us to be careful about what we count as experience. The experience that Emerson wants us to take seriously is the "seeing" or the "intuition" of the poetic imagination, for in such seeing we are most intimate with the world, sharing in its reality. Emerson wants "every touch of nature [to] thrill" (1982: 260), and it is the poet, "one step nearer the world," reading and writing the world, who has the power to receive this thrill and impart it by releasing it for all of us. Thus the experience upon which Emerson models the science of the real is not the experience of detached observation, but the experience of love, in which poet and nature animate one another: "The simplest words,—we do not know what they mean except when we love and aspire" (Cavell 1988: 24).

Poetry, Cavell argues, is the means by which we find and create the words to release and realize our feelings and so come to know ourselves. Poetry gives voice to humanity by reaching into the unknown in order to push and expand its language.[20] On this reading, one can say that, for Emerson, in the act of placing oneself in relation to the real, through the transition from intuition to tuition, the poet brings the words and world to life in mystical participation. Emerson distinguishes between the poet and the mystic, but only to make the distinction between living and dead religion. The poet lives in the turning and troping of language, but the mystic, insofar as he or she is dependent on the dogmas of the tradition to the point where the words no longer live, "nails a symbol to one sense, which was a true sense for a moment, but soon becomes old and false" (Emerson 1982: 279).[21] One should not repeat words senselessly for the sake of tradition, but neither should one simply imitate the words of the great poet. At best these are "provocations," which can only spur one to write/voice one's own world in reading it. "Every man is so far a poet as to be susceptible of these enhancements of nature" (Emerson 1982: 267). The life is not in the word itself, but in the process, the transition, of bringing the word to speech. In the next instant, the same word will not have the same life. What is crucial is not that which the words name or represent, but how reading and writing in the broadest sense enact our relationship to reality.

[20] In an early essay on acknowledgment, Cavell (1976) suggests that we might think about God not in the Freudian manner, as a kind of childish fear, but instead, as the sense of the inarticulate unknown from which words and meanings emerge. But then the movement toward God would not be finished in confronting the fact that there is an unknown, but in the effort to bring the unknown to words, not words that grasp, but words that release.

[21] This is not a simple rejection of all symbols because they are old. In "The Poet," Emerson writes, "We are far from having exhausted the significance of the few symobls we use. We can come to use them yet with a terrible simplicity" (1982: 269).

Body as Metaphor

The boundaries that separate the poet, the mystic and the Nietzschean philosopher are impossible to stabilize, because the effect of Nietzsche's writing is to constantly exceed such boundaries. It is not insignificant that it is in a speech entitled "Reading and Writing" that Zarathustra declares: "Now I am light, now I fly, now I see myself beneath myself, now a god dances through me" (Z: 41). The Nietzschean philosopher renounces the mastery of consciousness in the performance of becoming and body. This is not to say that he or she forsakes consciousness, for philosophy on this view is a discipline of consciousness and language. It is a discipline, however, that mortifies the philosophical temptation—one might argue that it is the philosophical imperative—to stabilize and hold language in the permanence of conceptualization. This is a life-giving mortification, for the resistance to concept inspires and liberates language. The Nietzschean philosopher turns to metaphor as a means of wandering beyond received meanings and reawakening, inspiriting word, thought, and life.

Paul Ricoeur has written that "poetic language alone restores to us that participation in or belonging to an order of things which precedes our capacity to oppose ourselves to things taken as objects opposed to a subject" (1980: 101).[22] Eric Blondel follows Ricoeur's claim that metaphor is fundamental to the ability of poetic language to redescribe reality. Metaphor, he writes, "is like a world made dynamic by a play of attraction and repulsion that continually creates interaction and intersection among different movements . . . without this play ever coming to rest in an absolute knowledge that would reabsorb all the tensions" (1991: 245). From this perspective, Blondel offers the most incisive and comprehensive of the many treatments of metaphor in Nietzsche's thought.[23] He argues that

[22] Charles Winquist gives the definition of poesis a slightly different, but closely related, spin: "Poesis is a refiguring of discourse to make space for the incorrigibility of the other within discourse" (1995: 138).

[23] The place of metaphor in Nietzsche's thought has drawn much attention, particularly in poststructuralist thinkers fixated on Nietzsche's early essay, "On Truth and Lie in an Extramoral Sense," with its famous passage that has generally been interpreted as accomplishing the reduction of concept to metaphor. Though this essay is crucial for Nietzsche's concept of metaphor, and its relation to philosophy, it is too easily assumed that this essay represents Nietzsche's mature position. See, for example, Kofman 1993 and Barker 178, 180. Blondel does not depend on this essay to the extent that others do. This is significant, because with his emphasis on the metaphor of body, I think Blondel (1991) helps show us why Nietzsche is closer to the Cavellian perspective on language, metaphor, and reality than to the Saussurian vision of language that posits a completely arbitrary relation between language and the world, such that the system of language operates completely without any reference to reality. As Nietzsche suggests through Zarathustra, in the turning of metaphor we do see language related to reality: "Here all being wishes to become word, all becoming wishes to learn from

metaphor for Nietzsche is the paradigm of interpretation and that "body" is Nietzsche's fundamental metaphor. Through this metaphor, Nietzsche's hermeneutics resist the conceptual reductionisms of both materialism and idealism: "body" is not a concept that serves as a physiological foundation for Nietzsche's thought, but is a way of designating the irreducible plurality of drives that themselves are already interpretations (1991: 219). "Body" is the "intermediary space between the absolute plural of the world's chaos and the absolute simplification of intellect" serving as a scheme of interpretation, the "metaphorical imagination" (1991: 207, 245–47). Metaphor and concept represent different degrees of the simplification of, or, better, orientation to chaotic becoming. They are, however, fundamentally different types of simplification: where concept is oriented to viewing the world as an ordered unity, metaphor can be utilized for an "interrogative pluralization," which allows different perspectives, different aspects of becoming to be examined without the pressure toward unifying reduction exerted by the concept.

Through metaphor, one is able to indicate and perform becoming without arresting it conceptually in any final way—and without sacrificing the positivity of perspective. Metaphor enables one to say, at the same time, that something both "is" and "is not"; it brings together and holds in tension the ordinary and the extraordinary (1991: 247). Where Ricoeur decisively distinguishes metaphor from concept, Nietzsche, without reducing one to the other, does not; he does not, in other words, write poetry instead of philosophy—he writes conceptual thought constantly dissolving in apophasis and turning back to metaphor, thus philosophy constantly beside itself, opening itself to the "heterogeneity of the 'body' " (Blondel 1991: 308): ecstatic philosophy.

Metaphor, in other words, enacts immanent transcendence. Figuring and transfiguring self and world, one points beyond this particular configuration of things and ideas: the "beyond" is the "once again" of the ever-shifting surface of life. Any particular metaphor offers a new, particular perspective on something familiar, but in doing so it also inscribes or acknowledges this "beyond." For Nietzsche, "body" is a metaphor that gathers and focuses the chaotic becoming of the world, and "spirit" is a metaphor for the shining, transfigured power of the body. These considerations allow a more refined grasp of Nietzsche's ideas on power and self-overcoming. Self-overcoming involves a kind of mastery over oneself. But when linked with metaphor, this Nietzschean mastery contrasts sharply with the Socratic mastery of consciousness. The mastery made possible

you how to speak" (EH: 301). This is not to posit a one to one correspondence between words and things, for it is precisely through the emphasis on metaphor that we see that for Nietzsche, as for Cavell, the reference, or the speaking of the world, is fleeting and momentary, taking place in the movement of words and not in the words themselves.

by metaphorically based thinking is one that organizes and spiritualizes without unifying or totalizing (Schrift 1990: 94). Metaphorically based thinking is fundamentally plural; it is without the foundational concept or "transcendental signified" that would bring a halt to the play of word and world. Nietzsche's self-overcoming therefore means, first of all, the power to resist the temptations to rest and unity. It demands the organization and beautification of the self, it demands the enhancement of the self, where to enhance means to enliven, which means to create and recreate, lose and regain the great health. Emerson suggests—as Nietzsche would have known—that power resides in the transitions or turnings that participate with becoming. If metaphor—between chaos and stasis—enacts these transitions, then the body as metaphor is the inspirited, transfigured body: the body turning, receiving, and speaking; not the static, mute body of naturalism but the body that powers the imagination and is, in turn, empowered by it. Spiritualization, as transfiguration, is a process in which the body's reception of the world becomes refined in metaphorical renewal, empowering the body in its relations with the world, others, and itself.

Metaphor and Mysticism: Desiring the World

As the moment of transition and excess on the boundaries of consciousness and conceptualization, metaphor is the means by which Nietzsche writes his passion for the real. In and through metaphor, Nietzsche's writing aims not at a conceptual grasp of becoming, but at the dance that participates with it. "On every metaphor you ride to every truth. . . . Here the words and word-shrines of all being open up before you; here all being wishes to become word, all becoming wishes to learn from you how to speak" (EH: 301). In the moment of transition from being to word, in a writing of and on the boundary, Nietzsche, like Zarathustra, finds eternity and divinity.

Nietzsche's is a mysticism of metaphor. Like Zarathustra, like Dionysus, Nietzsche's writing "lure[s] many away from the herd" (Z: 23); as the errant voice of ecstasy and abandonment, a voice opens self and culture to new thoughts and new words. But it is necessary to take care with terms such as *abandonment* and *ecstasy*, for they refer first of all not to a swooning surrender of all one's faculties, but rather to a disciplined, deliberate practice of writing. Again, the point is not whether or not Nietzsche had dramatic mystical experiences, but it is the way he inscribes becoming into his texts, practicing an ecstatic philosophy by which he opens himself and the reader to a new responsiveness.

Carl Raschke points to Nietzsche's invocation of the mask and notes that "in Greek drama the mask, or disguise, is the 'sacramental' element

that renders the theatrical—that which is 'envisioned'—*religious*. It is religious, because it is 'mimetic' not of the things of the everyday world, but of the 'beings of the other world,' beings 'holy' and 'horrific' " (1996: 179). Raschke is right to make these connections between mimesis, religion, and Nietzsche's conception of tragedy: Nietzsche's writing is a dramatic performance of/at the boundaries of thought, body, spirit. However, this beyond is not the beyond of another world, but of the "holy" and "horrific" faces, the extraordinary faces, of this world. Nietzsche's writing seeks to renew all things by resisting the idealistic need for the familiar and common and by seeking out the strange and extraordinary—new conjunctions and relations, new differences that make the familiar new. This is a wandering writing, which finds, in each of its returns, that "what is nearest and everyday here speaks of unheard of things" (EH: 305).

> It seems to him as if his eyes are only now open to what is close at hand. He is astonished and sits s̈ilent: where had he been? These near and nearest things [*Diese nahen und nachsten Dinge*]: how changed they seem! what bloom and magic they have acquired! He looks back gratefully—grateful to his wandering, to his hardness and self-alienation, to his viewing of far distances and bird-like flights in cold heights. What a good thing he had not always stated "at home," stayed "under his own roof" like a delicate apathetic loafer! He had been beside himself: no doubt of that. (HH: 8)

I will have occasion, below, to ask whether Nietzsche gives adequate emphasis to this return. For now it is enough to assert that in a fully affirmative mystical writing there is always return; in the return, the ordinary is transfigured, the extraordinary or the "magical" in the ordinary is reawakened. This extraordinary experience of the everyday is a way of being "faithful to the earth." This is mysticism as a continual reconnecting or rebinding with the reality of things in a cycle of departure, wandering, and return.

Chapter Six

NIETZSCHE'S AFFIRMATION:

A PASSION FOR THE REAL

> I Zarathustra, the advocate of life, the advocate of suffering, the advocate of the circle.
> (Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*)

> A full and powerful soul not only copes with painful, even terrible losses, deprivations, robberies, insults; it emerges from such hells with a greater fullness and powerfulness; and, most essential of all, with a new increase in the blissfulness of love.
> (Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*)

Suffering and Affirmation

The Meaning of Suffering

THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE, Nietzsche remained wedded to the Schopenhauerian idea that suffering was constitutive of the human condition. As he puts it in *Twilight of the Idols*, "all becoming and growing . . . postulates pain" (TI: 120). Yet, Nietzschean affirmation takes shape in the resistance to Schopenhauer's conclusion that the denial of life is the ultimate human response to this condition and that such denial—exemplified in the saint—is definitive of holiness. Nietzsche did not share Schopenhauer's estimation of the Christian saint, but he nevertheless remained fascinated with the way that the religious virtuoso used renunciation, intoxication, and suffering to forge happiness and power; and he continued to believe that spiritual insight and power were intimately linked to human suffering. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Schopenhauerian saint and the Nietzschean philosopher are closely related. But where the saint finds in suffering both the reason and, ultimately (the saint imagines), the power to deny life, the Nietzschean philosopher affirms by forging a new orientation to the suffering implicated in all human life.

Epigraphs: Nietzsche, Z: 215; WP: 532.

One reason Nietzsche rejects Schopenhauerian denial is simply that he believed such denial to be impossible: "denial" does not deny, it defers, it spiritualizes. But there is another, ultimately more interesting, reason. To understand precisely how Nietzsche's philosophy takes shape in response to Schopenhauer, it is not enough to see how he seeks to affirm life instead of denying it; one must also see how he twists himself away from Schopenhauer's approach by rethinking the significance of suffering for human life. For Nietzsche, suffering continues to be constitutive of human life, but he no longer sees suffering as a problem to be overcome or a condition to be transcended.

I have argued that we must be careful in considering what exactly Nietzsche means in the *Genealogy*, when, upon exposing the life-denial of the ascetic ideal, he asks: "Where is the opposing will that might express an opposing ideal?. . . Where is the other 'one goal'?" (GM: 146). In the essay on the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche equates, at least for adherents of the ascetic ideal, the meaning of suffering with the meaning of life: life becomes meaningful when such human beings have an answer to the question: "Why do I suffer?" (GM: 162). We must be careful in considering Nietzsche's alternative to this view because he never directly answers the question of this other ideal or will; at the end of the book, he seems only to have succeeded in reimmersing himself in the new problem of the meaning of the self-overcoming of the will to truth. He leaves us with questions and a search, not a solution. This in itself, I think, is a kind of answer: the search itself as a new ideal. But, of course, this is not simply a new ideal, it is a new *kind* of ideal. Where the ascetic ideal involves a solution to suffering as the meaning of life, Nietzsche suggests the ideal of a search, which demands more questions and a reimmersion in suffering life. Nietzsche does not offer an alternative to the ascetic ideal as much as he twists away from viewing suffering as a "problem."

The ascetic ideal gives meaning to life by answering the question, Why do we suffer? On this view, the ideal human life is defined in relation to suffering. For precisely this reason, however, Nietzsche considers the ascetic ideal to be essentially reactive: human beings find meaning in life only in reaction to the way in which life injures them. Suffering, life itself, then becomes a problem that one must solve in order to live. From the genealogical perspective, the hope for a final liberation from suffering is ultimately the expression of exhaustion, the nihilistic hope of an impoverished life able to will only nothingness, life *without* suffering. Like the nobles at the beginning of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche's view of suffering is active: suffering results inevitably from the engagement with life; however, it does not determine the relation between self and life. The question "Why do we suffer?" therefore does not hold such a central place in the

noble conception of life and its meaning—the noble does not need an answer to the question of suffering in order to find meaning in life.[1] Where adherents of the ascetic ideal seek a life different from the suffering life of the human condition, specifically the cessation of desire in "rest, stillness, calm seas," the noble desires to continue desiring, it "*wants* to want and will" (EH: 305) even to the point of desiring the worst of the human condition. In short, the noble affirms the return, not the cessation of desire, and so the return of suffering.

