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UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

THE PROBLEM OF NIHILISM IN THE  
PHILOSOPHY OF NIETZSCHE.

A Thesis submitted to the School of Graduate  
Studies and Research of the University of  
Ottawa in partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements of the Degree of Master of Arts  
(Philosophy).

By:  
Byron Williston



Byron Williston, Ottawa, Canada, 1994



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## INTRODUCTION

In the first section of the posthumously patched together work, The Will To Power, a section devoted to the problem of nihilism, Nietzsche tells us that "nihilism stands at the door" and asks, "whence comes this uncanniest of guests?" (WP, 1). The German word for "uncanny" is *unheimlich*: literally, "un-homelike". So the guest in question, though he stands on the threshold, is in some sense not welcome, a weird stranger and a challenge to what is most familiar. Deciphering these related themes will take us a long way towards understanding Nietzsche's position on the problem of nihilism. In a way, this thesis is really a prolonged reflection on the meaning of these themes. Nietzsche's pronouncement of the "death of God" signals what for him is the seminal condition of modernity: the collapse and repudiation of all significant meaning in the universe. Nietzsche thinks that this extreme form of nihilism -where meaning as such is denied to everything- is a necessary consequence of the fall of the highest values hitherto. Those values - transcendent values- were crucial for Western humanity insofar as they structured the world in which humanity's highest, as well as its lowest, concerns were articulated.

So the "homes", the truths which we have built, have suddenly been assailed by "nihilism". But how did we recognize this to be *our* historical burden, what message did the stranger at the door impart to us? He tells us not only that God is dead, but (what is more awful) that *we* have killed Him. It was our inveterate "will to truth", to truthfulness at all costs (the latest manifestation of which is our skeptical, scientific consciousness, but which began with Socrates), which found the idea of transcendent values as such impossible to

accept. The stranger tells us that we, in fact, have summoned *him*. And this is where we moderns stand. We know that it is not possible to survive outside of a home -our "need and land and sky and neighbour" (Z., I. Of The Flies of The Market Place)- and yet we also know that our homes -indeed the *heimlich* as such- are utterly without foundation. The disintegration of our highest values, then, occasions a number of responses, diagnosed by Nietzsche in terms of a typology of nihilism which, he thinks, describes the morality of the modern age. Nietzsche, however, finds almost all of these responses "incomplete" insofar as they fail to grasp the essential historical movement of nihilism.

But it is the possibility of a different, a "complete" response to the problem of the collapse of values that makes Nietzsche's account of the phenomenon of nihilism most interesting. This response he calls "active nihilism". The active nihilist neither closes the door on nihilism, thereby simply forgetting the stranger's message; nor does the active nihilist abandon the project of "home-creating" altogether. Rather, the project of creative valuation is carried on in affirmative response to the message of the stranger. The door is, as it were, left open to the guest and his news is allowed to pervade the structure although, importantly, he must be asked to leave at the appropriate time with the (hopefully) consoling thought that he will be invited back. But before these metaphors get out of hand, we must ask how all of this translates into the language of more traditional philosophical problems.

What I want to argue is that, through his account of nihilism, Nietzsche offers a highly balanced and synthesized account of the respective places of critical reason and artistic creation in the consideration of human consciousness and valuation. It is just such a balanced account of Nietzsche's position on the matter that is, speaking quite generally, missing from much of the secondary literature on Nietzsche, and from appropriations of his insights by post-modern, post

-structuralist theorists.<sup>1</sup> A representative example of this failure is Habermas. Habermas sees Nietzsche as the "turning point" for philosophical discourse, where the positive attempt to revise the concept of reason is abandoned and the "dialectic of enlightenment" thereby forsaken (Habermas, 85-6). Nietzsche, as Habermas sees him, dispenses with the "emancipatory content of reason", confronting it and overthrowing it with "reason's absolute other" (Habermas, 94).

But, as I argue, this is simply not the case, for Nietzsche reserves a highly specific place and important function for critical reason within philosophical/poetic discourse. Nihilism, as an active force of negation and critique, must ever again re-assert itself in our lives, Nietzsche thinks, so that we are never fully deprived of the tools -chiefly that of critical reason- which serve to *emancipate* us from established truths. Of course reason cannot by itself establish such truths, it cannot be the basis of culture, and Nietzsche goes to great lengths to criticize all attempts to "rationalize" culture. It is this fact which, presumably, leads thinkers like Habermas to attribute to Nietzsche the view that the aesthetic "domain" is all that is real for "post-modernity" and that this domain is the complete antithesis of reason (therefore philosophy has rejected its "emancipatory" role). Insofar as this is the position of post-modern philosophy generally, it is the latter which has misappropriated Nietzsche and Habermas is therefore wrong to see Nietzsche as the point of entry into post-modernity *in this respect*.

But neither does Nietzsche limit philosophical discourse to negative critique. On the contrary, he insists that as valuers we instantiate "truths" in which, for a time, we can believe unreservedly. This is necessary not only because life itself depends on such truths as horizons which allow for the continuance of the species, but also because such truths have an invaluable place within the process of what Nietzsche calls the "self-overcoming" of individuals and cultures. Put in

Nietzschean terms, the "enhancement" of the species depends, in part, on its "preservation". As I argue, then, we are actively nihilistic when we utilize incomplete forms of nihilism -like the belief in truth- in the overall project of creative valuation. Artistic creation is indeed the apex of the whole process because such creation, by its very emergence, is an affirmation of the world as radically meaningless and a willfull organization of a portion of this world in the face of such knowledge.

These are the parameters within which I investigate the problem of nihilism in Nietzsche's philosophy. Although I do address such central Nietzschean themes as the overman, perspectivism, the eternal return and the will to power, such concepts are analysed only insofar as they contribute to an understanding of the problem of nihilism. This approach may lead to a somewhat superficial account of these major themes, but I hope that this can be compensated for by the depth which their elucidation gives to my central theme. In any case, given the interwovenness of what Heidegger calls the "five major rubrics" of Nietzsche's "system" (nihilism, the eternal return, the will to power, transvaluation of all values, and the overman), I simply cannot see any other way of approaching Nietzsche.

My analysis begins with a classification of the types of nihilism. These are: transcendental, passive, reactive, and active. What this classification describes is the actual historical movement of nihilism, as Nietzsche sees it. This history begins with the belief that "God is truth" and now, with the modern consciousness, finds itself espousing the "fanatical faith" that "all is false" (WP, 1). As I argue in the opening chapter of the thesis, we are brought from the first of these statements to the second through the development of "truthfulness", and its embeddedness in moral agents. Nietzsche sees his own project as the culmination of this will to truthfulness and he is therefore intent on providing for the further historical development of the will to truth and nihilism.

Chapter two, then, examines Nietzsche's relation to the traditional philosophical problem of "truth". Here I argue that it is incorrect to see Nietzsche as espousing a positive theory of truth. What the will to truth signifies in his hands is, rather, the critique of "truths". Although it often appears as though Nietzsche criticizes systematic metaphysics (for example) in the name of a different substantial truth which is somehow more "real" than the one being criticized, this is not really the case since Nietzsche is consistently opposed to the notion that *any* such substantial truths exist. Nietzsche's position on this matter is examined with reference to his own attempts to establish a rigorously critical philosophical methodology. This he calls "genealogy", a method of doing philosophy which remains faithful to his ideas concerning the radically "perspectival" character of all existence (that is, the insight into the necessary place of the human will in the determination of all that exists).

Next, I analyse Nietzsche's concept of the overman. While chapters one and two were mainly critical, highlighting the "destructive" element of Nietzsche's thought, in the third chapter I argue that such a picture describes only half of his project. What I emphasize in the final two chapters is Nietzsche's account of the balanced consciousness, one which contains the demands of both the scientific/critical impulse and the creative/artistic impulse. In chapter three, I argue that "incomplete" forms of nihilism are highly qualified elements in the overall makeup of the overman as active nihilist. This means, in effect, that the overman suffers from what might be considered a weakness -what Nietzsche in fact calls a "sickness"- insofar as he is compelled to repose dogmatically in *beliefs* (that is, to take them as truths, in the strictest sense of the word). Such belief is a necessary moment in the process of self-overcoming which is the mark of the overman.

Finally, taking the main points from the preceding chapter, I examine Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal return. This, it will be argued,

serves two, closely related purposes. First, it is the psychological principle which drives the process of self-overcoming as I describe it in the third chapter. Second, by restoring time to "becoming", it is Nietzsche's answer to the specifically historical dimension of the problem of nihilism. Nietzsche addresses this latter point by means of a transvaluation of the concept of "redemption", where mankind is redeemed *only* through the circular, hence infinitely repetitive process of creating and destroying. Redemption, thus conceived, rejects all teleological conceptions of history according to which redemption is held to be a release *from* the suffering and destruction of becoming (one is, on these schemes, redeemed *for* the nihilistic beyond). Eternal return, then, is Nietzsche's definitive counter-thought to incompletely nihilistic appropriations of time and history.