The problem of suffering often holds a key place in both the stories and the systematic thought of different religious traditions. In fact, religion is often characterized in terms of the overcoming of suffering in healing or salvation. In Christian intellectual circles, the problem of suffering is articulated in the theological enterprise of theodicy. For close to two millennia, Christian thinkers have grappled with the question of why God—as omnipotent and loving—allows evil and suffering. For many it follows that evil and suffering must be necessary for some greater purpose of God's. John Hick, for example, argues that it is only through a historical process of struggle with good and evil in freedom that human beings can achieve genuine moral goodness; human beings would not be as good if God had created them morally perfect (1981: 44). Kenneth Surin describes the project of theodicy more generally as "the attempt to provide a teleology of evil and suffering, to slot occurrences of evil and suffering into a scheme of things consonant with the essentially rational workings of divine providence" (1987: 53). Theodicy is an attempt, then, to determine the economy of evil and suffering.

Even in cases where one is not justifying God, or in defending the "essentially rational workings of divine providence," the term *theodicy* is often used, beyond the strictly Christian context, to describe efforts like Nietzsche's to provide a conceptual framework for assessing the significance of suffering and evil. It is in this sense that some commentators have construed Nietzsche's project along the lines of theodicy.[2] Nietzsche himself actually uses the word *theodicy* on occasion. "The pessimism of

[1] I am indebted to John Lysaker's comments on this chapter for impressing upon me the importance of the active-reactive distinction for understanding Nietzsche's, and the noble's, perspective on suffering.

[2] Kathleen Higgens argues that the doctrine of eternal recurrence provides a theodicy to the extent that it "provides a framework in which tragic events and moral atrocities take their place beside life's lighter contents, a framework in which the overall significance of such horrors can be assessed" (1987: 198). Rosset compares Nietzsche to Leibniz, arguing that Nietzsche goes beyond Leibnizian theodicy with an affirmation not of God, but of "chance," an affirmation, in other words, of the way of the cosmos (1993: 27). Similarly, Deleuze (1983) writes of a "cosmodicy," thereby distinguishing Nietzsche's project from theodicy's justification of God yet drawing the parallel that Nietzsche remains concerned to demonstrate the "justice" of the cosmos.

strength ends in a theodicy, i.e. in an absolute affirmation of the world. . . . [It leads] to the conception of this world as the actually achieved highest possible ideal" (WP: 527). But, for at least one important reason, it is misleading to think of Nietzsche's project in terms of theodicy: theodicy, like few other theological projects or religious practices, exemplifies the reactive potential of Christianity. As in Schopenhauer, most theodicies begin with the presumption that suffering is a problem to be solved, a problem that touches the deepest meaning of God and of life. Suffering, as Nietzsche saw so well, can therefore easily become the point of departure for one's understanding of and relationship to God—God as that which somehow redeems or helps us overcome suffering. Such a God emerges from a lack, from the need to find an answer to suffering.

The conception of God as an answer to suffering is reactive in the deepest sense. When, in the first essay of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche contrasts active and reactive modes of valuing as characteristic of strong and weak forms of life, he narrates a process whereby the priestly class uses the power of reactivity to transmute their weakness into an insidious strength, which defeats the nobles in a revaluation of values. The weak accomplish this revaluation by locating the source of value beyond themselves and beyond humanity, in the metaphysical will of God. With this power, then, as Nietzsche writes in the third essay, the priest not only succeeds in mastering the strong, but seeks also to master life itself. Reactivity, in short, powers the metaphysics of mastery. Theodicy reflects this drive to absolute mastery, not only in the insistence on the omnipotence of God, not only in its assumption that human consciousness should be able to comprehend the workings of this omnipotence, but also in its deep need for all suffering to have a purpose or reward, thus to be cashed out in a divine economy.

It should be noted that in the passages where Nietzsche invokes theodicy, he is describing attitudes—pessimism of strength and tragic profundity—that "end" in a "theodicy." That is, Nietzschean "theodicy" is a consequence, or an expression, of a more a fundamental attitude or disposition: the "conception of the world" *follows* the affirmation, it is not a means *to* affirmation. Nietzsche's theodicy is less an attempt to assert ("discover") the metaphysical meaning of suffering and life than another way of saying "Yes" to life.[3] To understand Nietzsche's affirmation, attention must be directed to something other than the reactivity of the effort

[3] One might make the same point about certain Christian theodicies, that they are expressions of faith, of "faith seeking understanding," and not attempts to judge or define God outside the circle of faith. Often, however, this boundary is not recognized and theodicy becomes a general philosophical problem. The reactivity of theodicy reflects, as I said, the reactive *potential* of Christianity.

to determine the meaning or the economy of suffering. This suggests, as my work in Chapter 1 has anticipated, that the "new ideal" Nietzsche hints at in the *Genealogy* is far more than a new answer or a new meaning for suffering. While I do think that in some significant sense Nietzsche finds new meaning in suffering, he does so only against the background of an affirmation that embraces not just the meaning, but also the meaninglessness of suffering. Nietzsche's new ideal, I will argue, is a new way of practicing suffering as a response to the real.

At this point, the series of themes I have traced in the book so far come together to make possible a final approach to affirmation. Nietzsche's asceticism is not the life-denying asceticism of the ascetic ideal, suffering practiced for the sake of ending all suffering, but a practice of opening oneself to the conflicting, painful reality of life and world in active engagement with them. This asceticism recognizes and affirms the power of suffering in the creation of spirit; it is a practice of suffering. The mystical element of Nietzsche's thought offers a different perspective on the practice of suffering, yet is intimately linked to his asceticism. As a mysticism of metaphor, Nietzsche's is a practice of writing and thinking in which he cultivates the openness to, even the participation with, becoming. Rather than metaphysical mastery, Nietzsche as writer practices a responsiveness to the mystery and the power of the world—or, as I have put it, a passion for the real, passion in the sense of strong desire, and in the sense of the pain of submission to the real. Only with such passion is the creation of spirit possible: in Nietzsche's ascetic/mystical practice of transfiguration, suffering leads to joy, abysmal thought and bodily pain are transfigured into affirmative spirit.

Dionysus versus the Crucified

It is not by chance that I use the word *passion* in this context. For those attuned to the word's Christian resonance it may seem out of place, especially given Nietzsche's own comparison between "Dionysus" and "the Crucified." Nietzsche concludes *Ecce Homo*, written only months before his breakdown, with a question and a contrast: "Have I been understood?—*Dionysus versus the Crucified*." He elaborates in a notebook entry from this period.

> Dionysus versus the "Crucified": there you have the antithesis. It is *not* a difference in regard to their martyrdom—it is a difference in the meaning of it. Life itself, its eternal fruitfulness and recurrence, creates torment, destruction, the will to annihilation. In the other case, suffering—the "Crucified as the innocent one"—counts as an objection to this life, as a formula for its condemnation.—One will see that the problem is that of the meaning of suffering: whether a Christian meaning or a tragic meaning. In the former case, it is supposed to be

> the path to a holy existence; in the latter case, *being is counted as holy enough* to justify even a monstrous amount of suffering. The tragic man affirms even the harshest suffering: he is sufficiently strong, rich, and capable of deifying to do so. . . . The god on the cross is a curse on life, a signpost to seek redemption from life; Dionysus cut to pieces is a *promise* of life: it will be eternally reborn and return home again from destruction. (SW 13: 265–67)

Dionysus and the Crucified: martyrs, sufferers, gods—but, for Nietzsche, their trials mean different things. "The Crucified," for Nietzsche, represents the suffering from impoverishment: one suffers from suffering itself because one feels that suffering is an objection to life. For this kind of person, "the Crucified" promises life beyond this one. The Dionysian suffers from overfullness; suffers not from suffering itself, but from engagement with life. Suffering, from this perspective, is not an objection to life; indeed, it is something to affirm because it is part of life.

Nietzsche's comparison raises numerous questions. This chapter revolves around two of them. What does it mean to affirm suffering? And how should we receive Nietzsche's comparison of Dionysus and the Crucified? After introducing the first question, I will argue that a critical comparison between Nietzschean and certain forms of Christian suffering will expose problems with Nietzsche's view of Christian suffering and suggest that he is much closer to certain Christian views on the question of the affirmation of suffering than he allows. The comparison, then, will be a helpful step in elucidating Nietzsche's affirmation. It will not, I must emphasize, leave us with the conclusion that Nietzsche is a Christian or that Christian mystics are Nietzschean, but it will allow me to define more precisely the relationship between two views on suffering and affirmation. From there, it will be possible to offer my final formulations of Nietzsche's uses and abuses of the ascetic ideal, the mystical element of his thought, and his affirmation.

"The advocate of life, the advocate of suffering, the advocate of the circle"

Nietzsche seeks to overcome the reactivity of the ascetic ideal, but he continues to insist on a close link between suffering and affirmation, between the vision of the abyss and the experience of eternal joy. In *Zarathustra* we observe the transfiguration of one to the other, from the abysmal thought to Zarathustra's songs to eternity. A similar dynamic is at the heart of the passage from *The Gay Science* entitled "The Greatest Weight."

> What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you in your loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you

> will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and everything unutterably small and great in your life will return to you, all in the same succession and sequence. . . ." 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." (GS: 273–74)

For the affirmer, the thought of recurrence is divine, not demonic, but, as *Zarathustra* indicates, this thought only becomes divine in the process of plumbing its abysmal depths. To say "Yes" to recurrence is not simply to say "Yes" to joy, but also to "every pain." To understand the link between suffering and affirmation in Nietzsche, it is necessary to examine the idea of eternal recurrence.

Numerous interpreters have examined Nietzsche's scattered and apparently sketchy claims about eternal recurrence in some detail.[4] Nonetheless, it remains one of the most enigmatic of Nietzsche's ideas. The difficulty is particularly pronounced when it is thought that the ideal entails the affirmation of all that has happened in the past, not only in one's own life, but in the entire web of history in which one was produced. This means affirming all of one's personal sufferings and, in addition, all sorts of horrific evils. Recently, Maudmarie Clark has grappled with this consequence of Nietzsche's idea in her powerful and in many respects persuasive reading of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence (1990). Her reading provides a useful discussion of affirmation as "affirming eternal recurrence." It also is instructive as an illustration of the way a relentlessly secular and philosophical approach to Nietzsche can lead one to misread the issue of affirming suffering.

Clark argues that many of the difficulties attributed to Nietzsche's idea of eternal recurrence are dissolved if one emphasizes its practical significance instead of its cosmological implications. On her reading, one can "affirm eternal recurrence" without believing in the truth of the cosmological version of eternal recurrence. She points out that when the demon approaches in one's "loneliest loneliness," one is not going to consider the metaphysical implications of the idea, nor the question of whether life will actually recur. Instead, one will grapple with the thought "What if. . .?" She compares this test to the question one spouse might ask another: "If you had to marry me again, would you?" Eternal recurrence, on this view, is a thought to be affirmed, though not a metaphysical doc-

[4] It is not the *Ubermensch*, but eternal recurrence that Nietzsche describes as "the fundamental conception" of *Zarathustra* and "the highest formula of affirmation that is at all attainable" (Z: 295). Gary Shapiro points out that the term Nietzsche uses here—*Grundconception*—is significant, for, unlike *Begriff* or *Idee*, it refers not to what in English we would call *concept* or *idea*, but rather to "sketch" or "germ of a story" (1991: 97).

trine to be believed or proposed. The idea of the endless repetition of one's life in all its detail serves as an exercise of the imagination that tests one's fundamental attitude toward life: if one finds joy in the thought of eternal recurrence, then one is living affirmatively because one evaluates life only from the perspective of the very process of living it. Nietzsche, Clark argues, challenges the ascetic ideal with an ideal she terms "affirming eternal recurrence."

Part of the persuasive power of Clark's interpretation derives from her willingness to address the problem of the affirmation of suffering head-on. As Nietzsche's demon tells us, affirming eternal recurrence means affirming a life that may include agony—either suffering one has already undergone, or suffering that one may yet encounter; it means affirming a life in which those moments would be lived over and over again, without the hope that there would be an "end" to this life that would redeem its painful aspects in any final way. Clark elucidates precisely what this perspective on suffering entails. The idea of eternal recurrence tests what she calls the "intrinsic affirmation" of life, because by renouncing any end or reward, one finds the grounds for affirmation only in the process of living; this affirmation is truly a love for *this* life. But although the affirmer loves life for its own sake, no healthy person, according to Clark, can love suffering (or evil) in the same, unconditional, way. A distinction must be drawn, then, between the affirmation of life and the affirmation of any particular moment in that life. Clark contends that affirming eternal recurrence means that one is "willing to relive eternally even those parts of "this life" that one does not and cannot love" (1990: 279). In other words, the affirmer affirms suffering in the sense of being "willing," or assenting to it, but not in the sense of "loving" it. This means, for Clark, that even if one finds joy in the thought of living one's life over and over again exactly as it has been lived, one might also prefer an alternative life, one without the suffering or evil of one's actual life. She argues that preferring an alternative life does not negate one's affirmation of this life; indeed, she goes beyond simply suggesting that one can still affirm life even if one prefers that some things had not happened by claiming that it is "a greater affirmation of life to want the repetition of the past without the bad things" (1990: 281).[5]

[5] What does Clark mean by "bad things"? It is not clear. When she brings up the subject initially, she refers to the "painful experiences of one's life" and to the affirmation of "Hitler's atrocities" (1990: 279), apparently grouping together the affirmation of suffering (painful experiences) with the affirmation of evil (Hitler). As her argument progresses these become, simply, the "painful, horrible, and obscene events," and then, even more simply, "bad things" (1990: 279, 281). In fact, Clark appears to be eliding the significance of suffering because her examples appear to focus on the "horrible" and on the evil of Hitler. My concern here is primarily with Nietzsche's attitude toward suffering. However, it is the case that Nietzsche claims that we must affirm the eternal recurrence of everything. I think one aspect

With this argument, Clark finds genuine humanity in Nietzsche's vision of affirmation. If Nietzsche sought to affirm a life in which one loved each second with equal joy and gratitude, would he be affirming a *human* life? Does not a rich human life include regret and hatred; does it not involve the effort to resist suffering and evil? Even if I can see that in something terrible from the past—say the death of a loved one—I have learned much about myself and now lead a richer life, is it not part of the humanity we would want to affirm to still wish that that person was still with us? Given the choice in this instance, would we want to say that it is a denial of life to wish that our loved one was still alive? Or take the case of great evil, such as the Holocaust. Can we affirm *any* vision of affirmation that would refuse to change that particular part of our history? Clark makes the reasonable point that an affirmation which depended on either an even-handed acceptance of everything or on the love of suffering and evil would be inhuman. Simply because we have not loved every moment in our lives does not mean that we will not experience joy at the thought of repeating our life: affirmation, on this reading, requires only that we are joyfully willing, for the sake of the whole of our life, to relive those aspects of our lives we do not love; that, if given the choice, we would not choose to have happen again. To illustrate this point, one might compare the love of life with the love of a person. One does not necessarily love everything about a person one is in love with—being in love with someone does not depend on loving equally each and every aspect of the person, but on the love of the whole. Indeed, one might argue that the richest and most affirming love is only possible when there are aspects of a person that one does not love. That is, love of an other is experienced fully only when one learns how to love the other as a person with faults, limitations, and differences.

Clark's attempt to interpret Nietzsche in such a way that his affirmation avoids the position of affirming "the bad things" unconditionally is useful and interesting. But it fails to satisfactorily account for a number of claims Nietzsche makes about suffering. If it is true that it is a greater affirmation of life to prefer a life without the bad things, then, it seems, suffering is rendered superfluous. This, however, precludes two positions that I contend Nietzsche holds: first, Nietzsche holds that suffering is *necessary* for a strong and affirmative life; second, the affirmer, in some sense, actually *desires* the painful or horrible aspects of his or her life.

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of his affirmation of evil is evident, ironically, in his discussion of Jesus in *The Antichrist* (a figure who must be distinguished from "the Crucified"): "He does not resist, he does not defend his rights, he takes no steps to avert the worst that can happen to him—more, *he provokes it*. . . . And he entreats, he suffers, he loves *with* those, *in* those who are doing evil to him. . . . *Not* to defend oneself, *not* to grow angry, *not* to make responsible. . . . But not to resist even the evil man—to *love* him" (AC: 158).

At first glance, it does not seem implausible that Nietzsche should hold that at least certain kinds of suffering are necessary for a full, powerful, affirmative human life. He makes this explicit in the *Genealogy* when he describes "great health" in terms of a spirit "strengthened by war and victory, for whom conquest, adventure, danger and even pain have become needs" (GM: 96). But what could it possibly mean to "desire" suffering? That this is a significant question is suggested in a number of places in Nietzsche's writing. In "The Greatest Weight," Nietzsche writes that the idea of eternal recurrence is a question "in each and every thing"; that is, it is not just a question about life as a whole, but about each moment: "Do you desire *this* once more and innumerable times more?" (italics added). That Nietzsche is concerned with *desire* in this passage, and not simply *assent* (as in Clark's "being willing to"), is confirmed in numerous other passages: writing of the "suffering from overfullness" Nietzsche claims that it "craves the frightful" (*nach dem Furchtbaren verlangt*); he has Zarathustra proclaim himself "the advocate of life, the advocate of suffering, the advocate of the circle" (Z: 215), and sing an ecstatic song of eternity that contains the line: "So rich is joy that it thirsts for woe" (Z: 324); he writes of the Dionysian "sanctification" of pain, connecting it explicitly to the idea of eternal recurrence that he finds in Greek tragedy (TI: 120); he ridicules humanists for their aversion to suffering: "You want, if possible—and there is no more insane 'if possible'—to abolish suffering. And we? It really seems that we would rather have it higher and worse than ever" (BG: 153).[6] Finally, in a note from 1888, Nietzsche writes of "My new path to a 'Yes' " and of philosophy as a "voluntary quest for even the most detested and notorious sides of existence."

> Such an experimental philosophy as I live anticipates experimentally even the possibilities of the most fundamental nihilism; but this does not mean that it must halt at a negation, a No, a will to negation. It wants rather to cross over to the opposite of this—to a Dionysian affirmation of the world as it is, without subtraction, exception, or selection—it wants the eternal circulation. . . . The highest state a philosopher can attain: to stand in a Dionysian relationship to existence—my formula for this is *amor fati*. It is part of this state to perceive not merely the necessity of those sides of existence hitherto denied, but their desirability; and not their desirability merely in relation to the sides hitherto affirmed . . . but for their own sake. (WP: 536–37)

How does one explain these kinds of passages? Contrary to Clark, I think they mean that one must take seriously the idea that a Nietzschean affirmer would *not* prefer a life without moments of pain and terror, that this affirmer, in fact, *loves* them. I would qualify this immediately by

[6] See also Z: 87, 154, 162.

pointing out that to speak of the "desire" or "love" for suffering does not necessarily entail the claim that suffering is not aversive. Nietzsche certainly will admit that in moments of suffering one wishes that one could escape it: in the song at the end of *Zarathustra*, it is "joy" that wants agony, while "Woe entreats: go! Away woe!" (Z: 322). What he suggests with "The Greatest Weight," however, is that affirming eternal recurrence depends on a vision of divinity, that there is a perspective from which suffering is loved.[7] These passages push us therefore to explore what Clement Rosset calls the "secret alliance" in all of Nietzsche's work "between misfortune and bliss, the tragic and the jubilatory, the experience of pain and the affirmation of joy" (1993: 31). And they demand a closer examination of what I have described above as the transfiguration of suffering and the mystical element of Nietzsche's thought. Where Clark interprets "The Greatest Weight," and Nietzsche's view of recurrence in general, along resolutely secular lines, Nietzsche's invocation of the extraordinary and divine should not be ignored. Writing as the "advocate of suffering," Nietzsche brings to the idea of suffering a complex attitude where suffering yields something beyond the aversiveness of pain, perhaps beyond the experiences, needs, and values of the atomistic self. An adequate interpretation of suffering and affirmation in Nietzsche must examine, therefore, how he holds, at the same time, that such moments of pain and suffering are necessary for life, even that there are certain moments in life in which one actually "desires" suffering *and* that, in the midst of suffering, one wants to escape it.

Christian Mysticism as Passion for the Real

Theodicy's Denial, Christian Economics

As I have suggested, I will approach this question through a comparison between Nietzsche's view of suffering and certain Christian views, specifically those exemplified in the mystical practice of suffering. Nietzsche, I argue, is wrong to condemn Christianity in itself with the claim that *the* Christian response to suffering is reactive. Through a certain "theology of the Cross," Christians demonstrate a practice of suffering that engages the reality of the world in a way that exhibits close affinities with Nietzsche's affirmation.

To begin, I return to the issue of theodicy. Certain Christian thinkers have criticized the project of theodicy by arguing that the real problem with it is not intellectual but practical. What is accomplished in trying to comprehend the ultimate significance of all evil and suffering? What

[7] See Klossowski 1985.

are the effects of this theological practice? Arguing that it is the responsibility of the theologian and the philosopher to be self-conscious about the praxis their work mediates, Kenneth Surin claims that the project of theodicy, in practice, is implicated with a denial of the concrete reality of human suffering. As an intellectual attempt to give meaning to suffering per se, theodicy must focus on the general question of evil and suffering, and therefore cannot attend to the "radical particularity" of actual instances of evil and suffering. Theodicy therefore mediates "a social and political praxis which averts its gaze from all the cruelties that exist in the world" (1989: 77). Paul Ricoeur, in a similar vein, argues that the comprehensive and systematic approach to suffering and evil of Christian theodicy can achieve, at best, only a victory over the "aesthetic phantom" of evil (1974: 312). Like Kierkegaard's systematizer who constructs grand edifices of thought, but in actuality lives in the doghouse next door, theodicy makes conceptual promises about the meaning of suffering and evil, which do little, if anything, to respond to it concretely. Kathleen Sands puts it plainly when she argues that "it is wasteful to feign evil's resolution by 'thinking it through to the end,' when what is needed is illumination, creativity, discernment, and transformation in evil's midst" (1994: 29).[8]

There are religious considerations at stake here as well. Ricoeur employs the story of Job and the symbol of the Cross to affirm a worship and love for God beyond lament and political struggle, beyond, that is, active attempts to ameliorate suffering and resist evil (though, for Ricoeur, this "going beyond" does not preclude the moral imperative to attend to these crucial tasks). At the point marked by Job's confrontation with the whirlwind and by Christ's death on the Cross, Ricoeur claims that one renounces "the desire to be spared of all suffering," and escapes the cycle of retribution by "loving God for nought." With this, Ricoeur captures something profound about Christian worship. At its deepest level, worship of God is not a matter of economy, for one does not worship God *because* God gives meaning to life, or *because* God promises eternal life, or *because*, in loving God, one can overcome suffering. Instead, one worships because God is creator and life-giver.[9] But even putting it this way is not quite right, at least as long as the word *because* designates some

[8] One will note that in many of these discussions of theodicy, the focus is on evil rather than suffering. However, it is also the case that both Surin (1989) and Ricoeur (1974), when discussing the shortcomings of theodicy, focus on the inability of theodicy to explain certain kinds of suffering. It seems that part of the problem that theodicy is trying to grapple with is the problem of just how we untangle evil and suffering from one another, especially in a biblical context where there is always the temptation to see suffering as punishment for evil or as a form of purification.

[9] I think H. R. Niebuhr (1970) is getting at a similar point when he argues that God is not a value, but rather the center of value.

kind of utility, or some simple cause/effect relationship. Such terms miss the important point that worship and faith are, in the sense I am invoking, *active* forms of love and, as such, cannot be reduced to a *because*. I would suggest that it is part of the very definition of "divine" or "God" that that which we designate by these terms is beyond human meaning and human reason—is, to put it more positively, worshiped for its own sake, not ours. Calling something "divine" precedes the attribution of meaning or value.[10]

This is not to say that one can worship a God who seems to not care about human suffering: love is not blind; it does not simply refuse to question; it is not wholly without reason. The pull of theodicy consists in the fact that human beings are creatures who need to make at least some sense of their lives, who seek to understand God's care for them. Accordingly, neither Surin nor Ricoeur dismiss completely the theological attempt to address the mystery of evil and suffering. Instead, each displaces the theoretical imperative of theodicy by means of a practical theology of the Cross. Unlike theodicy's attempt to forge a speculatively totalizing account of evil and suffering, a theology of the Cross is a component of the practical participation in relationship to the God who suffers in and with the world. Such a theology articulates God's response to suffering without dwelling on the question of how God allows suffering in the first place, and it locates the human-divine encounter in suffering.[11] And, crucially, it grants priority to love rather than suffering. Thus a theology of the Cross directs human beings to a life, like Christ's, that, out of love, opens itself to the world and all its suffering and refuses to flee from it. This is a life of giving, even to the point of bearing suffering in one's own body: it shows us a divine life in suffering, not divinity as the means to transcend all suffering.

Is it possible (it certainly would be ironic) that in a theology of the Cross we might find a Christian perspective on suffering that escapes Nietzsche's criticisms of the ascetic ideal? Nietzsche's criticisms of the suffering and self-denial idealized by Christianity are directed to suffering as the price for or the way to heavenly bliss; the symbol of the Cross is a symbol for the "hatred of reality" (AC: 161). The question then is whether a theology of the Cross can articulate a Christian life that leads to engagement with reality through a deep love for *this* life. Such a theology would not empha-

[10] See Murdoch 1993: 106–7. Murdoch writes: "The 'true saint' believes in 'God' but not as a super-person who satisfies all our ordinary desires 'in the end.' (There is no end, there is no reward)."

[11] Surin is helpful on both these points. He rejects the impassability of God without sacrificing the idea of omnipotence, and he makes the interesting point that in the kind of theology of the Cross he is recommending theodicy resolves into a "suffering theophany" (1989: 77).

size the impassable, omnipotent God of metaphysical dualism, one whose apathetic response to pain and suffering becomes an ideal for human response, but a God that suffers with humanity, a God immersed in the this-worldly reality of the human, *out of love*. Here, imitating Christ on the Cross would not be a means to another life, but an expression of love for this life—a life in which the deepest suffering is intimately connected with the deepest affirmation.

By this route, one who is persuaded by Nietzsche's criticisms of the ascetic ideal might nonetheless see that there are other possibilities for understanding suffering within Christianity, and might agree that Christianity has more possibilities for affirmation than Nietzsche allows. Such possibilities are exemplified in certain forms of Christian mysticism.

Mystic Suffering

Hadewijch, the thirteenth-century Flemish beguine, mystic, and poet, writes:

> Hell is the seventh name
> of this Love wherein I suffer.
> For there is nothing Love does not engulf and damn.
> . . . . . .
> As Hell turns everything to ruin,
> In Love nothing else is acquired
> But disgust and torture without pity;
> Forever to be in unrest,
> Forever assault and new persecution;
> To be wholly devoured and engulfed
> In her unfathomable essence,
> To founder unceasingly in heat and cold,
> In the deep, insurmountable darkness of Love.
> This outdoes the torments of Hell.
>
> (Bynum 1987)

Caroline Walker Bynum observes that Hadewijch's poetic account of the torments of love describes a union with Christ "in a frenzy of suffering that included and transcended pleasure and pain" (1987: 154). Such mystical union in suffering was not uncommon in the spirituality of medieval, Western Christians, dominated as it was by the shadow of the Cross. Richard Kieckheffer has argued that for fourteenth-century saints "suffering was . . . the key to holiness" (1984: 121).[12] There was a flowering of

[12] Meister Eckhart writes: "If my suffering is in God and God is suffering with me, how then can suffering be sorrow to me . . . as I find pure suffering for the love of God and in God, I find my God suffering" (Sells 1994: 176).

such spirituality in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, though it has not been confined to this period of Christianity. In the sixteenth century, Teresa of Avila described an "agony" in which one "rejoic[es] with ineffable joy," an experience her follower and fellow mystic, Saint John of the Cross, also understood well:

> Oh that it may be perfectly understood how the soul cannot attain to the thicket and wisdom of the richness of God, which are of many kinds, save by entering into the thicket of many kinds of suffering, and by setting thereupon its consolation and desire. And how the soul that of a truth desires Divine wisdom first desires suffering, that it may enter therein—yea into the thicket of the Cross. (Katz 1983: 49)[13]

More recently, Simone Weil described a spiritual life grounded in the experience of "affliction," a state in which one is "nailed to the center of the universe" and there encounters divine love (1951: 135).

Nietzsche, of course, addresses such valorizations of suffering in the *Genealogy.* He mocks Christian claims about the love symbolized by the Cross, and he mourns those tortured by guilt so deep that they believe it can be atoned only by God's self-sacrifice. He also describes the "morbidly lascivious conscience" of the sinner who "thirsts" for pain as an antidote to this sense of guilt and as a way to make life "very interesting" (GM: 141). The power of Nietzsche's interpretation has been proved by recent scholarly interpretations of Christian suffering. Caroline Walker Bynum raises the possibility of a masochistic element in the ascetic and mystical practices of medieval Christian women. She does not reduce these practices to a "morbidly lascivious conscience," but she does point out the dangers of glorifying suffering in a spirituality of the Cross that excludes adequate consideration of the Resurrection (1987: 208f., 252 f.). And it is not too far from Nietzsche's general concern with the ascetic ideal as an expression of the will to power to Richard Kieckhefer's sociological argument that the practices of pain of fourteenth-century mystics were a means of achieving status within the saints' society (1984: 120).[14]

There are, however, interpretations of mystic suffering that challenge Nietzsche's. As my treatment of asceticism demonstrates, Christian suffering can be interpreted and practiced as an intensification and spiritualization, rather than as the extirpation, of desire. Grace Jantzen argues, with respect to the idea of "deification" in Hadewijch, that such desire is cultivated in union with Christ not as "a calm spiritual ascent" toward

[13] See Teresa of Avila 1957: 113, 141: "Yet at the same time this pain is so sweet, and the soul is so conscious of its value, that it now desires this suffering more than all the gifts that it used to receive."

[14] See also E. M. Cioran 1995. Cioran was strongly influenced by Nietzsche.

the otherworldly but in an identification with the humanity and love of Christ which directs them, in love, to this world (1995: 140–41). More generally, criticisms of Christianity's asceticism and otherworldliness, like Nietzsche's, have led contemporary Christian thinkers to look carefully at how they and their predecessors have treated the question of suffering. Dorthee Soelle and Rowan Williams are particularly helpful in this regard. Both argue that suffering can be a crucial element in a practice of love, and both appeal to Christian mystical traditions for insightful and practical reflections on the significance and place of suffering in human life.

Soelle works out of the radical theology of the Cross proposed by Japanese theologian Kazoh Kitamori. Writing of the "mysticism of pain," Kitamori articulates a complex dynamic of affirmation and resistance: "Our only desire is to become one in pain with God. Because of this desire we will seek and long for our pain. . . . We can conquer [pain] only when we seek it within ourselves and long for it" (Kitamori 1965: 81). In at least one specific respect, this brings Kitamori close to Nietzsche's Dionysian theology, for this view of pain requires a God that human beings experience not in victory *over* this life of suffering, but in the midst of it. Nietzsche argues that the will to power of the ascetic priest seeks to "master" life, and the Cross for Nietzsche is a sign of this final (illusory and deathlike) transcendence: the ascetic ideal finds its power in a worldly surrender for the sake of an otherworldly victory and mastery. But when Kitamori and Soelle write of "conquering" pain, they point to a different dynamic: not the reactive search for redemption from or elimination of pain, but the discovery, in the very longing for pain, of the healing presence of Christ. To "conquer" pain, on this view, is not to make oneself free of pain, but rather to recognize in pain one's own responsiveness to the world; it is to love pain in the same way that Jesus insists one must love one's enemies: in active, giving responsiveness. Soelle argues that the acceptance of reality hinges on the affirmation of suffering, that affirming life means making ourselves vulnerable to the pain of which so much earthly reality consists, and in which the creative God participates. The Cross is the symbol of this reality (1975: 163). Spiritual life understood as a *practice of suffering* is an insistence on bearing reality in one's body and soul.