## 1. THE HISTORY OF NIHILISM

*New Struggles* - After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave -- a tremendous gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the ways of men there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. -And we- we still have to vanquish his shadow, too.

(GS, 108).

Where does our modern world belong -to exhaustion or ascent? Its manifoldness and unrest conditioned by the attainment of the highest level of consciousness.

(WP, 72).

Nietzsche provides an extraordinarily rich typography of nihilism. In the The Will To Power, we find his most concentrated collection of statements on the concept of nihilism. There, he defines the latter as "the radical repudiation of value, meaning and desirability" (WP, 1). He quickly adds, moreover, that nihilism is "rooted" in the Christian moral interpretation of the world. Thus his analysis of nihilism is not focussed so much on definition and abstract classification, but rather approaches the phenomenon as an "evolutionary" process, an historically determined continuum of types. For Nietzsche, telling the history of morality (itself a slippery concept in his lexicon, comprising epistemology and metaphysics), is equivalent to showing the process by which one kind of nihilism is replaced by another. <sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, I will describe this process, as Nietzsche sees it unfolding. I begin with his analysis of "transcendental nihilism" (Plato, Christianity, Kant), moving next to his account of the modern reactions to the fall of the transcendent: "passive" and "reactive nihilism". Finally, I consider Nietzsche's own answer to the problem of modernity, namely his espousal of "active nihilism". Throughout, the discussion revolves around two tightly related issues: first, the problem of "truthfulness", which is the motor driving the historical movement of nihilism; second, the problem of the "self", considered as the locus or agent of this truthfulness. Since nihilism establishes itself in a given historical period by inculcating truthfulness in "moral" agents, Nietzsche attacks nihilism (at least its "incomplete" types) *through* these concepts. This approach accords well with Nietzsche's view of nihilism as an essentially historical phenomenon, one whose effects are concretely manifested in the valuations of humankind.

## 1.1 TRANSCENDENTAL NIHILISM 2

In one of the most famous passages ever written by Nietzsche, the reader is asked to face a strange and insistent demon whose task it is to present, and demand a response to the "weightiest question" (GS, 341). The demon steals into our loneliest loneliness and there confronts us with the following scenario:

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 every sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you in all the same succession and sequence...the eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again and you with it, speck of dust! (ibid.).

For Nietzsche, the demon's terrible question sets the stage for modernity's reaction to the "death of god".<sup>3</sup> The loneliest loneliness is that moment in the history of Western civilization when, as a consequence of the realization that our highest values hitherto (most notably the belief in the Christian God) have been stripped of their potency, a choice has become necessary. Specifically, we are asked either to hail the demon as a god, or curse his message and despair of the future as he describes it. The entire gamut of modern values is, Nietzsche thinks, analysable in terms of the stances it proposes to this either/or. Indeed, modernity just *is* this choice. What this means for Nietzsche, and how his own project fits in with this scheme, is the chief focus of this chapter. First, however, we need to ask how we arrived at the point where this question had to be asked. This brings us to the examination of the rise and fall of transcendental nihilism.

For Nietzsche, all efforts to posit a "beyond", a suprasensory realm opposed to "this" world, result in transcendental nihilism, the nihilism

of absolute values or absolute spheres (Deleuze, 1983, 148). Platonism, Christianity -that "platonism for the people" (BGE, Pr.)- and Kantianism are the most significant bastions of this form of nihilism. As Nietzsche would have it, the move to the transcendent is the first step in the history of an error. Platonism, asserting the existence of a realm of pure Ideas, allows access to this world, but only for the wise, the pious and the virtuous. Christianity also posits the existence of an otherworldly realm and holds it to be unattainable in "this life", although, again, the pious -in this case the sinner who repents- may attain it in the "next life". Kantianism, for its part, locates the beyond in the *Ding an Sich* and theoretical reason. "The true world" here is again unattainable, though the thought of it becomes an "imperative of morality" (TI: IV.).

As these examples illustrate, transcendental nihilism operates by moving life's centre of gravity out of life itself. This is the most generic characteristic of this form of nihilism, and that is why Nietzsche can, in speaking of it, collapse together its metaphysical and religious manifestations:

The metaphysical need is not the origin of religions, as Schopenhauer supposed, but merely a late offshoot. Under the rule of religious ideas one has become accustomed to the notion of "another world (behind, below, above)"- and when religious ideas are destroyed, one is troubled by an uncomfortable emptiness and deprivation. From this feeling once again grows "another world", but now merely a metaphysical one that is no longer religious (GS, 151).

Thus the motley play of becoming which *is* life, is devalued or, more precisely, is ascribed a value of *nil*. Nietzsche emphasizes the role of the will here: transcendental nihilism is not a denial of will expressed in the move away from the sensory realm, but rather the will to deny expressed in the creation of the suprasensory. And in the Platonic, Christian and Kantian modes of valuation, this means the will to deny

all that is, on the Heraclitean, Schopenhauerian and Nietzschean conceptions, *real*. Nietzsche therefore describes this type of world interpretation -that is, the transcendental- as an "error", "a failure of the intellect" (ibid.), one of whose principal causes is the falsification by reason of the evidence of the senses (TI: III, 2). But for Nietzsche, since the senses record becoming, change, and passing away, they alone give us access to "reality". The "apparent" world is the only real one while the "real" world of the transcendentalists is "lyingly added" (ibid.). That is why Nietzsche calls the move to the transcendent the first step in the will to nothingness. Interestingly, though, it is other-worldly morality itself which exposes its own "inveterate mendaciousness" (WP, 5). This is so because it cultivates *truthfulness*, a force which eventually finds the idea of higher values, indeed of creative valuation as such absurd, unconscionable, contrary to the prime imperative: "tell the truth!"

Nietzsche is unequivocal about the origin of this will to truthfulness, which he locates in the development and refinement of "conscience":

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

What Nietzsche elsewhere refers to as "the psychology of making men accountable" (TI: IV, 7) through the creation of a unitary self -and its instrument, free-will- results in the making accountable of Christian truth claims themselves. This is a crucial point for Nietzsche. It is essential for the inventors of morality (to speak naively for a moment) to posit the existence of "mind", "will" and "subject" so that all morally significant human activity can be given a motivational centre. This

centre then becomes a relatively easily *regulated* spring of moral action. It is controlled from both outside and inside the subject, as the interiorization of established moral codes.<sup>4</sup> Nor is the irony of this phenomenon lost on Nietzsche. As he sees it, the seminal art of the theologian is to make mankind dependent on Christian moral strictures and therewith on the Christian Church. This is done through the creation of free-will, the guilty conscience and the promise of otherworldly rewards or punishments. But, as we have seen, the very tool which was to have fixed mankind securely within the framework of a Christian moral world order, serves, in the end, to free him from that order.

Nietzsche is specific about what this scientized, apostate conscience rejects in the religious cum metaphysical interpretation of the world. First, the philosophical investigator finds that the world has no "goal", no teleological mission to fulfill, no high ethical canon -such as the creation of universal love and harmony- to advance (WP, 12: A). According to Nietzsche, all universal projects which posit a necessary "aim" and "evolution" for history and the world are discredited by this initial insight (ibid.). Second, and partly as a consequence of the first claim, one discovers that the whole has no "unity". What is rejected here is any faith which "suffices to give man a deep feeling of standing in the context of, and being dependent on some whole that is infinitely superior to him..." (ibid.). Moreover, upon the fragmentation of such a unity in which mankind has fixed its own value, humanity ceases to believe in itself as a body of creatively purposive agents.

Finally, after rejecting the truth claims of both "purpose" and "unity" as interpretations of the whole, we are led to doubt the concepts of "truth" and "being". This third insight of the truthful conscience, though it occasions the dogged attempts to fabricate new "true worlds", is prevented from doing so by the belief that we "have no right" to such

worlds (ibid.). Since what is rejected in this third and most radical postulate is any and all being outside of becoming this represents for Nietzsche the *coup de grace* which finishes off the old god (here thought of as the transcendent as such). Again, this is all the result of the metamorphosis of Christian conscience into critical reason. As Nietzsche starkly comments: "...the faith in the categories of reason is the cause of nihilism. We have measured the value of the world according to categories that refer to a purely fictitious world" (WP, 12: B).

## 1.2 PASSIVE AND REACTIVE NIHILISM.

For Nietzsche, modernity is defined by its reaction to the devaluation of transcendent values outlined above. He wants not only to describe the modern Western world as the forum in which various responses to the death of god clash, but also to indicate an alternative response, an alternative way of living in the growing shadow of nihilism. In this section I will explore Nietzsche's description of and attack on the nihilistic reactions to the fall of the transcendent, leaving the consideration of his own "solution" to the problem to the final section.