I want to emphasize here a particular kind of openness or responsiveness to reality as the fundamental characteristic of mystical affirmation. Iris Murdoch, who, like Soelle, owes much to Simone Weil's reflections on suffering, usefully elaborates this point. For Murdoch, one of the most difficult things about suffering is actually to see or perceive it. This may sound counterintuitive, and there certainly are many forms of extreme suffering that are brutally present to the senses. But it also is the

case that human beings employ manifold means to hide suffering, their own and especially the suffering of others, from themselves. In our efforts to avoid suffering, we create all kinds of illusions for ourselves to the point where it becomes extremely difficult to see, feel, and respond to many of the worst kinds of sufferings that human beings experience. For Murdoch, the mystical path is first of all a path of purification by which one strips oneself of all such self-centered illusions in an effort to learn how to *attend* to the world before one. Mysticism, for Murdoch, is a practice of attention. She notes that Simone Weil was particularly concerned with attention to suffering, which Weil believed was possible only on the basis of an attention obedient to the mystery of God; that is, willing to face the deep pain of forsakeness in the midst of suffering. Weil thereby identifies pain with an openness to or, in the full sense of the word, a *passion* for the real. "Each time that we have some pain to go through, we can say to ourselves quite truly that it is the universe, the order, and beauty of the world and the obedience of creation to God that are entering our body. After that how can we fail to bless with tenderest gratitude the Love that sends us this gift? Joy and suffering are two equally precious gifts both of which must be savored to the full" (Weil, 1951: 131–33).

To suffer in a mystical way, on this view, is to practice the passion for the real. Soelle finds such love demonstrated in the lives of Christian mystics whose "love for reality . . . avoids placing conditions on reality" or on God. Mystical love exceeds the need to explain reality or God in the way of theodicy—it is not an economical love. Thus "the theodicy question"—the question of the meaning, justification, or economy of suffering—"is superseded by an unlimited love for reality" (1975: 91). Such unconditional loving immerses one in reality to the point where one loves beyond the omnipotent God who promises redemption, loving only the God who is no less than love itself. It is from this perspective that one can understand Eckhart when he writes: "I pray God to rid me of God."[15]

This mystical love is different from forms of Christian transcendence that seek a final end to suffering, from platonically inflected contemplation that seeks the invulnerability of communion with Ideas, or from Stoic tranquillity that transmutes suffering in the transcendence of finite attachments. In the intensification of love, the Christian mystic becomes more vulnerable to the pain of reality. Yet this cultivation of vulnerability, this loving openness to reality, transforms suffering in "submitting" to it. It is neither simply submission nor resistance. Soelle describes the practice of suffering undertaken by mystics as the attempt to "turn all suffering into labor pains and to abolish all senselessness" (1975: 91). This love does

[15] Nietzsche quotes this passage (GS: 235).

not resist suffering in general, or condemn life because it suffers; it resists a certain response to or consequence of suffering: destruction, depression, and muteness, the deadening that results from the inability to bear suffering and the consequent refusal to engage life for fear of suffering. Love, as compassion, bears the suffering of oneself and others in a practice by which the contours of suffering are discerned and creatively transformed. Suffering, on this account, is not something to be justified or explained theoretically, but something to be embraced by love: love precedes justification and demands action.

Rowan Williams's survey of Christian spirituality offers historical support for this view of mysticism and suffering and articulates a soteriology grounded in a decidedly this-worldly view of Christian life. At the beginning of his survey, Williams asserts, "If we believe we can experience our healing without deepening our hurt, we have understood nothing about the roots of our faith" (1990: 11). Properly understood, Williams argues, the greatest figures of the tradition themselves saw the Christian life as a life of "the fellowship of God with human beings in their humanness" (1990: 30). The meeting place for this fellowship is the Cross (1990: 83). One bears the Cross not in order to suffer, but as an expression of love; one thereby joins with God in joining with the suffering of others. God is a "worldly reality," experienced in the here and now, always, therefore, as both present and absent. Williams finds in Martin Luther's view of God as a "negative theologian" the exemplification of this attitude: this God is present as God only in the godlessness of the world, only in that which "negates and mocks all human conceptions of God" (1990: 149). Christian experience is human experience; union with God is an experience of glory and bliss only as it also is an experience of anguish and alienation.

For Williams, as for Soelle, all forms of suffering are, in their depths, manifestations of the human encounter with the otherness of reality. This is the "pain of not being able to evade the constraints of reality, the 'givenness' of events." To desire suffering, then, is to understand suffering as a sign of reality and reality as a gift from God (1990: 72). One therefore experiences pain as the mark of God's "companionship" with us in that reality.[16] Or, as Soelle puts it, suffering becomes an "object of burning love." This love of suffering, as Williams stresses, is neither masochism—it does not involve the anticipation of the voluptuousness of pain itself, nor glorification of suffering—nor does it seek pain as a good in itself. As either, pain simply would become a comfort and consolation, neutralized

[16] Williams cites Ruth Burrows, a contemporary Carmelite: "Below the level of consciousness we know that our pain is the effect of God's closeness; we know it when the pain is withdrawn. We know we have lost for a time that profound companionship which was there in our pain" (1990: 171).

of its aversiveness, and thus no longer able to move one to growth and love. Pain would become an idol. Mystical love avoids these dangers in a delicate and passionate balance, yearning for God's presence but only through a disciplined suspicion of illusions of complacency or self-aggrandizement that would dissipate the mystic's concentrated desire.

As I have indicated, even desire for "mystical experience" can be an attachment that defeats love. Mystical love is more important than mystical "experience." Williams and Soelle each write of "mysticism" and "spirituality," but they both stress that what is of utmost significance for the spiritual life is not extraordinary experience of union with God—in pain or in bliss—but activity in the world grounded in divine love. If we are going to continue to speak of mystical union, one could say that God is present in every moment of such activity. This mystical tradition thus shares with Nietzsche real suspicion about the way extraordinary states of consciousness become escapist consolation. Moreover, the mystic must renounce the sense and meaning of suffering, the temptation to integrate it completely to the economy of human growth and becoming. Though love seeks to transform all suffering into meaning, suffering is excessive and challenges the human will to affirm God without conditions, in an affirmation that does not ask of suffering, "What is in it for me?" (1975: 96). The affirmation of suffering, therefore, takes place only by holding a tension between struggle and surrender. On the one hand, human beings strive to give voice to suffering, to name and make suffering meaningful, shaping themselves out of suffering. On the other hand, to use a concept from Eckhart, they must cultivate the attitude of *Gelassenheit* (letting be) in an obedience to a reality that cannot be mastered. The Cross defeats consolation: Christ experiences himself as forsaken or, as Williams puts it, "God is born in the hell of abandonment" (1990: 141). We must read the multivalence of the word abandonment here: on the one hand, it is abandonment as forsakeness; on the other hand, it is abandonment as "letting go," which, as Thomas Merton writes, is not an act but a gift: "The final step on the way to holiness in Christ is then to completely abandon ourselves with confident joy to the apparent madness of the cross. . . . This madness, the folly of abandoning all concern for ourselves . . . is a twisting, a letting go, an act of total abandonment. But it is also a final break-through into joy" (1996: 119).

At stake here is not simply a different conception of Christian suffering than that offered by Nietzsche, but a different conception of the Christian God. Traditional Christian theodicies that attempt to comprehend the economy of suffering generally depend on the God of metaphysical dualism, whose apathetic response to pain and suffering becomes an ideal for human response. By contrast, a theology of the Cross can affirm a God who suffers with humanity, who is immersed, out of love, in the worldly

reality of the human. This God is closer to the repeated suffering and dying of Nietzsche's Dionysus than the impassable God who supports the dualism of the ascetic ideal. Contrary to Nietzsche's assertion, such a mystical theology would find in the imitation of Christ on the Cross not a means to another life, but an expression of love for this life—a life in which the deepest suffering is intimately connected with the deepest affirmation.

From Suffering to Affirmation

> I carry the blessings of my Yes into all abysses. (Z: 164)

"Dionysus versus the Crucified": as Nietzsche sees it, an affirmation of rebirth into this life versus an accusation against life in the hope for a resurrection to eternal bliss. But the contrast is not as stark as Nietzsche claims. Since his attack on Christianity develops out of his critique of the monotheistic vision of absolute divine power and human abjection, a Christian vision concentrating on God's vulnerability avoids the blows of Nietzsche's idol-smashing hammer. Soelle and Williams show us how Christian mysticism creates an affirmative dynamic out of suffering, love, and responsiveness. Indeed, not only is Nietzsche's criticism off the mark, but there are some strong affinities between Nietzsche and the Christian mysticism they articulate: in both, affirmation is made possible only by a practice of suffering by which the self explores the contours and depths of vulnerability in the course of a loving embrace of reality. At this point, other affinities suggest themselves, which lead me to examine the degree to which Nietzsche's affirmative vision depends on vulnerability, responsiveness, and love, ideas not ordinarily associated with Nietzsche. Exploring these ideas, and so attending carefully to the similarities and differences between Nietzsche and Christian mysticism, I interpret Nietzsche's affirmation as a disposition of joy and love.

Suffering

Nietzsche conceives of philosophy itself as a practice of suffering, one that embraces and transfigures suffering. This dynamic is a key to affirmation, for only in the disciplined responsiveness to suffering—what Saint John of the Cross calls the "dark night of the soul" and Nietzsche the "abysmal thought" or "midnight"—are joy, creativity, and love made possible. "A full and powerful soul not only copes with painful, even terrible losses, deprivations, robberies, insults; it emerges from such hells with a greater fullness and powerfulness; and, most essential of all, with a new increase in the blissfulness of love" (WP: 532). Nietzsche figures his philosophical

path in the descents and ascents of *Zarathustra*, which do not have an "end" in final knowledge or contemplation, but constitute Zarathustra's "work" (Z: 237). This work, this love of the world, is always accompanied by the experience of eternity and love we find at the end of both Books III and IV. In *Zarathustra*, the transfiguration of suffering finds its clearest expression in the pages leading up to Zarathustra's first declaration of love for eternity, near the end of Book III. In the chapter that falls between "The Convalescent"—in which Zarathustra wakes from the trance in which he dreamt of the recurrence of the small man—and the ecstatic songs that end Book III, Zarathustra converses with his soul in a chapter entitled "On the Great Longing." Here, Nietzsche narrates an act of self-overcoming in which the despair of the abysmal thought is transfigured into the joy of affirmative vision.

> O my soul, your smile longs for tears and your trembling mouth for sobs. "Is not all weeping a lamentation? And all lamentation an accusation?" Thus you speak to yourself, and therefore, my soul, you would sooner smile than pour out your suffering—pour out into plunging tears all your suffering over your fullness and over the vine's urge for the vintager and his knife. (Z: 223)

At the end of Zarathustra's greatest struggle with himself, a struggle in which he has had to resist his desire for any final overcoming of "man," his soul is characterized by "longing" and "overabundance." It suffers from overfullness of insight and wants to express this suffering, but without accusation. Zarathustra tells his soul: "But if you will not weep, not weep out your crimson melancholy, then you will have to sing, O my soul. Behold, I myself smile as I say this before you: sing with a roaring song till all seas are silenced, that they may listen to your longing." Instead of pouring out tears that accuse the world, Zarathustra transfigures his suffering into longing, beauty, and celebration, offering a dance with life and a song of love. His song, a hymn to eternity, is a declaration of love and affirmation. The encounter with the "abysmal thought" produces an overflowing joy and creativity.

In the preface to *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche puts the matter of philosophy as suffering and suffering's transfiguration a bit more prosaically. He honors his "fickle health" because it has put him at odds with life—it has made him suffer—and so has opened the space of philosophical reflection. Philosophy, as Nietzsche understands it in this context, is the transfiguration of "everything that wounds us" into "light and flame" (GS: 36). As a practice of suffering, philosophy, like sickness, demands an encounter with the real, which is always an encounter with suffering. Like Zarathustra, the philosopher "goes down," descending into the "subterranean" world of "the modern soul" to examine all-too-human reality of its highest ideals and its deepest sufferings.

Nietzsche's vision of suffering centers on the close relation, even ambiguity, that always exists between suffering and desire. Generally, we use "suffering" to designate the aversiveness experienced in need or in pain, and "desire" to designate the direction toward the goal of filling the need or stopping the pain. In a sense then, suffering is a condition of desire; the pleasure and power of desire needs the aversiveness of suffering. Nietzsche imagines a mode of desire that seeks out confrontation with the otherness and painfulness of reality in the knowledge that it is only in such aversiveness, in resistance to it and creating out of it, that desire has its force. "Suffering from overfullness" is a particular, active way of suffering: it renounces the search for the object or the way of life that will fill or stop suffering and desire once and for all because it knows the desire for desire and so "wants to want and will."

"Wanting to want," desiring desire, is a key to Nietzsche's affirmation. John Caputo has taken issue with Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche by characterizing the affirmation of Deleuze's Nietzsche as follows: "True affirmation does not affirm anything in-itself, anything other-than-itself, i.e. anything *other*. What is other will weigh the will down. . . . So, if affirmation affirms itself, then that is Being affirming itself, which is why, if affirmation affirmed something *other* than itself, that would be nihilism." Caputo points out that Deleuze's affirmation sounds suspiciously like a philosophy of "pure act or pure presence"; that is, like a philosophy of *parousia par excellence* (1993: 45–46). For Deleuze, the affirmative will is only creative and only wills itself in what Edith Wyschogrod describes as a "desire that streams without restriction."[17] The affirmer must, for Deleuze, know how to say "no," but this negation is only the negation of all the forces of reactivity.

Nietzsche's negation is more complex and uncanny than this. For him, the person is constructed out of the dynamics of a conflict with itself. Affirmation must affirm this conflict by spiritualizing it rather than dissolving it or turning it into guilt. This entails a turn to otherness. When Zarathustra proclaims his love for eternity and shows us that this means that joy wants to want and will, we see joy negating itself in a return to the world. Joy sacrifices its bliss for the sake of more desire: it wants to want. In one respect, as Deleuze says, Nietzsche's affirmation does take place in the will willing itself, in the desire for desire. But it can only do this through another kind of desire, the finite desire expressed in the will to creativity, the will to create and love things in the world. In creating, the suffering will expresses the desire for something other than itself ("Woe says, Go!"). At the peak of the creative moment, however, in the accomplishment of beauty, the will finds itself in the eternal moment,

[17] Wyschogrod describes as "saints of depravity" those who exemplify the unconstrained desire affirmed by Deleuze, but "in whom the altruistic impulse remains intact" (1990: 215).

wanting only itself. But that also is the moment of sacrifice, the turn to the world and its desires. Joy sacrifices its self-sufficiency and self-containment, opens itself to the finite and to suffering.[18]

The conflict at the heart of the self, then, is mirrored in the conflict between two kinds of desire: the desire for things of the world—and satiation—and the desire for desire itself. The former depends on the sacrifice of the latter. Where Deleuze argues that Nietzsche's affirmation poses an unresolvable conflict with the Hegelian dialectic, I think it is more helpful to consider the alternative Nietzsche poses to a certain Platonic vision of pure presence. Suffering involves a complex interplay between intense concentration on the self, in all the excruciating details of its pain, and the desire to be free of this self in pain, the desire for something beyond. In suffering, then, a space of resistance of the self to itself, of the self "beyond," to the self in pain, is opened up. In Western thought since Plato, the desire for transcendence inherent in pain has often been conceptualized and practiced as a philosophical or religious path toward contemplation of God, in which one gradually detaches oneself from "the mass of perishable flesh" to turn toward the permanent and eternal. One turns away, that is, from all that causes pain, including the self as finite body; one seeks to master the suffering body and life itself. In the *Symposium*, Plato's Socrates describes the invulnerable love that transcends all finite attachments. But Plato also allows Alcibiades to speak of his passionate and beautiful love for a particular human being—Socrates. Martha Nussbaum has argued that even if we read Plato as affirming the self-sufficient, unchanging love of the divine, the attractiveness of Alcibiades tells us something important (1986: 165–99). It makes clear the very real sacrifice of the particular, the human, the finite, which the love for the eternal entails.

What I find so interesting in Nietzsche's alternative to this vision is not simply that he embraces the necessity of tragic sacrifice, but that he does so while also arguing that love for eternity and love for the finite do not exclude one another but depend on one another. Affirmation as love for life emerges out of a sacrificial dynamic that, for the sake of the fundamental dynamism of love, resists any attempt to hold too tightly to the love of eternity, the love of the world, or the love of self. Affirmation consists in the simultaneous recognition of the aversiveness and the fruitfulness of pain, the desire for transcendence, and the desire for return. This is not simply a matter of accepting the suffering that is one's lot for the sake of

[18] This process is sung not just in the climaxes of Zarathustra, but in the narrative itself as the quest for the *Ubermensch* gives way to the affirmation of the recurrence of the small man. Zarathustra gives up his desire for the complete transcendence of humanity not because he gives up striving and overcoming, but in the recognition that the joy is in the striving itself and not in the accomplishment.

the whole of one's life, but it involves, at the very least, the active cultivation of the vulnerability and empathy that can affirm the inevitability of suffering. On this view, suffering is integral to the affirmative life, it is the ground in which such life can be cultivated. Nietzsche thus "justifies" suffering.

The Madness of Affirmation

To acknowledge that suffering is necessary for the affirmative life is not all Nietzsche means by "advocating suffering" or "thirsting for woe." Put differently, this justification does not fully account for *affirmation*, understood as the uncalculating *desire* for the real. The Nietzschean philosopher does make affirmation to the meaning of suffering, in the sense that suffering is the means to affirmation. But this does not mean that one opens oneself to suffering in order to become affirmative; rather, one does so because one affirms. Affirmation, in other words, is the condition, not the consequence, of meaning: affirmation takes place "beyond" meaning, and, in that sense, is nihilistic.

To make this clearer, I return to the meaning of the *Genealogy*. This book maps one of Nietzsche's descents, his exploration of the suffering of the modern soul. On this journey, Nietzsche finds that human beings would rather will nothing than not will at all. Human beings submit themselves to the suffering and self-hatred of sin, willing a kind of self-destruction, rather than facing the suffering of meaninglessness. Nietzsche, by contrast, in exposing the nihilism of the ascetic ideal as the will to nothing of Western humanity, takes the nihilism of meaninglessness upon himself, as "my problem." He thereby brings himself (and us?) to the place where Zarathustra arrives when he faces the terror of "the most abysmal thought," or where Nietzsche's madman comes when he proclaims the death of God: "Are we not straying as though through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space?" (GS: 181).

There are no easy or clear answers to Nietzsche's problem, because he offers no answers that promise the definitive overcoming of nihilism. The will to the definitive overcoming of nihilism, would merely reinscribe the metaphysics of mastery, as Blanchot recognizes: "Nihilism would be identical with the will to overcome Nihilism *absolutely*" (1985: 126). Instead of offering a solution to nihilism, Nietzsche *responds* to nihilism. The abyss of the death of God, Nietzsche's encounter with nihilism, is a "dark night of the soul," or, as Rowan Williams describes it: "not just a sequence of decisions to do without spiritual consolation; it is the actual felt absence of consolation" (1990: 170). From one perspective, such absence of consolation might be described as the "suffering of suffering," as suffering without meaning, the suffering at being forsaken even by God. Yet pre-

cisely in making this nihilism "my problem," Nietzsche transfigures it. The problem of meaning becomes a philosophical adventure and task, Nietzsche finds joy at this boundary of Western culture and human life. Nihilism as meaninglessness now becomes a space in which creativity is possible, a space of freedom where the turn to affirmation can be accomplished: it becomes, as Nietzsche puts it in a note, "a divine way of thinking" (SW 12: 354). This affirmation is not consolation but a difficult joy that takes shape in the tension between the renunciatory "No" of nihilism and the "Yes" of creativity.[19] And it is precisely in the rejection of "purpose" and the embrace of chaos and chance that Nietzsche finds the possibility of blessing and affirming (Z: 166).

Affirmation, as Nietzsche writes it, is a kind of madness. It is the madness of a surrender to that which lies outside of knowledge or reason, to the chaos of becoming. Like the Christian mystic enacting the anarchy of love—loving through his or her suffering and beyond God, meaning, and all human hierarchies—Nietzsche's affirmation is ultimately grounded in a "hidden Yes." The madness of this "hidden Yes" is a theme of the final pages of *The Gay Science*. There, the "playful spirit" (GS: 346) that is Nietzsche's new ideal is moved not by *reasons*, Socratic grounds developed, asserted, and confirmed in the broad daylight of consciousness, but by a "hidden Yes," by "will," a passion emerging from body and shining in spirit—amoral, nonmetaphysical, unreasonable. Here, Nietzsche invokes madness and play, enthusiasm and ecstasy, to help envision a passionate way of life, one that does not sacrifice the joy of the moment for the sake of deliberation about and achievement of certain ends. This does not mean that Nietzsche forsakes all goals and ideals—he obviously does not, because he *seeks* to cultivate an affirmative life. But at the same time that one hopes for affirmation, it must in some way be embodied and lived in the now, in the passion of the problem and the experience of the experiment. Genuine affirmation finds its source in a movement of the soul that cannot be willed or forced, for it is an embrace of life out of love; it is an "inspiration," a feeling "of freedom, of absoluteness, of power, of divinity" (EH: 300). Ultimately, the source of affirmation is as mysterious as the source of faith.

In one sense, Nietzsche demands the joy of affirmation, as an act of what Soelle calls "mystical defiance," willing affirmation from the abyss and enacting it in creative praise of life and eternity. But despite the

[19] Here, the term "joy," in Clement Rosset's sense, becomes a key concept for understanding affirmation. For Rosset, joy is "unconditional rejoicing for and with respect to existence," in the full realization of the tragic nature of existence. Joy does not overcome tragedy or suffering, but is "eminently attentive to calamity" and thus paradoxical. "There is no true joy unless it is simultaneously thwarted, in contradiction with itself"(1993: 15–17).

emphasis Nietzsche puts on the individual will, Zarathustra does not simply call on "his own" will. Note that Zarathustra's transfiguration of the abysmal thought into the joy of eternity takes place in the context of a conversation between "Zarathustra," as voice, as ego, and his soul, which Zarathustra describes in both personal and cosmological terms, as both "mine" and, variously, "sea," "destiny," and "umbilical cord of time." This conversation takes place, in other words, at the boundary where self and "beyond"—something more fundamental and more comprehensive than the ego—meet. Zarathustra's affirmation is not the result of a calculating knowledge that determines it is better to affirm than to deny, for it takes place only as the boundaries of the self are broken, as the self is overtaken by the "Yes." This "Yes" is not something he controls, but something that occurs in him, an affirmation that strikes in "lightning bolts that say 'Yes' and laugh 'Yes.' " Zarathustra gives all he has to the soul, and he bids it to say "Yes," but it is only the soul that can make the affirmation. Zarathustra is beyond himself in this "Yes." He cannot grasp affirmation, he cannot master it and have it. He can will it, but this will must be enacted as a joyful love by which Zarathustra moves beyond himself in a receptivity to life and through which life affirms itself in him.

"To Share not Suffering but Joy": Nietzsche's Affirmation

This "Yes" is not all there is to affirmation, however. It makes affirmation possible, but affirmation as a mode of life, a way of living, is more complex. To articulate in more detail what Nietzsche means by affirmation, it is necessary to consider Nietzsche's view of love and joy. The suffering that the Nietzschean practices is not only personal suffering, but a more generalized human suffering. As I have argued, Nietzsche's philosophical methods—such as the "hermeneutics of desire" or, more generally, "perspectivism"—are as much spiritual practices of discernment and transformation as they are exemplifications of epistemological theory. Specifically, when he writes of philosophy understood as wandering or traveling in "many distant, terrifying worlds," viewing life from different perspectives, Nietzsche signals that he is less interested in philosophy as constructing a coherent theory of knowledge than in inhabiting different points of view as a way of learning about others and about oneself. As suffering drives him to explore the depths of his own life, and so to open himself to further suffering, Nietzsche encounters many different possibilities of suffering and philosophy. "A philosopher who has traversed many kinds of health, and keeps traversing them, has passed through an equal number of philosophies" (GS: 35). These enable him to understand the suffering of many different kinds of people.

> Anyone who manages to experience the history of humanity as a whole 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. (GS: 268)

As psychologist (and artist), the genuine philosopher is able to make many types of people come to life in his own "underworld." The "reality" to which such a philosopher has access in suffering is not a metaphysical reality, but the reality of one's own suffering body and soul and, in this process, the bodies and souls of others.

Nietzsche's practice of suffering, then, depends on a kind of empathy. True, he calls this empathy "enormously generalized," less empathy with particular individuals than with types. One might therefore accuse Nietzsche of knowing suffering in the kind of generalized or aestheticized way that Surin and Ricoeur criticize. But a consideration of Nietzsche's critique of pity opens up a different way to look at the issue. Nietzsche was vituperative in his attack on Christian pity—*mitleid*, literally, suffering-with. But to suffer-with admits of at least two meanings. One can suffer-with in a way that shares with the other your knowledge of his or her suffering, or you can suffer-with from a distance, recognizing the suffering of the other, even experiencing it yourself, without communicating that knowledge or feeling to that person in any direct way. It is the former kind of suffering-with that Nietzsche rejects as pity. In part, he does so because he believes that sharing suffering shames the one who suffers, and he believes that shame is the worst form of suffering there is. Pity, on this view, *imposes* upon the other a particularly wasteful and demoralizing form of suffering. Speaking through Zarathustra, Nietzsche writes: "Thus speaks he who has knowledge: shame, shame, shame—that is the history of man. And that is why he who is noble bids himself not to shame. . . . If I must pity, at least I do not want it known; and if I do pity, it is preferably from a distance" (Z: 88). More importantly, however, Nietzsche rejects pity because when one responds to another in pity, one threatens to tear the sufferer away from his or her suffering:

> Is it good for you yourselves to be above all full of pity? And is it good for those who suffer?. . . Whenever people notice that we suffer, they interpret our suffering superficially. It is the very essence of the emotion of pity that it strips away from the suffering of others whatever is distinctly personal. . . . They wish to help and have no thought of the personal necessity of distress, although terrors, deprivations, impoverishments, midnights . . . are as necessary for me and you as their opposites. It never occurs to them that, to put it mystically, the path to one's own heaven always leads through the voluptuousness of one's own

> hell. No, the "religion of pity" (or "the heart") commands them to help, and they believe that they have helped most when they have helped most quickly. (GS: 269)

Pity, for Nietzsche—both in extending it and receiving it—tempts one away from oneself, it distances one in a deadening way from the suffering body. In his view, it is only in moving through suffering—through one's own "hell"—that one finds one's own path and one's own joy.

Nietzsche rejects pity as sharing and shaming, but this does not mean that he refuses to suffer or to recognize or feel the suffering of others. In fact, it is only because he can feel the suffering of others that the philosopher is, according to Nietzsche, always tempted by pity: "The more a psychologist—a born and inevitable psychologist and unriddler of souls—applies himself to the more exquisite cases and human beings, the greater becomes the danger that he might suffocate from pity" (BG: 217). Though he does so from a distance, Nietzsche does practice a kind of empathy or compassion. Consequently, his view of suffering must be distinguished from the stoicism, or simply the cruelty and callousness, with which he is sometimes identified.[20]

There is, nevertheless, a connection with others that is missing from Nietzsche's vision, one that has both ethical and philosophical consequences. Zarathustra suffers with the higher men but resists pity. And in the end, he is alone, having turned from the higher men to seek his true companions. Nietzsche's writing resounds—in vain, it seems—with the call for those who can "hear" him. But who can hear him? Who are his true companions? The difficulty interpreters have in discerning the genuine compassion in Nietzsche's thought results in part from his refusal/inability to communicate compassion except in the most oblique manner. To the extent that he seeks to communicate only to select, noble souls, this indirection is intentional on Nietzsche's part, and it is of a piece with his tendency to focus only on suffering to which one can respond out of one's own strength. His ideal is the tragic hero who struggles valiantly and alone against inexorable fate, and he is critical of the demand to "suffer with" those who cannot fend for themselves against the misfortune or the evil they encounter. Nietzsche claims, correctly, that the Christian idea of sin threatens to turn all suffering into punishment and destructive self-condemnation. However, he fails to acknowledge the danger of his approach to suffering: turning *all* suffering into a test of spirit. Nietzsche's legitimate concern for the superficiality of pity leads ultimately to a failure to recognize the value of community and human love as compassion, a failure that prevents the affirmation of full human relationship.

[20] See Nussbaum 1993 and Tillich 1952.

Each of us, at least to some extent, is alone with our suffering. Compassion, like all powerful spiritual practices, can therefore be used stupidly, because it can undermine self-reliance. But this does not mean that all compassion—not from a distance, but fully engaged with the sufferer—tears us away from or prevents us from reaching that place—the dark night of the soul—that both Nietzsche and the Christian mystics find so important. Compassion can be a powerful mode of attention to the other that seeks to discern when another is being overwhelmed to the point of physical or spiritual paralysis—as Nietzsche knows is all too possible. Thus, as Soelle argues, compassion, expressed in both "spiritual" and "material" ways, can in many instances be that which enables certain people to discover or rediscover the strength that allows them to go on to confront and affirm their own suffering. Nietzsche seems blind to the strengthening power of a certain kind of love, and so does not distinguish suffering that will make one more powerful in love and spirit from suffering that destroys.

There is, however, a way to respond to this criticism on Nietzsche's behalf, for he is not without a positive vision of human relationship. He has a strong appreciation for the value of friendship as the Greeks understood it, the noble, self-full love of *philia*, rather than the self-less love of *agape*. Moreover, his attack on pity is accompanied by the claim that his goal is to teach others how "to share not suffering but joy" (GS: 271).[21] Love between friends consists primarily, for Nietzsche, in sharing joy. To what extent might sharing one's joy with one who suffers do more to empower him or her than sharing suffering? Is it possible that sharing joy is more compassionate than sharing suffering?

Nietzsche argues that pity is a means of erasing the differences between self and other and holding the deepest sufferings at bay. When one pities, one assimilates the suffering of the other to one's own experience, in part, no doubt, out of genuine concern to communicate, but also in part, thinks Nietzsche, to save ourselves from facing the concrete particularity—and the difficulty—of the other's suffering. The effect, then, is actually to silence the sufferer. Genuine friendship, for Nietzsche, is different, because it is based in the recognition of difference between self and other. To be able to have a friend is to be able to see the other as other, as different. Friendship, claims Nietzsche, is therefore intimately linked with enmity, not in the sense of envious hatred, or a desire to conquer, but in the sense of resistance that refuses to assimilate the friend to oneself, that keeps the differences alive. Ever critical of liberal tolerance, Nietzsche holds that the genuine response to difference, on some very fundamental level, is resistance, but an attentive resistance. Friendship requires resistance because one should become for one's friend a beacon for overcoming, be-

[21] "[Men of] antiquity knew better how to rejoice: we how to suffer less. . . . Perhaps we are only constructing the foundations upon which [to] again erect the temple of joy" (HH: 259).

cause friendship is based in "a *shared* thirst for an ideal above [the friends']" (GS: 89). And this means that one should hide one's "compassion . . . under a hard shell" in order to encourage the friend to find his or her own resources for self-overcoming. Resistance in this sense also means keeping enough of a distance so as to be able to continue to recognize difference and so truly to relate to the other as other. "In a friend one should have one's best enemy. You should be closest to him with your heart when you resist him" (Z: 56).

As he imagines it, then, Nietzsche's *philia* is a love constituted out of tensions and differences. For that very reason it is a genuine bond between persons, to be distinguished from forms of love in which difference is erased, love that finds reason only in an engulfing intoxication such as the surreptitious love of oneself, or love that seeks to lose oneself in the other. "What is love but understanding and rejoicing [*freuen*] at the fact that another lives, feels and acts in a way different from and opposite to ours? If love is to bridge [*uberbrucke*] these antitheses through joy [*Freude*] it may not deny [*aufheben*] or seek to abolish them.—even self-love presupposes an unblendable duality (or multiplicity) in one person" (HH: 229–30).