As we have seen in the case of the third attack on higher values examined above, the rejection of the suprasensory ultimately results in the rejection of all "truth". After the moral epoch of transcendental nihilism, then, *passive nihilism* arises. Of this shift Nietzsche writes,

Extreme positions are not succeeded by moderate ones but by extreme positions of the opposite kind. Thus the belief in the absolute immorality of nature, in aim- and meaninglessness, is the psychologically necessary affect once the belief in God and an essentially moral order becomes untenable... One interpretation has collapsed; but because it was considered *the* interpretation, it now seems as if there were no meaning at all in existence, as if everything were in vain (WP, 55).

This is a sort of radical skepticism coupled with a radical pessimism with which the will to truthfulness becomes pathological, bent (in spite of itself) on its own retirement: "duration in vain, without end or aim, is the most paralyzing idea, particularly when one understands that one is being fooled and yet lacks the power not to be fooled" (ibid.). What Nietzsche thinks is being denied here is the synthesis of values and goals on which strong individuals and cultures depend. The entire "apparent world" has fallen as a result of the fall of the "real world" and nothing but a Schopenhauerian torpor, which simply does not have the energy to posit goals and create values which lead to the achievement of those goals, remains.

This, however, is a difficult state to endure (why else is Schopenhauer so preoccupied with the question of suicide? 5). It is a weariness of spirit which leads to pessimism<sup>6</sup> and a general dissolution of will. It is, however, a condition consequent on our *knowledge* -of the radical meaninglessness of reality- which does not allow us to "esteem what we know", but cannot expunge the need for us to esteem, to have faith in something larger than ourselves.<sup>7</sup> It is this need to believe, together with the inability or refusal to do so which characterizes passive nihilism, whose numbing and negating force Nietzsche thinks is at the heart of modern forms of political anarchism (WP, 10), libertinism, celibacy (sic) and alcoholism, among other things (WP, 42). Nietzsche is neither moralizing nor playing the amateur sociologist here, but is trying to characterize what he sees as the breakdown of will in democratic culture as a direct consequence of a fundamental and pervasive *exhaustion*, which does not allow for the creation of a healthy social "body" (cf. WP, 48).

Existing alongside this "European Buddhism", Nietzsche points to the nihilistic attempts to replace the fallen god. These represent a *reactive*

*nihilism*, since they are not strictly speaking creative, but are constructed only as a reaction to an event considered too devastating in its implications. Like passive nihilism, of which it is after all a variation, reactive nihilism represents "a decline and recession of the power of the spirit" (WP, 22). What we have now, however, is a move beyond the stasis of passive nihilism, a move which, because reactive, is also a regression. God is replaced by some other structure of morality which, though ersatz, nevertheless does represent an act of willing. Heidegger describes this phenomenon as follows:

...if God in the sense of the Christian God has disappeared from his authoritative position in the suprasensory world, then this authoritative position itself is always preserved, even though as that which has become empty. The now empty authoritative realm of the ...ideal world can still be adhered to (Heidegger, 1977).

Of these replacement values, the most significant for Nietzsche are utilitarianism, socialism, "progress" (scientific positivism) and Wagnerian music (the cult of democratic Culture). The weariness of spirit which is the cornerstone of passive nihilism also characterizes reactive nihilism, but this will is now expressed in the delusive creation of political herds and a new democratic, cosmopolitan virtue. Such values, the pre-eminent creation of "the last man", Nietzsche sees as contributing to a general levelling and resignation of mankind:

Nobody grows rich or poor anymore, both are too much of a burden. Who still wants to rule? Who still wants to obey? Both are too much of a burden. *No herdsman and one herd.* Everyone wants the same thing, everyone is the same...(Z., Pr.: 5).

It is important to highlight the affinity that these democratic sentiments bear to the total refusal to will (Buddhistic resignation). For Nietzsche, really creative willing results in the establishment of an order of rank

amongst competing drives and between people. Thus, for example, the strong political leader, the artist and the sovereign individual need to *legislate* a definite order of commanding and obeying amongst their respective "materials". By contrast, passive and reactive nihilism refuse to establish the requisite "pathos of distance" (TI., VII: 37) between individuals in society (the strong political leader), between perceptions (the artist) or between affective "drives" (the sovereign individual). The result is dissolution and mediocrity. Still, Nietzsche thinks this is an unavoidable phase in the history of nihilism, one which he himself seems to accept as such. What he cannot abide, however, is the moral posturing and epistemological error which sees this type of valuation as *virtue*. This is the central objection to reactive nihilism.

Although Nietzsche is generally critical of all "modern ideas" (especially where they concern morality), he reserves his most scathing denunciations for the sentiment of pity and its concomitants, altruism and selflessness. Pity is the most potent tool of mediocrity, something which Nietzsche thinks reduces all of mankind to the level of those who, on his conception, are "naturally" unfit for preservation:

Pity on the whole thwarts the law of evolution, which is the law of *selection*. It preserves what is ripe for destruction; it defends life's disinherited and condemned; through the abundance of the ill-constituted of all kinds which it *retains* in life, it gives life itself a gloomy and questionable aspect (A., 7).

These are not only the half-mad, quasi-Darwinian ravings of a lonely *manque* aristocrat and monarchist. As I alluded to earlier, Nietzsche also finds in modern virtue an epistemological error ("virtue is our greatest misunderstanding" (WP, 54)), which he wants to expose as part of his general project of re-historicizing philosophical investigation.

It is in the interest of correcting this epistemological wrong turn that Nietzsche criticizes pity's call to selflessness as the highest moral principle. Selflessness for the "good man" is the principal cause and moral export of "civilization". We pity as a result of the move out of ourselves, away from our own self interest and toward consideration of, say, the greatest good for the greatest number. This self-abnegation and self-sacrifice had, Nietzsche claims, "been gilded, deified and projected into a beyond" (GM, Pr.: 5) by Schopenhauer and perpetuated by such wordly Christians as John Stuart Mill (BGE, 253; GM, 1), Herbert Spencer (GM, I: 3) and George Eliot (TI, VIII: 5). It represents for Nietzsche not only a great *No* to life, but also a reversal of cause and effect in moral matters.

Nietzsche does not want to deny that "vice" and "virtue" describe certain forms of behaviour, nor does he simply want to reverse these values, calling vice what the English "flatheads" and "hysterical bluestockings" call virtue (this would make him a mere "rebel"). Nietzsche thinks that all behaviour (moral or otherwise) can be traced back -though not as effect to cause- to the relation of drives in the valuator, that is to the relative strength of the person who acts:

...one is in a state in which one can experience hope *because* the physiological basic feeling is once more strong and ample... Morality and religion fall entirely under the *psychology of error*: in every single case, cause is mistaken for effect...(TI, VI: 6).

Thus, for example, where modern virtue finds general social decadence - crime, alcoholism, libertinism, anarchism, etc.- it sees it as an effect of moral vice. For Nietzsche, who also does not simply want to praise the collapse of social order, physiological decadence is the pre-condition for vice. The latter is in fact the *consequence* of a lack of will. Similarly, virtue -regardless of how one defines it- is the consequence of something which is essentially non-moral, a relation of "physiological basic feelings":

...when a people is perishing, degenerating physiologically, vice and luxury (that is to say the necessity for stronger and stronger and more and more frequent stimulants such as every exhausted nature is acquainted with ) follows therefrom (TI, VI: 2).

As Nietzsche would have it, then, selflessness represents the refusal to will, a weakness of will which is itself one of the causes of general social decadence. So it is not the breakdown of society *per se* which needs to be combatted, but rather the false causality which sees virtue and vice as the forces which give rise to such breakdown. The reactive nihilists attempt to replace the old god by effectively preserving the structure of a unitary self which is the seat of moral freedom (free to choose either vice or virtue) and which was, as we have seen, the key regulatory fiction of transcendental nihilism. Nietzsche's criticism of this fiction will be explored in the next section, but we can sum up this section by re-invoking Nietzsche's demon.

For Nietzsche, democracy, socialism, "progress", Wagnerian music and so on, are among the modern movements which signify humanity's failure to live up to what is after all the insight of passive nihilism: the radical chaos of becoming (passive nihilism saw this but also, in its own way, shrank from it). Reactive and passive nihilism are historically co-existing responses to the death of god; they are both ways of cursing, rejecting or simply refusing to listen to the ultimatum posed by Nietzsche's demon. Thus, although the loneliest loneliness represents the modern condition, it need not be a terminal state and can, apparently, be rejected or ignored. Nietzsche repudiates this latter step of course and insists that our loneliest loneliness be kept perpetually -indeed eternally- in view. Analysing what Nietzsche means by this brings us to the last type of nihilism, *active nihilism*.

### 1.3 ACTIVE NIHILISM.

It is tempting to see the foregoing analysis of nihilism as Nietzsche's last word on the topic and therefore to see his project as the attempt to overcome this definitively negative or ignoble aspect of the human condition. Nietzsche himself occasionally invites this interpretation: for example, when he speaks of nihilism as a mere "pathological transitional stage" in human history (WP, 13). This, however, is a mistaken interpretation. Insofar as nihilism is merely passive or reactive, it is, argues Nietzsche, "incomplete" (WP, 28). The problem with restricting Nietzsche's account of nihilism to the latter forms is that one thereby misses his more "positive" conception of knowledge, his celebration of the critical spirit as an essentially negating force.

"Complete" nihilism, then, is an active force, a "violent force of destruction" (WP, 23). This is a clearing of the way by knowledge which makes possible for humankind a hitherto unknown kind of freedom:

At long last the horizon appears free to us again even if it should not be bright; at long last our ships may venture out again, venture out to face any danger; all the daring of the lover of knowledge is permitted again; the sea, *our* sea, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an open sea (GS, 343).

Active nihilism, which is the pre-condition of this exuberance of knowledge, is a "sign of increased power of the spirit" (WP, 22). As knowledge, it not only seeks to tarry in the flux of becoming, but also desires a maximum amount of perspectives and drives while standing in the flux.<sup>9</sup> This demands cheerfulness and irony, but above all *strength*

Whoever has a soul that craves to have experienced the whole range of values and desiderata to date...whoever wants to know from the adventures of his ownmost authentic experience how a discoverer and conquerer of the ideal feels, and also

an artist, a saint, a legislator, a sage, a pious man,  
a soothsayer...needs one thing above everything else:  
the *great health* (GS, 382).

There is a clear opposition between this type of joyful knowledge and the despair of knowledge which characterizes passive nihilism or the retreat from knowledge which characterizes reactive nihilism. The great strength which the active nihilist possesses is, moreover, not something which one simply acquires at a given moment of intellectual epiphany. It is not an epistemological insight into some "truth" of reality. Rather, it is a form of healthy spiritual comportment which needs to be acquired continually, since one "gives it up again and again and must give it up" (ibid.). The question now is how does this version of nihilism represent a real cultural alternative to the other forms?

Nietzsche insists that his call to active nihilism not be misunderstood as just another version of the politicization of culture. He does not think that democratic society (as such) can accommodate the demands of active nihilism.<sup>10</sup> On the contrary, Nietzsche wants, through the doctrine of active nihilism, to provide an account of culture which preserves the latter from the levelling forces of democratic "civilization". This becomes clear when we examine one of Nietzsche's central concerns in The Birth of Tragedy, the relation between Dionysian and Apollinian culture. As we will see, Dionysian energy is to a healthy culture what active nihilism is to a healthy individual: an ever-present and chastening connection to the chaotic ground of being.

According to Nietzsche, the great accomplishment of the Hellenic genius was the synthesis of Apollinian form and primordial Dionysian power. Greece is, he says, peculiarly placed "between India and Rome" (BT, 125). The meaning of this is largely symbolic: Greece combines in itself both Dionysian wisdom which, taken to its extreme results in

Buddhistic resignation from the world (passive nihilism, symbolized for Nietzsche by India) *and* Apollinian instincts, whose extreme form glorifies individuality, state and patriotism (a form of reactive nihilism, symbolized by Rome). "Classical purity", then, constituted a third form in which the Dionysian and Apollinian were kept in tight interplay. And the specific cultural achievement which kept the balance, so that the Greeks did not exhaust themselves either in "ecstatic brooding" (ibid.) or in the search for political glory, was tragedy.

But what specifically is the Dionysian? It is the "titanic", "barbaric" primordiality, the "excess in pleasure, grief and *knowledge*" (BT, 46; my italics). The ever changing world of transfiguring "illusion" (*Schein*)<sup>11</sup> - Apollinian form, whether expressed in statuary art, tragic myth, music, the political agon- owes its existence to its connection to the more primordial region of the Dionysian. Indeed the form is nothing but the representation of the Dionysian. But the chief function of the latter is always, in the end, to smash the Apollinian form and so the destructive force of Dionysus must ever again be compensated for by an equal level of recreative power (art). So culture, for Nietzsche, insofar as it is healthy must be extraordinarily vibrant in response to the perpetual influx of destructive knowledge.

Of course, not all cultures are strong, just as not all individuals are strong. For Nietzsche the most profound synthesis of Dionysus and Apollo was relatively short lived, extending roughly from the time of Aeschylus to that of Euripides. That achievement is nevertheless paradigmatic for a consideration of Nietzsche's thoughts on health, strength and wholeness (for cultures and individuals). On the other hand, there can be and have been purely Apollinian cultures. These societies -Bismarckian Germany is perhaps the most egregious example as Nietzsche sees it (cf. EH, V: 1)- are mere "deserts" whose topography

is dominated by shallow patriotism, the dryness of scholarly specialization, superficial art, herd morality, etc. In light of this fact, Nietzsche insists on a strict separation of the demands of culture and those of civilization, that is, "democratic culture":

Culture and the state...are antagonists. The "cultural state" is merely a modern idea. The one lives off the other, the one thrives at the expense of the other. All great cultural epochs are epochs of political decline: that which is great in the cultural sense has been unpolitical, even *anti-political* (TI, VIII: 4).

Thus culture and civilization have not only different but perhaps even opposite aims (WP, 121). Indeed, Nietzsche wonders whether "the whole coarse and gaudy flower of the nation" is worth the disappearance of the rarer, more spiritual growths which it (the nation) has failed to esteem or destroyed (HA, I: 481).

What Nietzsche deplores in the optimistic growth of civilization - here we should keep in mind those types of reactive nihilism outlined above- is the inevitable slide to democratic dissolution. As Nietzsche sees it, the key struggle of modernity is with the *shadow* of the dead god, that is, with the very form of valuation which perpetuates the structure of morality (this is why he thinks reactive nihilism is more dangerous for the present and future than passive nihilism: the former denies knowledge in the name of morality). As we have seen, he is not content merely to expose social vice and decadence and then propose social "reforms" to combat them. Nietzsche thinks that this simply perpetuates incomplete nihilism by perpetuating (implicitly) the belief in the free moral agent. At bottom, the moral solutions to modernity's problems are all ways of denying the destructive and regenerative power of Dionysus. A culture which is thus uprooted, cut off from "the violent force of destruction" (WP, 23) which is active nihilism becomes

nihilistic in a passive or reactive (that is, moral) fashion. Culture then becomes merely the parlour room puffery of optimistic demagogues. But how, specifically, does Nietzsche attack the form of morality rather than its manifestations? I suggest that he does this through his critique of the subject, of "free-will" and the idea of moral causality to which these concepts give rise.

Although a complete explication of Nietzsche's views on the "self" is obviously beyond the scope of this inquiry, it should be clear that Nietzsche needs to attack the notion of free will and the unitary self if he is to get to the root of the problem of modernity. As we have seen, modern virtue -especially pity- has as its motivating principle the call to selflessness. The free self is free precisely because it can choose to concern itself with its own desires and ends (vice) or those of others (virtue). Nietzsche, however, holds that an unegoistic action is impossible, that the individual is simply not free to choose between itself and others ("how could the ego act without the ego?" (HA, I: 133)). Although the morality of selflessness appears *prima facie* to be exactly what it says it is, namely a move away from the self as centre, Nietzsche thinks this appearance is an illusion and that, in fact, selflessness is as egoistic an action as any other. He does not deny that there exists, in the selfless person, a need to negate the self nor that this need occasions changes in the comportment of the valuator. But this need and this behaviour change are ultimately rooted in and derive all of their content from *the self*. Thus selflessness should be thought of as the manifestation of a weakened or fragmented will, not as the abandonment of willing.

But Nietzsche does not simply want to replace the morality of selflessness with that of egoism (this would preserve the actor/action distinction, which Nietzsche thinks untenable). Rather the appeal to self-

interest as the seat of behaviour is a genealogical pursuit <sup>12</sup> aimed at exposing the plurality of forces which form concrete activity and valuations. Thus the focus on the conditions of physiology and egoism as the primary elements in human valuation is an appeal, first, to the "body" and the "self" as they are embedded in history and becoming and, second, to the stance an individual takes to this fundamental plurality. The latter is, for Nietzsche, the proper conception of "soul", not an atomic spring of action, but "a social structure of the drives and emotions", a "multiplicity of the subject" (BGE, 12). <sup>13</sup> This plurality is not an isolable antecedent which causes action. It is important for Nietzsche to establish this point in connection with his critique of morality. He wants to subvert the content of the causality of free-will by attacking the mechanism of causality itself. This is the essence of his critique of modern ideas and modern virtue; it is that which distinguishes him from those who are still grappling with the shadow of the dead god. Active nihilism, unlike passive or reactive nihilism, goes to the heart of morality by attacking the structure of morality itself. But what of that will to truthfulness which is the motor of nihilism? How does active nihilism stand in relation to it? I will answer this question by way of concluding this chapter and pointing the way to the next.