Love is a form of joy—"rejoicing" in the encounter with the other as other, whether the other is another person or an aspect of oneself. Again, we see that Nietzsche thereby refuses a certain kind of mastery of consciousness and knowledge that assimilates the other to oneself, attempting to unify the multiplicity and difference even within the self. This refusal, viewed positively, is love. In this sense, love is an expression of the passion for the real because it demands the attention that allows the other to be and therefore allows one to experience the other as other. Clement Rosset has emphasized this point with respect to the significance of music for Nietzsche as a "witness to the world." Rosset (1993) cites *The Gay Science*:

> This is what happens to us in music: First one has to *learn to hear* a figure and melody at all, to detect and distinguish it, to isolate it and delimit it as a separate life. Then it requires some exertion and good will to *tolerate* it in spite of its strangeness, to be patient with its appearance and expression and kindhearted about its oddity. Finally there comes a moment when we are *used* to it, when we wait for it, when we sense that we should miss it if it were missing; and now it continues to compel and enchant us relentlessly until we have become its humble and enraptured lovers who desire nothing better from the world than it and only it. But that is what happens to us not only in music. That is how we have *learned to love* all things that we now love. (GS: 262)

To suffer, in the most general sense, is to find oneself impinged upon by that which is other. Love is thus a practice of suffering, though not a sharing of suffering. To speak of love in this manner, however, is also to

point out that it involves not only the passivity of being impinged upon by the other, but also the activity of *desiring* the other as other. Desiring the suffering that this entails is, as we find in the mystics, an expression of the love for the real.

"Joy" is that which one gives and shares in friendship (HH: 180). Nietzsche places immense value, in his writing, on giving: his affirmer is an "overflowing" spirit whose creations are gifts given out of fullness, gratitude, and love.[22] In the final speech of Book One, Zarathustra proclaims the "gift-giving virtue" as the highest virtue. He explains this virtue by distinguishing two kinds of selfishness: first, a selfishness that proceeds from a powerful self-love overflowing in gifts of love; second, a "sick selfishness" that is greedy and needy, taking simply to fill an endless lack that can never give freely. Each form of selfishness corresponds to a kind of selflessness. With respect to sick selfishness, selflessness is always reluctant and instrumental, giving (of) oneself only under the threat of punishment—the "spasm of the scourge"—or the lure of reward. It is a calculating virtue, giving in order to receive, seeking its own best interest. "And now you are angry with me because I teach that there is no reward and paymaster? And verily, I do not even teach that virtue is its own reward" (Z: 93–94). Healthy, powerful giving, by contrast, gives itself in the overflowing of love; this is *active* giving, giving out of the urge to create, without regard to itself or thought to reward. To the extent that one gives without calculation of reward, one gives selflessly. It is only selfish in the sense that what is given comes out of one's fullness, made possible by a loving cultivation of oneself. For Nietzsche, one must give freely and be willing to lose oneself, to let go of oneself at least to some degree, in order for giving to be genuine.[23] There is an ecstatic element to Nietzsche's conception of giving and creativity, and he writes, "It is in this *state of consecration* that one should live" (D: 223).

This sharing of joy is also the basis for the Nietzschean ethic. Zarathustra invokes love to explain virtue, finding the origin of all such virtue in the grace of "the lover's will" (Z: 76), and he proclaims that when we learn to feel joy "we learn best not to hurt others or to plan hurts for them" (Z: 88). He even warns against a pathos of heroism that takes pride in the self-denial of self-overcoming. Such pathos leads only to hatred and gloom, and cannot discover the blessedness of joy. Instead of asserting one's heroism, Zarathustra counsels, one should learn "beauty," "laughter," and "kindness" (Z: 118). Nietzsche's power, on this reading, is not

[22] Zarathustra says that he leaves his solitude in order to "give away and distribute" his wisdom. "Behold, this cup wants to become empty again, and Zarathustra wants to become man again" (Z: 10).

[23] For related reflections on giving, reciprocity, and ethics, see Derrida 1992a and 1995. For a response to Derrida, see Milbank 1995.

a violent explosion of dominating will. It is far too simplistic to view his "will to power" in terms of some kind of egoistic, self-aggrandizing power over others. On the contrary, it involves an elevated, ecstatic state of "willlessness," a state where one's personal will is transcended in a graceful giving. It is not too much of a stretch to find here in Nietzsche a version of the Augustinian ethic: "Love, and do what you will."[24] This joyful willlessness is the essence of mystical love for the world.

Williams and Soelle demonstrate in their reading of the Christian mystical tradition that what persists through the dark night of the soul, the suffering encounter with the real, is love, not God the Redeemer, but God the lover experienced as one's own love for the world. As Nietzsche conceives it, the analogous experience is the experience of creative love, which both connects us with the concrete reality of the world and also detaches us from it. One must give oneself, in love, to the other. However, in order to continue willing and loving, one must also be able to detach oneself from that which is created and loved, in order to maintain the awareness of the greater movement of love and creativity. "Verily, through a hundred souls I have already passed on my way, and through a hundred cradles and birth pangs. Many a farewell have I taken; I know the heartrending last hours. But this my creative will, my destiny, wills it" (Z: 87). The Nietzschean self, as portrayed in these sections from *Zarathustra*, finds itself enmeshed in relations of creativity and love that, however crucial and constitutive of the self, are relativized in a broader or deeper connection with a process of power/creativity that Nietzsche calls "life." In order to maintain the positive intensity of life, Zarathustra claims that all one's creations and loves—all that is oneself—have to at least in some way be overcome or abandoned.

"Love," as Nietzsche understands it, is a rejoicing in the other, a directionality toward or desire for the other manifested in creative giving. "Joy" is a more generalized state of relation to the whole of world and life. To put it in terms of love, joy is that element of love that joins the lovers in something beyond themselves, the transcendent aspect of love that makes "sharing" possible even as the friends resist one another. As such, joy is a complicated, even paradoxical state or mood. Wanting itself and the agony of the world, joy is more comprehensive than the feeling of rejoicing in or desiring of some particular object. Nietzsche isolates two movements of the will, two registers of mystical abandonment: the abandonment of an overflowing giving that forges relations of love, and the abandonment of oneself as invested in that love. With respect to each,

[24] Henri Birault, in his essay "Beatitude in Nietzsche," quotes Nietzsche's notebooks: "What must I do to be happy? That I know not, but I say to you: Be happy, and then do as you please" (1985: 222). Nietzsche also writes: "An action compelled by the instinct of life has in the joy of performing it the proof it is a right action" (AC: 132).

Nietzsche is concerned with the way the self finds itself subject to a will to power that is both within it and beyond it. This will compels the self always to move beyond itself in acts of giving and self-transcendence. On this view, the self is not an atomistic soul, but a dynamic movement of will, ever reaching out and beyond itself. At the heart of this movement is a relation between the self, as ego, and the will to power, as that which both grounds the self and transcends the self. Embracing the will to power, one lives intensely and affirmatively in a continual re-creating and overcoming of the self, a new casting forth of the self in the world. In the end, this is what I think Nietzsche means by affirmation: not simply the love that perseveres through dark nights of the soul, but the flowering of this love into an embrace of the whole, in all its joy, in all its pain. In Nietzsche's terms, such flowering is the manifestation of the divine. This transfiguration of the human into the divine is not a matter of attaining a superhuman, overhuman omniscience or omnipotence, but a matter of active love that blesses all of existence. For the affirmer, in the affirmer, life says "Yes" to itself: "eternal Yes of being/eternally am I thy Yes:/for I love thee, O eternity!" (DD: 67). Affirmation is mystical participation.

A Divine Way of Thinking

The rhetoric of secular ideology makes it easy for most readers to identify religion in Nietzsche's texts as the embodiment of a nihilism to be overcome. In turn, this has made it difficult to see that the questions he raises and the possibilities he imagines with respect to religion are far more complex than is allowed by a simplistic reading of his attack on religion. But the secular reading of Nietzsche results from far more than ideological struggle (and than Nietzsche's own ambivalences). The pronouncement of the madman—"God is dead"—has resonated with the temper of the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries because Western culture during that period has been deeply informed by a sense of loss of what people imagine to have been a richer, more cosmic, more meaningful way of being in the world. The fear expressed by the madman in the face of his own pronouncement speaks clearly to the culture shaped by nostalgia for God, or faith, or simply meaning.

One of the first, and among the most important, of the intellectual figures to be deeply influenced by Nietzsche was Max Weber. In his own conceptual idiom, Weber treated the loss proclaimed by Nietzsche's madman as "disenchantment," understood as a historical trajectory in which magic and religion are lost to human beings in the face of increasing rationalism. In this process, "the world's processes become disenchanted . . . and henceforth simply "are" and "happen" but no longer signify any-

thing." (1978: 506). Thus Nietzsche's early despair in the face of a demystifying rationality whose imperative he could not and would not escape; thus Weber's lifelong struggle with the problem of meaning; thus the nihilism of modernity: as human beings perfect reason, they lose the reason to live. For Weber, the loss of such signification led to an intensification of the importance of meaning: "It is the intellectual who conceives of the 'world' as a problem of meaning. . . . As a consequence [of disenchantment] there is a growing demand that the world and the total pattern of life be subject to an order that is significant and meaningful." Since the meaningful order of the world was no longer simply "there" or self-evident, no longer inhered in the relation of one's god or gods to the world in a relatively unproblematic way, meaning became an articulate problem and demand. The modern fascination with meaning, and the modern study of religion's tendency to cast religion as a meaning-creating force, are consequences of this demand. Lost sight of in this process of intellectualization is the fact that meaning, when it is most meaningful, is not an intellectual, self-conscious sense of the world's significance as much as it is a lived, embodied, practiced relation to the world: the world "is" meaningful, the natural and the cultural are much closer together than they become in the modern period.

The mature Nietzsche, the Nietzsche who already had expressed a yearning for "Dionysian magic" and dancing muses in his first books, and who had written *Zarathustra*, suggests a new way to enchantment, through affirmation. On the one hand, Nietzschean enchantment is based in the recognition that after the death of God, meaning does not inhere in the cosmos as objective reality, but is created in and through human beings. On the other hand, however, Nietzsche is not paralyzed by the modern illusion that human creation emerges simply out of the autonomous subject. Creation happens—it is as much, maybe more, an event than an intentional action. Nietzsche's enchantment does not renounce the imperatives of modern rationality, however, but works only through close attention to the real and the natural. For the real, as Nietzsche sees it, happens at the interstices of imagination, creation, and nature. Nietzsche's mysticism is a discipline of finding/creating magic in the "closest things."

In the spring of 1888—as he was preparing to write *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Antichrist*—Nietzsche wrote an extended entry in his notebooks, entitled "On the History of the Concept of God." There he identifies the concept of god with the will to power of a people, he distinguishes between decadent and ascending gods, and he rejects the popular nineteenth-century claim that the development from the God of ancient Israel to the Christian God of pure goodness represents an advance. This last, he claims, is "God degenerated to the contradiction of life, rather

than its transfiguration [*Verklarung*] and eternal 'Yes.' " Christianity, he complains, has prevented the creation of new gods: "Almost two thousand years: and not a single new god!" He ends, however, on a hopeful note.

> And how many new gods are still possible! As for myself, in whom the religious, that is to say god-forming instinct occasionally becomes active at impossible times—how differently, how variously the divine has revealed itself to me each time! So many strange things have passed before me in those timeless moments that fall into one's life as if from the moon, when one no longer has any idea how old one is or how young one will yet be—I should not doubt that there are many kinds of gods. (SW 13: 523–26)

Nietzsche proclaims the death of the Christian God, but, as he attests here, more gods are still possible. And, in one of his "Dionysian Dithyrambs," he speaks to one of these, whom he describes only as an "unknown god."

> No!
> Come back!
> *with* all your torments!
> All the streams of my tears
> run their course to you!
> and the last flame of my heart,
> it burns up to you.
> Oh come back,
> my unknown god! my *pain*!
> my last happiness!
>
> (DD: 57)[25]

As an expression of a passion and praise for life, Nietzsche's affirmation is a declaration of divinity. When one says "Yes" out of the deepest suffering and the deepest joy, when one says to the "demon" who proclaims eternal recurrence, "You are a god," one declares divinity. The divine reveals itself to the affirmer in the sense that to affirm is to deify. After the death of God, the point for Nietzsche is not to discover new gods, nor to determine a new eternal will or order, but to find his own will, deep beyond his personal self, out of which he desires and creates gods.

These considerations raise the question of the significance of the "divine" in discourses such as Nietzsche's. Nietzsche writes of feeling divine; he invokes Dionysus. In doing so, is he simply using figurative language to communicate something human, all too human? Can the intensity he

[25] See also GS: 117, where Nietzsche describes the particular passion that defines nobility of soul as "offering sacrifices on altars that are dedicated to an unknown god . . . a self-sufficiency that overflows and gives to men and things."

experiences in his "inspiration," even if it cannot be reduced to any single materialist or naturalistic interpretation, at least be generally comprehended in terms of the relation between the intensity of body and significations of consciousness without involving any third term, such as "god"? In short, is divinity for Nietzsche simply a subjective, psychological state or, as in Feuerbach, a projection?

This question must be approached carefully, and I can only begin to do this here. First, the "divine" for Nietzsche is not realized in an independently existing entity or force—"Dionysus" is not a being. As creator and affirmer, Nietzsche is not interested in the metaphysical question of whether gods "exist" or not, nor whether reality, or "will," or "life," is divine "in-itself." Second, even if one therefore wants to call Nietzsche's divinity a projection, one must also recognize that it is not pathological, or alienating projection, for it is not an expression of need or the production of a lack. It is, instead, an expression of celebration and gratitude. Third, it is a mistake to move from these two points to the position that "divinity" in Nietzsche is "merely" a figure of speech that can, for all intents and purposes, simply be eliminated in a strict analysis of his ideas.

To encounter reality as perfection by creatively and lovingly living in it is to enact a divine transfiguration. In general, Nietzsche describes transfiguration in terms of art and philosophy rather than religion. But it should be clear that "art" and "philosophy" as we ordinarily understand them—creating beautiful things and careful thinking about important things—are not what Nietzsche had in mind here. Instead, philosophy and art are spiritual practices in which the highest possibilities of human life are realized—precisely because they are ways of living in which affirmation is enacted. The divine aspect of this affirmation is strongest in some of Nietzsche's comments on art. In his late work, the primary question is not how art comforts, but how certain kinds of art (most importantly, tragic philosophy) express certain elevated states of soul. "Dionysian art," Nietzsche's ideal, is the "transfiguring power of intoxication" rooted in the noble soul's overabundant "gratitude and love" (GS: 328). He therefore rejects the decadence and deadness of Kantian and Schopenhauerian idealizations of a disinterested "*L'art pour l'art*." The artist as lover "becomes a squanderer . . . he believes in God again, he believes in virtue, because he believes in love" (SW 13: 299–300).

As John Sallis (1991: 71) writes, the identity of the Dionysian is "abysmal": it is realized only in a certain movement of creativity and not "in some originary being over against the individual." In part, this means that that which the artist/philosopher produces—works of art/philosophy—are ultimately less important than the process of growth and spiritualization by which they are generated. Dionysian art/philosophy is a process

by which life speaks in and through one. This requires both a responsive listening and a creativity. For Nietzsche, the divine resides in this living relationship between self and reality by which one connects with that which is beyond oneself—"timeless moments that fall into one's life as if from the moon." Dionysian creation is participation. In this participation one "creates" gods. But, again, what is significant here is not the particular creation—divinity comes alive as neither projection nor object—but the state, the feeling of divine participation and gratitude, out of which the creation emerges. To reimagine religion in a Nietzschean key, one must take seriously the de-emphasis or subversion of god as entity that has persisted in apophatic mystical traditions, and which, for Nietzsche, is even evident in the life of Jesus. In *The Antichris*t, he writes: "*Evangelic practice alone* leads to God, it *is* God!" Religion, then, as a certain openness or responsiveness in which divinity is not so much encountered as realized.