It is necessary to highlight the ambiguity of Nietzsche's position in modernity, an ambiguity which he himself recognized and (characteristically) liked to play on. This centres around the will to truth. We have seen that the will to truthfulness was both the brain child and the eventual demise of transcendental nihilism. The refinement of truthfulness through the development of scientific method leads to the unmasking of the untenability of the truth claims of the suprasensory . This results in the fall of the transcendent world and, with it, the apparent world as well, which had been defined and

structured vis-a-vis its dependence on the transcendent. The will to truthfulness finds at this point that reality as a whole has no aim, no unity, no truth. As a consequence of this insight, the will itself either seeks the back door of a "new" transcendent, or sinks into a lifeless torpor.

Nietzsche however sees himself as inheriting this defunct will to truth and providing for its convalescence and eventual consummation. The will to truthfulness becomes, in his hands, active nihilism, the cheerful and unfettered will to more and more knowledge. But the irony of Nietzsche's project is that because he pushes the will to truthfulness to its limit, he ends up questioning that will itself. Nietzsche does see himself as pursuing the "truth", indeed as pushing this pursuit to previously unknown heights (and depths). Here -that is, with active nihilism- The will to truth achieves a new "self-consciousness" which cannot repose in "truths". Incomplete forms of nihilism, though they opposed conscience to metaphysical error, nevertheless left intact the will to truth itself. This is as it must be, for it is precisely this will that Nietzsche inherits. But now,

...after Christian truthfulness has drawn one inference after another, its 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, III: 27).

In order to see how Nietzsche conceives of the self-overcoming of the will to truth, its final consummation which is to take place at his hands, we need to examine more carefully his position on the nature and problem of "truth".

## 2. TRUTH, PERSPECTIVISM, GENEALOGY

"They are beautiful, glittering, jingling, festive words: honesty, love of truth, love of wisdom, sacrifice for the sake of knowledge, heroism of the truthful -there is something about them that makes one's pride swell. But we hermits and marmots long ago became convinced that this worthy verbal pomp too belongs among the ancient false finery, lumber and gold-dust of unconscious human vanity, and that under such flattering colours and varnish too the terrible, basic text *homo natura* must again be discerned...."

(BGE. 230).

"The essential point is: the greatest perhaps also possess great virtues, but in that case also their opposites. I believe that it is precisely through the presence of opposites and the feelings they occasion that the great man, *the bow with the great tension*, develops"

(WP, 967).

As we have seen, Nietzsche is generally critical of all attempts to devalue "this" world by placing the "truth" beyond it. Nietzsche's "history of nihilism" thus forces us into a direct confrontation with his views on "truth", or more precisely the value of truth. What I want to do in this chapter is examine Nietzsche's manifold statements on the problem of truth and show why I think these cannot be reduced to a single, positive theory of truth. I want to show, first, that Nietzsche can be read as having an overwhelmingly "negative" account of truth (truth as criticism of "truths") and, second, that given his views on nihilism this in fact must be the case. Nietzsche's own methodological answer to the search for truth ("the will to truth") is genealogy, an entirely critical project whose goal is to overcome both transcendental and reactive nihilism (dogmatism) and passive nihilism (as decadence, dissolution).

I begin the chapter by highlighting Nietzsche's admittedly ambiguous presentation of the problem of truth, and follow this with a critique of some representative attempts to resolve this ambiguity by attributing to Nietzsche a positive theory of truth. Next, I analyse Nietzsche's doctrine of "perspectivism" in order to show what his answer to the philosophical question of the nature of "reality in itself" might look like. Finally, I look at the concept of genealogy, which, as Nietzsche's counterdoctrine to the will to truth, provides a criticism of traditional notions of truth and which ultimately points us beyond itself, to the problem of the overman.

## **2.1 NIETZSCHE'S THEORY OF TRUTH?**

Nietzsche's writings are rife with ambiguous and seemingly contradictory references to truth and knowledge. For example, Nietzsche seems to hold a general epistemological scepticism regarding sensory knowledge: "(t)he habits of our senses have woven us into lies and deception of sensation: these again are the basis of all our judgements

and "knowledge" -there is absolutely no escape, no backway or bypath into the *real world*" (D. 117).<sup>1</sup> At other times, Nietzsche praises sense perception as precisely that which provides the straightest path to "reality": "(a)ll credibility, all good conscience, all evidence of truth comes only from the senses" (BGE. 134).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Nietzsche speaks positively of the "small unpretentious truths" which science offers to us (HA, 1:3). And so scientific truths, insofar as they are drawn from the evidence of the senses, are alternately disparaged (WP. 50, 53, 69; BGE. 12; D, 92) and lauded (HA. 27, 31, 17; EH., W, 2).

Again, although Nietzsche often repudiates "reason" in favour of "taste"<sup>3</sup> as means for establishing philosophical values, he also upbraids his enemies for their "self-deceit", "dishonesty", "mendaciousness" and generally "unscientific" behaviour.<sup>4</sup> There is, if not a contradiction, at least a palpable tension between these types of statements. Indeed, as Wilcox has pointed out, Nietzsche can, on this matter, be read with equal justification both as a cognitivist (insofar as he praises science and rationalism in his polemical rhetoric) and a noncognitivist (with his avowed scepticism regarding the power and importance of consciousness) (Wilcox, chs. 1, 2).

Finally, given Nietzsche's criticism of "truth in itself", "knowledge in itself" and so on, how does one account for the Nietzschean call to be "faithful to the earth" (Z, Pr., 3), to affirm *reality* without wearing the blinkers of transcendental nihilism? Nietzsche seems to be espousing a kind of fatalism here, a belief that there is an ontological substratum to whose power and truth humans should simply submit. This idea is summed up in Nietzsche's belief that strong spirits will love and affirm fate - *amor fati*. This conception seems to suggest that "reality in itself",

though it may not have the mathematically correct features extreme rationalists like Plato and Descartes (for example) think it has, nevertheless exists, in some form.

In light of this confusion about truth and knowledge, is it possible to attribute a "theory" of truth to Nietzsche? I want to examine three such theories, all of which, though sophisticated, are, I think, flawed. The first sees Nietzsche as having a pragmatic theory of truth (Danto), the second a correspondence theory (Warnock), and the third a three tiered theory culminating in a slightly different form of correspondence theory (Schacht). Rather than refuting these positions at this point, I want to suggest alternative ways in which the textual evidence they offer in support of their respective theories, can be interpreted.

It is highly tempting to see Nietzsche as advancing a pragmatic criterion of truth. This, for example, is the view Danto attributes to him. Nietzsche himself seems often to view truth as a matter of public utility: "(t)ruth is the kind of error without which a certain species of life could not exist. The value for *life* is ultimately decisive" (WP. 493). As Danto sees it, the view that truth is usefulness follows naturally from Nietzsche's perspectivism. The perspective of a people -its "common-sense"<sup>5</sup> beliefs about the world- are inherited as "the accumulated treasure of the entire past" (HA, I: 16). These are precisely *its* truths, truths which enclose it and define it against other perspective-bound systems:

We sit in our net, we spiders, and whatever we may catch in it, we can catch nothing at all except that which allows itself to be caught precisely in *our* net (D. 117).

Moreover, the very "humanity" of a people depends upon such truths (HA. 16). Danto draws from these points the stark conclusion that for Nietzsche, "p is true and q is false, if p works and q does not" (Danto, 72).

Now there can be no doubt that Nietzsche rejects the idea that "truths" are inscribed in nature and then either passed down to or discovered by a people (the claims of religion and positive science, respectively). The truth is created from and for a particular perspective. Nietzsche's point, however, is to inquire into the *value* of truth, and he finds that it is by no means always the case that the truth is beneficial to life:

Something might be true while being harmful and dangerous in the highest degree. Indeed, it may be a basic characteristic of existence that those who would know it completely would perish... (BGE. 39). 6

Although this point does not deny that the useful is, in some sense, true, it does seriously challenge the converse view and therefore adds considerable complexity to Nietzsche's position on this matter by positing truth as in some cases precisely the move away from useful truths.<sup>7</sup>

According to Danto, Nietzsche, "like many innovators" (Danto. 80), is unsure of the theory toward which he is groping. In rejecting the correspondence theory of truth, he implicitly grasps the pragmatic criterion of truth, but does so inconclusively, unsystematically, perhaps unconsciously (*ibid.*). But, as we have seen, Nietzsche simply does not think that the final tribunal of truth is the useful: "a belief, however necessary it may be for the preservation of a species, has nothing to do with truth" (WP, 487). Or again, "the falsest judgements... are the most indispensable to us" (BGE, 4). Such statements, far from supporting a pragmatic-criterion-of-truth interpretation of Nietzsche, seem in fact (*contra* Danto) to point towards some form of correspondence theory (on which, cf. Nehamas, 1985, 53).

Mary Warnock, seeing that a pragmatist theory of truth such as the one put forth by Danto, cannot unproblematically be applied to Nietzsche, asserts instead that he is developing a sort of Popperian view of truth as the search for the best scientific method. This position eventually collapses into a form of correspondence criterion of truth.

Commenting on Popper's statement that science needs "...to probe deeper and deeper into... the properties of the world..." without, it is admitted, being able to provide an exhaustive logical analysis of that world, Warnock writes,

This might well be taken as a statement of Nietzsche's belief; it might express the extent, in his words, to which he "remained pious" (Warnock, 59).

Warnock concludes from this that the conception of truth as "fitting the facts" has "by no means been expunged" for Nietzsche (Warnock, 58). So although she does not fail to note Nietzsche's radical scepticism concerning essences, Warnock nevertheless attributes to him a positive theory of truth as the search for *deeper* truths than those which science (or, presumably, any other mode of human valuation) has already established.

Although I find this view compelling and for the most part plausible, it seems in the end to express a confusion which an alternative reading of Nietzsche might avoid. For, while denying the legitimacy of the search for the ultimate explanations of phenomena, Warnock's position nevertheless speaks the language of essences. For Nietzsche, there simply are no "basic properties of the world"<sup>8</sup> and so scientific method can in no sense be thought of as a tool which Nietzsche wants to use and refine to contact such a world. Such a view implies that the world can be thought of as lying outside our interpretations of it, which is why our interpretive mechanism -here thought of as scientific method- should be honed in order to somehow reflect or capture the structure of the world. Nietzsche, however, writes,

That things possess a constitution in themselves quite apart from interpretation and subjectivity is a quite idle hypothesis; it presupposes that interpretation and subjectivity are not essential, that a thing freed from all relationships would still be a thing (WP. 560).

But this is precisely the type of idle hypothesising in which Warnock's Popperian Nietzsche would be engaged, if her account of his theory of truth is correct. In fact none of Nietzsche's comments, as cited by Warnock, clearly suggest such an interpretation. This is not to say that whenever Nietzsche mentions truth he does so with a dismissive sneer (cf. BGE. 39). On the contrary, but that does not mean that this "positive" use of truth terminology betrays a positive "theory" of truth. Might it not be the case that the will to truth is provisionally useful for Nietzsche himself, but as a hammer (sounding out hollow idols) rather than as a mirror (reflecting the transcendent truth)?

Warnock interprets Nietzsche's statement that "the strength of a spirit might be measured according to how much of the "truth" it might be able to stand..." (BGE. 39), as a clear statement of Nietzsche's view of truth as "explanation of the real world" (Warnock, 58). Nietzsche places the word "truth" in quotation marks here, however, precisely in order to define it as a drive directed *against* conventional truths, rather than *towards* natural truths. Insofar as conventional truths comprise the framework within which a certain type of being lives and defines itself, the active engagement to destroy or deny such a framework is inimical to this "life". This is why it requires strength. But because the truth which Nietzsche praises here merely attacks the truths of convention (which are, after all, errors), one need not see Nietzsche's appropriation of the will to truth as anything but a negative, critical move.

An alternative and, I think, more subtle interpretation of Nietzsche on truth is offered by Schacht. He thinks it is necessary to attribute both pragmatist and correspondence theories of truth to Nietzsche,<sup>9</sup> but wants to distinguish the "domains of discourse" to which each applies. Thus he identifies, first, what he calls Nietzsche's "first order analysis of truth". This is comprised of a background and a foreground: the former is the linguistic conceptual scheme within which a given

proposition -as a statement asserting the truth of some state of affairs- finds its function; the latter is the more immediate relation of the proposition to the actual state of affairs it describes. And so Schacht thinks this order of truth functions can be given a "coherence" analysis (the background) and a "correspondence" analysis (the foreground). It is important to remember here that Schacht is not analysing theories of truth which Nietzsche holds, but is rather distinguishing the separate realms of discourse (each of which uses truth in a slightly different function) which Nietzsche himself analyses.

Next, Schacht looks at the "second order analysis of truth", one which he claims (rightly, I think) occupies far more of Nietzsche's critical attention. As Schacht explains it,

Whereas (the) first order analyses of truth of various kinds centre upon their contextual warrant, (the) second order analyses focus upon the functions of truth determinations...in the lives...of those who engage in the forms of discourse...(Schacht, 72).

What is decisive here for Nietzsche is the instrumental beliefs of a people, those truths which organize and direct its energies for particular purposes. Thus the background analysis of this level uses a truth as instrumentalism criterion while the foreground employs a conventionalist criterion. Like the foreground of level one, this latter describes the more immediate relation of a people to its beliefs. The background, by contrast, is the more general truth of the foreground, a truth which may, of course, be partially or wholly hidden from the believers (who for the most part measure the truth solely on conventionalist lines). We can sum up level one by saying that for Nietzsche the "truth" of propositions attempting to assert something about reality is their place in an accepted and coherent system of belief. Level two asserts that the "truth" of convention, the interest which drives it, is the instrumental needs of the organization.

If Schacht had confined his analysis to these two levels, there would be little in his account to quarrel with. To his first and second order analyses of truth, however, he adds a third which is more problematic. This, he asserts, is the inquiry into truth which Nietzsche thinks is "epistemically favoured" (Schacht, 96). This is the "truth" of Nietzsche's "free spirits", those who create values beyond the merely instrumental interests of the common lot of humanity. Schacht describes this privileged insight as a "relative adequacy relation between characterizations and states of affairs" (Schacht, 112).

This description is vague enough to warrant either of two interpretations. First, the relation it posits may refer to the philosopher's analysis of a "system of beliefs". Thus, the philosopher shows a society or a culture that its truths are necessary falsifications, or at least that those truths are not precisely what the people take them to be.<sup>10</sup> If this is the interpretation intended, however, it can easily be accounted for within the parameters of the second order analysis of truth (which, I am arguing, is a wholly negative account). Alternatively, the relation described by Schacht may refer to the philosopher's move toward some substantial, pre-constituted truth or set of truths ("states of affairs" ultimately distinct from our apprehension of them). But if this is the intended interpretation, it falls into the same problematic relation with some of Nietzsche's statements on the matter as did Warnock's views. The theory then becomes based in a correspondence criterion, where the "characterization" is seen as attempting to fit the pre-established facts. As we have seen, this violates the Nietzschean denial that such basic facts exist to be represented.<sup>11</sup> The confusion into which Schacht falls is an inevitable consequence of the attempt to see Nietzsche as engaging in the same type of philosophical project -truth seeking- in which those he criticizes are engaged.

However, in order to see that my interpretation of Nietzsche here is not merely plausible, but is in fact deeply rooted in Nietzsche's thought (especially his views on nihilism), we need to examine his counter-notions to truth analysis. These are the related doctrines of perspectivism and genealogy. Perspectivism treats of knowledge and the possibilities of knowledge, that is, the nature of the meeting point between human "consciousness" and the "world". It is Nietzsche's radically sceptical view of the possibilities of "pure knowledge", or "truth" unfettered by human interests. This doctrine thus lays the epistemological groundwork for Nietzsche's own preferred method of philosophical investigation: genealogy. The latter is Nietzsche's attempt to move away altogether from philosophy as truth seeking. He is not simply shifting the locus of truth analysis (this, broadly, is what those who see him as providing a positive theory of truth think he is doing); but, by denying that the philosopher can discover (or even create) something which is true *over against that which is false* ("mere" appearance), he is rejecting philosophy's traditional role as the guardian of truth and certainty.

## 2.2 PERSPECTIVISM

Perspectivism is Nietzsche's answer to the vexed philosophical problems of objective truth and subjective certainty. He writes, for example,

Against positivism, which halts at phenomena -  
"There are only *facts*"- I would say: No, facts is  
precisely what there is not, only interpretations.  
We cannot establish any fact "in itself"...

"Everything is subjective", you say; but even  
this is interpretation. "The subject" is not something  
given, it is added and invented (*Hinzun-Erdichtetes*)  
and projected behind what there is.- Finally, is it  
necessary to posit an interpreter behind the  
interpretation? Even this is invention (*Dichtung*),  
hypothesis.

In so far as the word "knowledge" has any meaning, the world is knowable; but it is *interpretable (deutbar)* otherwise, it has no meaning behind it but countless meanings.-  
"Perspectivism" (WP, 481).