In his final polemic against Wagner, Nietzsche asserts that the essence of all "great" art is "gratitude [*Dankbarkeit*]" (CW: 191–92). In the same note in which he affirms the possibility of new gods, Nietzsche describes religion as a "form of gratitude." He is more specific on this point in *Beyond Good and Evil*, for there he asserts that it is the noble religion of the Greeks that is characterized by gratitude (BG: 64). To qualify nobility in terms of such gratitude complicates the picture of the noble Nietzsche often gives us, particularly in the first essay of the *Genealogy*, for there the noble is simply active, blindly imposing himself on all around him. But when he describes nobility as thankful, he suggests that there is a way to be both active *and* receptive. The idea of gratitude also complicates Nietzsche's concept of art. It is only through the disciplined attention of the artist, a determined seeing, feeling, hearing of the real, that true creativity is possible. Nietzsche rejects the romantic cult of genius in favor of the "severe, noble, conscientious training in the service of art" (CW: 182). The artist does not assign meaning to the world as an autonomous consciousness, on the model of God the Creator. Often, it seems, the artist is as unsure about what a creation means as is his or her audience. Meaning emerges, and it is as much visceral and sensual as intellectual; creation, in a way, takes place beyond intention and meaning. Only through a certain abandonment of the self is the world experienced as enchanted and is one able to enchant the world. This is one reason why we should hesitate before locating mysticism in peak experiences. Is the word "experience" helpful in illuminating what happens in artistic creation? Is it not more illuminating to talk about a kind of event or interaction between artist and world or the artist and God?

The religious, mystical element in Nietzsche's thought is expressed in reverence as gratitude, not pious awe, but the active thankfulness for exis-

tence that is the active blessing of transfiguration—the art of apotheosis, the declaration of divinity (BG: 213; Z: 164; GS: 328). This declaration of divinity is a kind of deification, for such art, writes Nietzsche, is not only the "essentially *affirmation, blessing, deification of existence*"; it is itself "perfection of existence, [the] production of perfection and plenitude" (WP: 434). The point is a way of existing, a way of desiring and creating that attributes perfection to this life, here and now, that finds perfection in the creative, self-affirming surge of life always beyond itself. Divinity, for Nietzsche, is realized in the affirmative human being, in the transfiguration of reality accomplished in and through the reality of an affirmative life, in a love that reaches beyond, beneath the self and turns even the encounter with the demonic into a declaration of the divine. Nietzsche's reflection on Jesus applies equally to his affirmer. "[H]e knows that it is through the *practice* of one's life that one feels 'divine,' 'blessed,' 'evangelic,'. . . The profound instinct for how one would have to *live* in order to feel oneself 'in Heaven,' to feel oneself 'eternal' while in every other condition one by *no* means feels oneself 'in Heaven': this alone is the psychological reality of 'redemption.'—A new way of living, *not* a new belief" (AC: 156).

Conclusion

ALTERITY AND AFFIRMATION

> Is not this remythicizing a sign that the discipline of reality is nothing without the grace of imagination? that the consideration of necessity is nothing without the evocation of possibility?. . . What carries this mytho-poetic function is another power of language, a power that is no longer the demand of desire, demand for protection, demand for providence, but a call in which I leave off all demands and listen.
> (Paul Ricouer, *Freud and Philosophy*)

> Religion in the mind is not credulity and the practice is not forms. It is a life. It is the order and soundness of a man. It is not something *else to be got*, to be *added*, but is a new life of those faculties you have.
> (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

Madness

I BEGAN WITH THE PREFACES of 1886 and Nietzsche's celebration of a life rejuvenated in the recovery of health and love. By the turn of the new year 1889, Nietzsche had fallen into madness, where he would remain for the final ten years of his life. In the months leading up to his collapse, Nietzsche had been working at a feverish pace, and at times had experienced intense feelings of euphoria. Some of his most "affirmative" statements come out of this period, particularly in *Ecce Homo*. We do not know why Nietzsche went mad—whether he suffered from a congenital illness, whether he had contracted syphilis, or whether he simply broke down from the strain of various physical ailments and excessive mental effort. Whatever the cause, one cannot help wondering: how intimately are his ideas about human life and affirmation bound up with the excesses and deprivations of a life that ended in madness? Does Nietzsche simply think from a place that most of us will not or should not go? Alan Megill (1985) describes Nietzsche and some of his poststructuralist successors as "prophets of extremity." Nietzsche's was extremity practiced at the boundaries of the self, humanity, and the divine. His writings illuminate these brilliantly. But if he was a kind of prophet, one can imagine him speaking—to himself? to an other?—in a voice like that of Jeremiah, who laments before the Lord of the pain he suffers at being un-

Epigraphs: Ricoeur, 1970: 525; Emerson, as quoted in *Emerson: Mind on Fire* (Richardson 1995: 126).

heard.[1] For Nietzsche's was also an extremity of solitude. He was a lonely, sickly man without home, without community. He celebrates his solitude, but he suffers from it as well. And in the end, it closed in on him, leading him to megalomania and, finally, to silence.

I have tried to turn our attention to the extremity of responsiveness that I believe is integral to Nietzsche's affirmative vision. It has too long been ignored, and it is a primary reason why I believe we are compelled to rethink the question of religion in Nietzsche. But when I look squarely at his life and his writing, I also find myself compelled to ask whether it was precisely with respect to the issue of responsiveness that both his life and his affirmative vision fail. In his life, Nietzsche was not able to practice relations with others that could support his affirmation; in his writing, such relations are, at the very least, muted—which is a very good reason they have been all but ignored. Nietzsche sought to find "bloom and magic" in the "near and nearest things" (*Diese nahen und nachsten Dinge*; HH: 8); he strained to hear, in "what is nearest and everyday," "unheard of things" (*das Nachsten, das Alltaglichen redet hier von unerhorten Dinge*; EH: 305). But relations of affirmative responsiveness are possible only in a spiritual practice that is as extreme in its embrace of the ordinary as it is in its desire to open itself to the extraordinary; a practice that is able to turn us back to the world renewed, invigorated, alive with the desire to be a human being in this world with other human beings. In the end, Nietzsche was unable to do this.

There are resources in Nietzsche for thinking such a turn. I have already discussed, briefly, his ethic of joy. In conclusion, I want to consider some of these resources by reflecting on how they help us rethink religion. But, in conclusion, I also remain unable to refrain from equivocating with respect to the question of religion in Nietzsche. A certain equivocation is the trade of the genealogist or the deconstructionist, for it is precisely the "is" of any definition, any essence, any philosophical conclusion, that one is interrogating. But ultimately my equivocation is not particularly sophisticated: I simply find myself caught between the recognition that, on the one hand, Nietzsche is far removed from any traditional and most commonly used conceptions of "religion," and, on the other hand, his thought exemplifies and expresses an embrace—even a faithful embrace—of existence, which I believe finds its closest analogs in particular expressions of Nietzsche's professed enemy, Christianity. Moreover, unlike many writers who embrace certain "postmodern" ideas and methods, or at least in contrast to the assurance with which they write the "undecidable," I find myself frustrated by the necessity of such equivocation. I am

[1] Jeremiah 20:7–8: "O Lord, thou has deceived me, and I was deceived; thou art stronger than I, and thou has prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all the day; every one mocks me. For whenever I speak, I cry out, I shout, 'Violence and destruction!' For the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision all day long."

tempted to relax my resistance to the "is" by stating flatly that Nietzsche is a religious thinker.

At the same time, I feel the need to resist this temptation. One way to do this, though it still frustrates the desire to take position or possession, is to declare Nietzsche a "postreligious" thinker. Certainly this has been implied in my claim that he can lead us to think beyond the secular/religious distinction.[2] Such a gesture at once asserts and withdraws a claim about the religiosity of Nietzsche's writings. It may be a self-serving gesture; but it does reflect Nietzsche's own practice of articulating possibilities which he then, in full view of the reader, subverts. He does this not so that the reader is forced to choose in the manner of an either/or. Instead, he does it to push the reader to think beyond. With this in mind, then, I resist positioning Nietzsche by attempting to explain how his own resistance to position can help us rethink religion in a postmodern age. This is a necessary task, for there are many who find themselves "beyond" religion, not as antireligious, modern secularists, but as postmoderns; that is, in no simple sense with or without religion.

To invoke the "postreligious" or the "postmodern" is to make explicit a form of equivocation. The prefix "post-" must be used with trepidation, subject as it is to many silly polemics, on the one hand, and to sloppy generality, on the other. Rather than simply invoke it, then, I will endeavor to explain here precisely how it can help us to reflect with some precision on Nietzsche and religion. I can summarize this effort by saying that I want to work toward a conception of the postmodern that can think and say "Yes," to ourselves and to alterity—that which is other than ourselves, or other than the human.

On the Boundaries of Religion

> The soul becomes the place in which that *separation of self from itself* prompts a *hospitality*, now "ascetic," now "mystic," that *makes room* for the other. (de Certeau 1992: 195)

Embodying Dionysus

I have argued that Nietzsche writes on the boundaries of philosophy and the boundaries of religion. Another way to put this is to say that he writes on the boundaries of representation: writing to represent, he also writes

[2] Leslie Paul Thiele claims that Nietzsche "secularizes piety" by distinguishing between religion as belief and affirmation as reverence (1990: 143). This is helpful if "secular" is taken simply to mean "this-worldly." But, as I have argued, the problem with contrasting secular in this sense to religious is that the temporal significance of "secular" helps prevent

resistance to representation. In the metaphorical turn of his writing, Nietzsche enacts a practice of the real in which words do not represent the real but rather perform the excess of becoming out of which human beings construct significance and meaning. Nietzsche thus moves toward the postmodern as the "aesthetic of the unrepresentable." For Nietzsche, the unrepresentable "is" Dionysus. Nietzsche's attention is critical and active, yet his thinking more generally only takes shape in an opening to something beyond the critical manipulations of the ego and consciousness—the voice of Dionysus. Dionysian thinking does not think from the metaphysical belief in God or gods, but it does think out of what may be called a postreligious practice of the declaration of divinity.

One of the polemical strategies employed to keep the difficulties of postmodernism at bay, and one often used to dismiss Nietzsche, is the accusation of "nihilism"—as if it were self-evident what nihilism entails. Modernist suspicions of postmodern nihilism are not without grounds, for much self-identified postmodern discourse is composed in the key of negativity. But whether such rhetoric necessarily excludes the "Yes" is, I think, an open question. At the very least, it is possible to distinguish different postmodernisms. Here, I follow Carl Raschke, who appropriates terms from David Levin to distinguish the "analytic postmodern" from the "metaphorical postmodern" (1996: 11). The former, Raschke argues, is in fact a reinscription of modernist antimetaphysics and is characterized by its own form of totalization: the nihilistic "exhaustion" of signification. This postmodernism, however, is no more than a hypermodernism: an intensification of the critical impulses of modernity minus the grounds of modern rationality or the hopes of modern humanism. Beyond hypermodernism, though, Raschke argues that a "metaphorical postmodern" offers a far more successful attempt to think the boundaries of modernity, for it both embraces the critical impulses of modernity and offers new possibilities for signification and value.

Metaphorical postmodernity makes this positive move by rooting itself in a "fundamental ontology of the body" in a manner akin to Julia Kristeva's semiotics of the body. Whereas analytic postmodernity relegates all significations to the ultimately meaningless play of signifiers, metaphoric postmodernity reconnects the signifier to the signified through the body: signification is not purely linguistic; it is somatic, it speaks desire. How-

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us from acknowledging the key role of "eternity" in Nietzsche's thought, and, more generally, from thinking carefully about what "affirmation as reverence" might mean. As I have argued, this element of eternity transfigures the worldliness and the temporality of Nietzsche's thought. Once we are going to talk about a world reenchanted beyond the natural-supernatural distinction, the secular/religious distinction loses its force. But why exclude a different kind of piety, one that does not look beyond the temporality of this life, but to the passionate, eternal affirmation in and of this life?

ever, in order to avoid thinking of this body as a conceptual ground or a naturalistic foundation, it is important to consider how this body "speaks." Charles Winquist, close to Raschke on this point, explains by means of the psychoanalytic distinction between primary and secondary processes. We have no direct access to the primary processes of body and desire; these can only "speak" as mediated by the secondary processes of conscious reflection. To explore the connections between signification and desire, in other words, is to attempt to think the unthought or say the unsaid, to create, through metaphor and metonymy, a discourse at the limits of representation: "Any discourse about primary process is heuristic and provisional. To think of it as foundational is self-admitted irony . . . since whatever figurations represent the primary process are themselves simulacra, the achievement . . . is not that we now have principles for grounding discourse but that we have principles for turning discourse" (1995: 93). The metaphorical postmodernist seeks to open consciousness and language to the body, to the forces and intensities beyond meaning that help to shape and figure consciousness, forces and intensities that the dominant subjectivity of modernity seeks to repress or decode once and for all. The Dionysian body of metaphorical postmodernity is both material and metaphorical: body as the "dance" or "rhythm" of a multiplicity of drives and instincts, which, in their alterity, resist any final appropriation or reduction by consciousness. The body as metaphor is the body as a matrix of interpretation, nature suffused with culture to produce culture.

Within the "metaphorical postmodernism" the body and desire become heuristics for interpreting the relationship between consciousness and world. The body is the most immediate "other" to consciousness, and it is through the body and its primary processes that the world impinges upon consciousness and so upon language.[3] The body, in other words, is the site of suffering. The metaphorical postmodern is an opening to suffering. This opening of consciousness make possible a kind of listening that connects consciousness to the rhythms of signification and life, language and desire. This results in a new kind of discourse, metaphorical or poetic rather than simply conceptual; as Charles Winquist puts it: "a mixed genre of force and meaning. . . . Texts are places of meeting, theaters of conjunction and confrontation between the incorrigibilities of mind and body" (1995: 39). The point is not to exhaust meaning but to intensify force. This is accomplished by loosening the weave of discourse as meaning without unraveling it, interrupting consciousness with the entrance of intensity that brings the life of the body to the spirit of meaning. In one sense, this intensification of force destabilizes meaning, because it pre-

[3] See Winquist 1995; see Scarry 1985.

cludes totalization and rationalization. But in another sense, bringing the force of body and desire to meaning intensifies its meaningfulness. Emerson, as I have noted, found power in transition, which, when put in terms of writing, is the power of metaphor. The renunciation of representational or conceptual mastery, then, finds its positivity in the affirmation of the power of metaphor and body, the transfiguring dance by which the body is spiritualized and consciousness embodied.

Mastery and the Ends of Humanism

The critique of modern humanism found in certain Continental thinkers of the twentieth century—particularly in structuralists and poststructuralists—finds a key predecessor in Nietzsche.[4] His dismissal of the idea of social progress, his antidemocratic elitism, and, most important, his subversion of the philosophy of consciousness and the dominant subject constitute a kind of "antihumanism." Reflecting on Nietzsche and antihumanism is a complex matter, for there are two or three sides to every issue. For all his attacks on the ideals of modernity and humanism, Nietzsche seeks, on his own terms, to affirm, even to glorify the human. It should not be forgotten that he is an admirer of the Renaissance and of the humanistic impulses of that period that honored human intellect and creativity. And implicated in my very preliminary treatment of Nietzsche's ethic of joy in the previous chapter is the claim that he was not without hopes for greater human love and flourishing. But Nietzsche's glorification of the human appears politically and ethically problematic, to say the least. He does not believe in human equality—in either a political or a spiritual sense—and it is questionable whether one could extrapolate any basic human rights from his work. He imagines a social structure that has as a primary purpose the enhancement of the most spiritual individuals. There are obvious elitist and even oppressive implications in many of his political and ethical ideas. Even here, however, there is more to consider, as recent Nietzscheans, like Foucault, have reminded us. Such thinkers have exposed the dark side of the politics and ethics of the modern humanistic presumption to assert a fundamental, normalizing human nature upon which ideals of equality can be based. For Nietzsche, such concerns are intimately tied to his attack on monotheism and its "doctrine of one normal human type" and ideal (GS: 143).