This passage is interesting because it denies not only the existence of a meaning or a host of meanings "behind" events and appearances, but also because it rejects the existence of a Cartesian subject equipped with the ability to reach such meanings. So, if Nietzsche is right, the "world" is just what our projects, inventions and additions say it is, and "we" are ourselves defined by the specific manner in which we organize the world. There would seem to be no residue of meaning on either side of the equation (no primary qualities or cogito). In fact, each of these Nietzschean denials of essence reinforces the other. How does this work?

Nietzsche's point in attacking rationalism is to overthrow two traditional notions: first, that reason can actually organize the world for us by getting us in touch with the immutable nature of things and, second, that in this respect reason and instinct (which is linked to the "senses") are opposed, the former clearly enjoying a privileged epistemological position, while the latter is held to be mired in contradiction and uncertainty. <sup>12</sup> Nietzsche, for his part, sees the intellect as overwhelmingly passive, reactive and instrumental (in the sense of being the instrument of something more powerful). This is true of consciousness generally, but especially of that most "conscious" of pursuits, philosophy:

...by far the greater part of conscious thinking must still be included among instinctive activities, and that goes even for philosophical thinking; we have to learn differently here as we have learned differently in regard to heredity and the "innate". Just as the act of being born plays no part in the procedure and progress of heredity, so "being conscious" is in no decisive sense the *opposite* of the

instinctive -most of a philosopher's conscious thinking is secretly directed and compelled into definite channels by his instincts. Behind all logic too and its apparent autonomy, there stand evaluations, in plainer terms physiological demands for the preservation of a certain species of life (BGE. 3). 13

Nietzsche speaks elsewhere of the intellect as the "blind instrument" of another "craving" (D. 109). It follows that if the instincts actually employ the intellect, we have, contra Descartes, no apparatus which allows us to contact material essences. What we have is not a strict reason/instinct dualism, but a relatively fluid subjective unity where the instinctual works through rather than against consciousness. And this is true even where consciousness considers itself most free (philosophical contemplation). The subject, therefore, is reduced to the total history of its drives and valuations, that is, its organization of the world from a particular perspective and for a particular purpose: "all those bold insanities of metaphysics, especially answers to the question about the *value* of existence, may always be considered first of all as the symptoms of certain bodies" (GS. Pr. 2).

As a corollary of attacking subjective dualism, Nietzsche wants to dismantle notions of objective dualism (the split between primary and secondary qualities, essence and existence, noumena and phenomena). Thus in addressing concepts such as "knowledge in itself", "truth in itself" and so on he asserts that these concepts

...always demand that we should think of an eye that is completely unthinkable, an eye turned in no particular direction, in which the active and interpreting forces, through which alone seeing becomes seeing *something*, are supposed to be lacking; these always demand of the eye an absurdity and a nonsense. There is *only* a perspectival seeing, *only* a perspectival "knowing"; and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one

thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our "concept" of this thing, our "objectivity", be (GM. III: 12).

It is tempting to read this passage as though Nietzsche is still hoping that we can reach the ultimate stuff of reality, that we *can* be objective, if we but bring enough of the right interpretations to bear on our apprehension of the phenomena in question. But this, I think, would miss Nietzsche's central point here that our knowledge of things, and thus those things themselves as mere creations of our "knowledge", are *nothing but* the potentially infinite totality of perspectives we have of them. Nietzsche's use of terms like "concept", "knowledge", "objectivity" and so on is provisional and rhetorical, a way of hammering on traditional philosophical conceptions from within the traditional lexicon. Of course, insofar as knowledge is comprised only of perspectives, and since there can, in principle, be no way of gathering and recording "all" the perspectives on a given phenomenon, our "objectivity" is not really objective at all (being "incomplete"). But that is Nietzsche's point. And so, like the subjective realm, the objective realm is unified, reduced to "mere" appearance, that is the perspectival valuations which organize it.<sup>14</sup>

To summarize this section: I see Nietzsche's doctrine of perspectivism as an attempt to overcome the abstract, Cartesian separation of subject and object. Nietzsche's project, thus construed, has profound implications for the problems of knowledge and truth. If it is true that the subject is a unity in which the intellect merely serves the valuative drives of the instincts *and* that the "objective" realm is nothing but the motley of perspectives formulated by those drives, then does it make sense to speak of a fundamental distinction between the subject (*qua* knower) and the object (*of* knowledge)? For Nietzsche, "interpretation" is where the "world" and "human consciousness" meet and there can be

no further meaning behind either of these. And so, it is not a question of our knowledge peering deeper and deeper into reality, but rather of one, relatively narrow interpretation being overthrown by another, more comprehensive one: "...previous interpretations have been perspective valuations by virtue of which we can survive in life...every elevation of man brings with it the overcoming of narrower interpretations;...every strengthening and increase of power opens up new perspectives and means believing in new horizons" (WP. 616).

But if this is the case, if the meaning of our interpretations of the world is just what we say it is, shouldn't that meaning be entirely transparent to us? What, according to Nietzsche, can the role of the philosopher (as "free spirit") be, if this is the case? Nietzsche's answer to this question brings us to the problem of genealogy. For, as Nietzsche would have it, although our truths cannot be *verified* by reference to something which lies outside the linguistic-conceptual scheme in which they are embedded, they can and must be exposed, dissected, as the bearers of all the conquered and forgotten drives of which they are composed. Nietzsche writes:

A morality, a mode of living tried and *proved* by long experience and testing, at length enters consciousness as a law, as *dominating* - And therewith the entire group of related values and states enters into it: it becomes venerable, unassailable, holy, true; it is part of its development that its origin should be forgotten --That is a sign it has become master (WP. 514).

Since it is precisely that nexus of world and humanity called interpretation that provides the locus for genealogical investigation, Nietzsche's conception of the task of philosophy stays strictly within the

bounds of his view of the world as radically perspectival while showing us how our perspectives are constructed (which means, in effect, to expose them *as* perspectives).

### 2.3 GENEALOGY.

A casual reader of Nietzsche, supposing that the latter's call to historicize philosophical investigation will finally lead us to the discrete, though dust-covered "sources" of our present "truths", might be surprised to read the following kind of statement:

...formerly, when investigators of knowledge sought out the origin of things, they always believed they would discover something of incalculable significance for all later action and judgement...they always *presupposed*, indeed, that the *salvation* of man must depend on *insight into the origin (Ursprung) of things*: But...now, on the contrary, the more we advance toward origins, the more our interest diminishes; indeed, all the evaluations and "interestedness" we have implanted into things begin to lose their meaning the further we go back and the closer we approach the things themselves. *The more insight we possess into an origin the less significant does the origin appear...* (D. 44).

Following this insight, Nietzsche wants to distinguish his own brand of philosophy from that of the "deep" thinkers -the origin seekers- by espousing instead a radical investigative thoroughness, the kind of thinking which explores the "grounds" of things (D. 446). Elsewhere, Nietzsche condemns those who, upon discovering an "origin", merely repudiate positive metaphysics altogether rather than taking a "retrograde step" with the genealogist in order to grasp the real historical and psychological significance of our ideas (as superstitious as these might be (HA. 20)). Why, then, if Nietzsche's self-imposed task is to "translate man back into nature" (and presumably also back into history and "society"; BGE. 230), does he reject the search -which after

all may be entirely historical -"this-wordly"- for origins?

I think the answer to this question is that, for Nietzsche, the search for origins is itself a form of the search for essences. The origin, thus construed, stands fully formed at some privileged point in space/time -a sort of historically (or transcendentally) based unmoved mover. Nietzsche, however, denies that our truths are rooted in a uniform "beginning". Rather, "origins" themselves are the sites of radical interpretive disparities and not univocal truths. <sup>15</sup> In order for an origin to stand as a beginning, it has already to have overcome many competing forces. A beginning is a truth -victorious and having taken on the mantle of a teleology- and so if we merely locate the beginnings of our truths we have done nothing but "inquire into morality from within morality" (BGE. 186). This is not to assert that if we want to analyse a phenomenon such as the ascetic priest or the concept of original sin, we will seek in vain for that single place in history where it emerged and began to extend its influence. Nietzsche does not deny the "existence" of origins, only that they are a fit subject matter for the new philosophical investigation. Rather, in keeping with the doctrine of perspectivism as elucidated above, Nietzsche wants the philosopher to record as many perspectives on the phenomena as possible, then organize those "angles" into an interpreted whole.

This is why the task of the genealogist is by no means the path to philosophical glory (as was the task of the metaphysician). For Nietzsche, every phenomenon is, and has been, *conditioned* through its contact with countless competing drives. The genealogist -whose subject matter is held to be "grey"- merely exposes the play of forces which recorded history has concealed:

Anyone who now wishes to make a study of moral matters opens up for himself an immense field of work. All kinds of individual passions have to be thought through and pursued through different ages,

peoples and great and small individuals; all their reason and all their evaluations and perspectives on things have to be brought into the light (GS. 7).