Here, though, I want to emphasize a different perspective on the question of humanism, one figured in the invocations of "beyond" in the figures of the *Ubermensch* and eternal recurrence. It is simplistic and distorting to read the *Ubermensch* as a post-God apotheosis of the modern,

[4] See Frank 1989.

secular, that is, *humanist* project, for Nietzsche's *Ubermensch*, to the extent that we can even call it an ideal, is not a "man" of the future. That is, the *Ubermensch* is not an ideal emerging out of hopes for a future of increasing human autonomy and humanly engineered progress.[5] Instead, the *uber* in *Ubermensch* is a figure of transcendence, the "beyond" of "beyond good and evil." More literally, as Cavell reminds us, it is the *uber* of *Ubermorgen*—the day after tomorrow, as in "the philosopher is the man of tomorrow and the day after tomorrow" (Cavell 1995: 7). Nietzsche certainly is not without concern and hope for the future, but the day after tomorrow is always beyond, the philosopher is always turning toward a new dawn. The beyond of this *uber* is the beyond of alterity, striking Zarathustra like lightning. It seems that the more Zarathustra tries to preach and grasp the ideal, the more it recedes from him. In the narrative of *Zarathustra*, the hope for the *Ubermensch* is overtaken and shaken by the abysmal thought of the eternal recurrence of the small man. At this point, the *Ubermensch*, at least as an ideal for the future, seems to disappear from the narrative; it no longer represents a new humanity, an evolution of the human into something bigger and better. What has happened instead is that the hope for the *Ubermensch* opens up in Zarathustra a region of alterity; his imagination and poetic capacities have become receptive to dreams and visions inhabited by dwarfes, snakes, and strange, fantastic, and absurd "higher men," as well as moments of bliss and harmony. Occupied by something other than himself, Zarathustra is led on his quest by something(s) other. His quest does not end with the assertion or reassertion of Zarathustra's mastery: instead, he overcomes pity and finds eternity—and also finds that a new dawn awaits, and with it, more work to be done.

On this quest, Zarathustra not only refigures his relationship to himself, but also his relation to time. As many commentators have discussed, the embrace of eternal recurrence involves the ability to will the past, to view the past, no matter what has happened, as something one has willed. In one respect, this seems like a desperate assertion of the power of the will, an attempt to dominate time at least as wild as any modern attempts to take hold of the future. But when we reflect on how this refiguring of the past involves a refiguring of the future, things look different. Zarathustra's willing of the past involves the renunciation of a certain way of hoping for the future. After Book Three, Zarathustra must let go, to some degree, of his hopes for the future in order to embody the formula for greatness that Nietzsche articulates in *Ecce Homo* as "*amor fati*": "that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity" (EH: 258). Since he continues on with his work, this is not to

[5] In Derrida's words, the *Ubermensch* "affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism" (1978b: 292).

say that Zarathustra becomes resigned to whatever happens, only that this hope is less articulate, less determined, than it was at the beginning of the book. By the end of Nietzsche's self-acclaimed masterwork, as at the end of the *Genealogy*, it becomes very difficult to determine what the protagonist hopes for, though it is clear that a kind of hope remains alive. As much as Zarathustra wishes to create a future, he must also learn to "await" it.

Cavell finds a strong link between Nietzsche and Emerson with respect to this perspective on the future. Learning to await the future requires a new thinking, a kind of receptivity, a creativity that is not simply an assertion of the human, but something that happens, an event. "To learn to await, in the way you write, and therewith in every action, is to learn not to despair of opportunity unforeseen. That was always the knack of faith" (1981: 61). Such faithful receptivity to the future shows that the willing of the past is less a desperate assertion of the will than a liberation from fixation on the past, a detachment or departure from the past in a way that may only be possible by viewing the past as willed or in some sense determined. Nietzsche might say it is a way of "forgetting." Such receptivity opens up the present and the future, allowing one to see all opportunities.

Nietzsche thinks beyond humanism in thinking a new kind of transcendence, one with many contemporary echoes. Cavell describes this movement into the future as "steps, but without a path" (1995: 8). Elsewhere he invokes a passage from Emerson: "I shun father and mother and wife and brother when my genius calls me. I would write on the lintels of the door-post, *Whim*. I hope it is somewhat better than whim at last, but we cannot spend the day in explanation" (Emerson 1982: 179). Like Kierkegaard's Abraham, Emerson renounces communication, assurance, and even self-knowledge in the face of the call. One hopes the call is more than the voice of whim—Abraham hopes it is God—but that cannot be guaranteed or controlled; nor can the future wait. Faith, in this sense, is a response within a radical kind of uncertainty and within a kind of responsiveness to that which is unknown. It requires a kind of passivity at odds with modern humanism's ideal of constructive, calculating agency. George Steiner also uses the figure of an unknown path to describe the transcendence of creativity: "a step beyond both moral good sense and the existentially empirical . . . a step embarrassing beyond words where 'embarrassment' must serve precisely as that which compels inference beyond words" (1989: 200). Finally, Maurice Blanchot (1992) writes of *Le Pas Au-Dela*, or, the "step/not beyond." The duality of this title invokes a transcendence or transgression (the step beyond), only at the same time, and in an undecidable manner, that it recognizes a prohibition against such a step (do not go beyond). One does not "take" the step beyond, for

transcendence happens precisely at the point where the self exceeds itself, is beyond activity. As Caputo puts it: "The step beyond, *le pas au-dela*, the pas-sage, the transcendence, or the 'transgression,' is . . . a passivity more passive than passivity. . . . [It is] the worklessness of patience, not the doing of an *agens* but the suffering of a *patiens*." (1997: 82).

One might read this as a counsel to quietism, a dangerous provocation to which we must respond with the redoubling of activity, vigilance, and responsibility. But for critics of modern humanism, such a response only threatens to reinforce the totalizing ethic of action that must control. Given the totalitarianisms that have been politically realized in this century, such antihumanism may seem like so much irresponsible hyperbole. Yet, it seems to me that the point is not to equate humanism with, say, Nazism, but to inquire carefully into the multifarious ways that humanistic injunctions to agency and control may be implicated in humanity's seeming rush to consume itself and the planet of which it is a part. It is to ask whether such injunctions prevent us from thinking and practicing a "passivity" that would create the silence and space that is indispensable for the responsiveness of genuine responsibility.[6] How do we respond to what is other, whether that be another person, an animal, or an ecosystem? Before we can even ask that question, another has to be posed. How do we see the other or listen to the other *as* other?

Paradoxically, we might begin with ourselves. It is clear that Nietzsche sees the self as a multiplicity, and in this he anticipates a central tenet of contemporary antihumanism. Nietzsche affirms humanity, then, only at the same time that he radically rethinks human subjectivity. Where Kantians and Romantics each posited a subject that in key respects inherited the unity, creative autonomy, and even freedom of the Christian God, Nietzsche asserts a subject that is subject to the ruptures and fissures of the body and necessity. This subject is creative, but it is not the master of its creativity; it seeks power, but it is human, finite power, not power modeled on the submission-omnipotence model of Christianity.[7] Nietzsche's is not a wholehearted rejection of subjectivity, agency, or intentionality, but, as Charles Winquist (1995) puts it so nicely, a "drift of subjectivity," as if the self awoke from its Cartesian/Kantian dream of foundational, unified selfhood to find itself afloat, washed about on the sea of the desiring body. To begin with ourselves and that alterity closest to us—the material body inaccessible to any direct conscious representation—we might begin to develop a practice of listening without (immediately) knowing or acting, attending without self-assertion. Opening one-

[6] See Welch 1989 and Niebuhr 1970.

[7] To follow through on this claim, which I cannot argue for here, would lead one, I think, to raise some important questions about recent treatments of the problem of autonomy in Nietzsche. See Rorty 1989 and Pippin 1991.

self to body is not simply opening ourselves to the material matrix out of which one's particular consciousness emerges—one's physical body. Body is metaphor, or, in this case, it may be more accurate to say, metonymy: the body stands for all that which is other, existing independently of me. To write out of the body, then, is to engage in a practice of responsiveness to that which is other. Passivity, in this sense, is not quietism, but passion, suffering oneself as another. It is what Nietzsche means by "becoming what one is": exposing oneself to the otherness within and without.

Nietzsche is not alone in the experience of this passion, as thinkers as different as Augustine—"I have been made for myself a land of difficulty and of great sweat and tears"—and Heidegger—"I have become a question unto myself"—attest. We might begin, in other words, with a kind of confession. Nietzsche's ideal is not some superhuman self that can say "Yes," but rather the ability to be able to say "Yes" to who one is. Nietzsche rejects the concept of responsibility to the extent that it presupposes a unified subject that ultimately is the cause of all thought and action; yet he practices another kind of responsibility—a responsiveness—as the conscious and deliberate meditation on the multiplicity at the heart of the subject. Nietzsche, as Sloterdijk (1987b) says, is a "thinker on stage," performing, creating a spectacle of and for himself by creating a space or a stage where the conflicts, desires, relations, and ideas from which he is constituted find their voice and character. He sets in play, with thought and imagination, forces of good and evil, excess and discipline, hate and love, blindness and insight. The discipline involved in this project requires the courage and strength to allow the different characters within one to take shape and improvise; it is a matter of resisting the temptation to direct them too forcefully to follow the script. Such spectacle provides a model of spiritual and ascetic practice in which one learns to explore oneself in order to set in play one's intellect and imagination, cruelty and perversity, in order to find out who one is and to learn how to take responsibility for oneself.

To take responsibility for oneself in the way I am describing does not mean to follow through indiscriminately on one's desires, hopes, and perversities in the world—to act the anarchy one is in all one's day-to-day relations with others. Part of the practice involved is learning how to think and feel one thing and do another. Nietzsche insists on creating a beautiful character through self-mastery. But such self-mastery does not seek to extirpate or deny the "turmoil of delusion and lust" that makes up the human self. Just because one thinks about and tries to do what is right or good does not mean that one should think and feel what is right or good. To try and make these the same is to engage in the kind of religious or humanistic asceticism that tries to forge a pure heart out of the fissures and resistances that make up the human self. Integrity in action is one

thing, integrity of heart another. At the same time, however, I am not suggesting that to "become who you are" means to engage in a process of nonjudgmental, therapeutic self-discovery. What makes the Nietzschean spectacle so fascinating is that there are parts of the self that one does not like, that one hates and fears, that one knows are evil. The discipline involved here is to allow these aspects of oneself to have life and access to one's imagination, to resist the inclination to push these parts of oneself away, to distance them from oneself with labels like "neurosis," "false consciousness," "prejudice." For one thereby separates them from oneself, recognizing them as "problems" or "issues," and, in that very act, imagines that, "in reality," one is essentially good and whole—and meant for a different life. Through such strategies, one constitutes a reactive relationship to oneself and others. By contrast, an active relationship to oneself embraces who one is. Such an affirmation of the otherness of oneself is, in a sense, a submission, but it is a submission that, like sacrifice, is both passive and active. It requires a certain kind of ascetic discipline, or self-mortification, that resists the desire to separate oneself from one's otherness; but it also requires affirmation, an active submission, a "Yes" to who one is that submits without succumbing to a numbing self-hatred or resignation.

The question of faith, the "knack of faith," resurfaces. To say "Yes" to what is other in oneself, and in others, is to embrace a certain fatedness—not in order to resign oneself or submit to what must be, but in order to liberate oneself from the fixations that result from the need to control. And it is to take a certain risk, for the "Yes" only proceeds from the way of love, not the way of control. To become what one is does, then, entail a process of purification and transformation: a process of embracing, not excising or extirpating, a process of learning to love what (one) is.

Thinking Religiously: The Passion of Affirmation

It has been easy to assume that the pathos of Nietzsche's writing has its source in his reaction to the death of God: after this disaster, Nietzsche finds himself confronted with the prospect of meaninglessness and so asks how human beings can find or create new meaning. It would follow, then, that if one sought to articulate the religious significance of Nietzsche, one might explore the ways he creates new meaning. In the past century, it has been common for scholars of religion to find the key of religion in the creation of meaningful worlds.[8] In some respects, this would be right—

[8] See J. Z. Smith 1993: 290. Irena Makarushka has argued that the "inner desire" at the heart of Nietzsche's writing "can be interpreted as religious insofar as it is directed toward the creation of meaning." She argues that Nietzsche's desire is rooted in the "lack" that results from the death of God: after this disaster, Nietzsche sees the necessity of "creating the conditions for a meaningful life" (Makarushka 1994: 28).

Nietzsche is concerned with the meaningfulness of life after the death of God. But he imagines a creativity emerging not out of lack, but out of overabundance, out of the activity of affirmation rather than the reactivity of *ressentiment*. That is, Nietzsche does not react to the death of God, but, in fact, seeks to complete the act of God's murder as a condition, not the cause, of the creation of new meaning. After the death of God the meaning of meaning is decisively changed because it can no longer be seen simply to inhere in the nature of things, in the nature of God's cosmos. Human beings must now realize what we might call the finite and plural anthropocentrism of meaning: there is no single, eternal, God-given meaning because meaning is born and dies with humanity. Among other things, this entails for Nietzsche that meaning and value are to be loved as they are being created, but particular meanings are not to be held as absolute and turned into idols.

What is religious in Nietzsche is not meaning itself or even the creation of meaning, but affirmative reflection/practice with respect to the limits of meaning and the limits of the human. Which, as I have argued, means confronting and embracing the meaninglessness that inheres in all genuine alterity, and from that point searching for the bonds that allow some kind of response to it. Meaning emerges out of this search, but only in the context of the affirmation—we might call it the transfiguring, divinizing piety—that enables one to move forth, passionately, toward the other as other. Saying "Yes" out of love, one wills to let go of "the meaning of it all," one steps beyond, on a new path.

John Caputo writes that "Yes" is an elemental religious word (1997: 255). Nietzsche recognized this as well, for instance in *Ecce Homo*, when he pairs "Yes" with "Amen," and also in his notes when he writes, "Five, six seconds and not more: you suddenly feel the presence of the eternal harmony. . . . You seem to be in contact with the whole of nature and you say, 'Yes, this is true!' as God, when he created the world, said 'Yes, this is true, this is good' at the end of every day" (SW 13: 146). This is not to say that "Yes" is the essence of religion, for, as Nietzsche shows so well, powerful religious forces can also be set in motion by a "No." But insofar as it is an opening to both self and other, "Yes" is the first step in attending to and embracing existence, the first step in living an active passion for life. In this respect, the "Yes" decisively determines Nietzsche's conception of spiritualization and, I think, points in the direction of a religious thinking beyond the death of God, a way to think the religious (or to think religiously) after religion.

The attempt to envision or cultivate an affirmative humanity—finding ourselves in and through the elemental "Yes"—moves beyond modernity. Specifically, it moves beyond the endlessly critical impetus of the modern, demystifying mind. Despite the exhausting self-consciousness, the evasive writing, the constant undermining of ideals—all hallmarks of what

Raschke (1996) calls hyper-modernity—I cannot read Nietzsche, and I have tried to show in this book why no one should read Nietzsche, without being struck by the passion he writes and, more to the immediate point, by the *wonder* and *hope* he writes. Nietzsche's is far from the debilitating nihilism of the modern critical perspective that laments the loss of meaning. He moves us through this perspective, affirming the discipline of demystification, but out of a passion for the real, not hatred for the unreal, out of a "Yes" prior to any "No." The affirmative impetus of Nietzsche's critical writing engages and enlivens by bringing us before the real, which we can so easily hide from ourselves and others if we insist that it must be meaningful. Such insistence is yet another way of assimilating the other to ourselves. But by beginning in the "Yes," one allows the openness of wonder. We then can see things anew, as a child. "The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred 'Yes.' For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred 'Yes' is needed" (Z: 27).

To see things anew might mean thinking, once and for all, beyond religion. But with his unsettling passion, with the life that bursts from Nietzsche's writing even as it undermines and questions our aspirations and our common sense, life, this life, as he says, "becomes interesting again." In the elemental Yes, and in the practice of keeping this Yes before us and alive, life hears the demanding call of the depth of mystery and enchantment.

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