So for Nietzsche, any attempt to locate the essence of an historical phenomenon is to see it as totally or relatively *unconditioned*,<sup>16</sup> that is, such a view sees the phenomenon as completely unconditioned at its origin (transcendental metaphysics, e.g., the Platonic Forms) or, as conditioned by a relatively small number of isolable perspectives (historical metaphysics, e.g., "historical materialism"). Both of these approaches must be rejected as failing to bring into question the problem of morality itself and as therefore inquiring into morality from within morality (BGE 186, 187). Thus the refusal to search for origins commits the genealogist only to the *description* (BGE. 186) of the conditions surrounding that which is conditioned, and this stance is entirely consistent with Nietzsche's "negative" conception of truth.

Genealogy represents for Nietzsche an entirely new role for philosophy and the philosopher. Nietzsche now sees the latter as a kind of traveller, a restless compiler and recorder of past valuations:

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 (GS. Pr. 3).

This description of the philosopher is entirely compatible with Nietzsche's sketch of the "active nihilist". With regard to the problem of "truth" (with which this chapter is primarily concerned), genealogy should be seen as Nietzsche's methodological counter-tool to the traditional philosophical "will to truth", which is necessarily nihilistic (that is, incompletely nihilistic). This becomes clear when we analyse genealogy as the specific means for overcoming two manifestations of incomplete nihilism: dogmatism (reactive nihilism) and the decadence of

dissolution (passive nihilism).

As we have seen, the will to truth -what Nietzsche often calls the ascetic ideal- operates by positing a "beyond" of some sort -Plato's Forms, the *Ding an Sich*, the atomic structure of the world, and so on. What distinguishes this will, what makes it truly powerful and historically significant, is its self deception, the ability it has to forget that it arose from the ashes of historical conflict. The beyond is infused with a mythological status as the beginning and end of "reality" (as the earth emerged from the hands of the Creator to whom we, as the created, return after our earthly sojourn). For Nietzsche, even though such projections are, strictly speaking, errors (which is simply to say that they do not mirror reality), there is no sense in which they can be refuted on their own terms. Any attempt to do so simply leads to the positing of a new god, a new truth. The overall form true/false is preserved and simply filled in with new characters and "significant" events (this *replacement* is precisely the source of reactive nihilism):<sup>17</sup>

*Historical refutation as the definitive refutation-*  
In former times, one sought to prove that there is no God -today one indicates how the belief that there is a God could *arise* and how this belief acquired its weight and importance. A counterproof that there is no God thereby becomes superfluous (D. 95).

As Nietzsche would have it, all forms of transcendental nihilism can be overcome this way and, presumably, only this way. It would seem to require nothing more than a diligent philologist and what Foucault refers to as "relentless erudition" (Foucault, 77). If philosophy were not to engage in such constant destruction of truths, it would, it seems, slip naturally into a hardened truth of its own, into some form of incomplete nihilism. But if the project of genealogy is entirely critical and destructive, won't it lead to a dissolution of knowledge, an unorganized and lifeless compilation of "facts" and to a picture of the

philosopher as a sort of burrowing, bespectacled civil-servant of knowledge? 18

Nietzsche, I think, is aware of this problem. Consider the following analogy drawn from a criticism of what he takes to be the modern "decadence" in literary style:

...life no longer dwells in the whole. The word becomes sovereign and leaps out of the sentence, the sentence reaches out and obscures the meaning of the page, the page gains life at the expense of the whole. But this is the simile of every style of *decadence*: every time, the anarchy of atoms, disgregation of the will, "freedom of the individual", to use moral terms -expanded into a political theory, "equal rights for all" (CW. 8).

This is a state strikingly similar to the one diagnosed by Nietzsche as "passive nihilism". As we have seen, this is the psychological state of torpor and helplessness, the loss of vital self-interest which attends the insight into the radical meaninglessness of life. Nietzsche's analysis of "truth" and the will to truth is designed to expose the contingent and conditional character of all existence. This is a Dionysian insight and, as Nietzsche maintained even as early as The Birth of Tragedy, such an insight, if it is unmediated by the organizing force of Apollinian representation, leads to "nausea", fragmentation, an ascetic "disgregation of will". 19 If, in the case of tragedy, Apollinian "illusion" is the required force of integration and temporary stability, then what constitutes such a force for the genealogist, Nietzsche's answer to the seeker after truth, who seems himself to be condemned to the chaos of knowledge without "illusions"?

Nietzsche answers this problem by providing a kind of genealogical hermeneutic, by means of which the genealogist (though as we will see, not merely *qua* critic), can make creative judgements on past (and present) cultures. This is his appeal to the relative strength of regimes

of truth, the extent to which a culture -an individual, an age- can be said to serve the ascension of life or, on the contrary, its decline. But how is this measured? At this point, Nietzsche's invocation of the "great man" may help us to understand his analogous points about great cultures and epochs. Nietzsche praises Shakespeare, for example, as a person who combined and controlled within himself powerfully conflicting drives (WP. 966). Also Goethe, who is lauded, first, for his "realism", his ability to say Yes to "the whole wealth and range" of experience and, second, for his ability to create himself out of this radically affirmative stance (TI. IX: 49). And finally Napoleon, who receives Nietzsche's praise for attempting to build a cultural and economic union out of the disparate elements of European nations, whose "centre of gravity" is being lost in the face of progressively democratising tendencies (TI. VIII: 4). This will to unity in spite of massive contradictions is the sense in which, for Nietzsche, all great men are "beyond good and evil". What is decisive is the way in which good and evil, justice and cruelty, and so on, are employed and dispensed solely in the interests of the whole. Moral valuations have no significance except within the economy of this whole.

According to Nietzsche, then, this is the way that strong values need to be created: in the face of and the knowledge of a variety of perspectives. Hence the philosopher compiles and employs a number of "positions" in the service of a greater philosophical project (Nietzsche himself <sup>20</sup> or, perhaps, Zarathustra who, we are told, "adopts a parodistic attitude toward all former values as a consequence of his abundance" (WP. 617)); the artist employs a variety of styles and characters -characters who themselves personify the whole range of moral qualities- in the overall interests of his or her art (Shakespeare, Goethe); and the culture creates its own standard of justice and cruelty out of its knowledge of the Dionysian depths (pre-Socratic Hellenic

culture). What links all these examples of the overcoming of dissolution, is their appeal to "art" as the manifestation of the creative will to power. So the politician, the philosopher and the artist must all, in an important sense, *be* artists if their valuations are to escape becoming nihilistic representations (that is, passively nihilistic).<sup>21</sup>

Genealogy, then, taken by itself, is not a complete philosophical tool. Strangely, the genealogist must also be an artist, the philosopher of the future must also have a will to illusion and simplicity:

*Actual philosophers are commanders and law-givers: they say "thus it shall be!", it is they who determine the Wherefore and Whither of mankind, and they possess for this task the preliminary work of all the philosophical labourers, of all those who have subdued the past -they reach for the future with creative hand, and everything that is or has been becomes for them a means, an instrument, a hammer (BGE. 211).*

Or again,

*That commanding something which the people calls "spirit" wants to be master within itself and around itself and to feel itself master: out of multiplicity it has the will to simplicity, a will which binds together and tames, which is imperious and domineering (BGE. 230).*

The type of free-spirit Nietzsche wants to see as the philosopher of the future thus transcends the genealogist *qua* critic of the will to truth. The purpose of this chapter has been merely to show that Nietzsche need not and indeed should not be seen as providing or even groping toward a positive theory of truth. He *need* not, because all his statements on "truth", despite their ambiguity, can be read as negative employments of that term; and he *should* not, because, as he sees it, the search for truth leads inevitably to incomplete nihilism. Genealogy is thus *part* of his counter-philosophy insofar as it rejects this drive and provides instead an actively nihilistic approach to philosophical investigation. We

now need to look at a fuller picture of the free spirit, the genealogist who creates values: the overman.

### 3. WHO IS THE OVERMAN?

...only after the spirit of science has been pursued to its limits and its claim to universal validity destroyed by the evidence of those limits, may we hope for a rebirth of tragedy -a form of culture for which we would have to use the symbol of the *music practicing Socrates...*

(BT, 17).

Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman -a rope over an abyss. A dangerous across, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking back, a dangerous shuddering and stopping

(Z, Pr. 4).

The problem of the overman (*Übermensch*) is the fulcrum of Nietzsche's concern with nihilism. As we will see, the overman represents Nietzsche's attempt to transform the self-sufficiency of all forms of incomplete nihilism. One might assume that with the overman, Nietzsche has given us an "ideal type", towards whose incarnation humanity as a whole should strive. But as I want to argue, the overman is best thought of as an active nihilist, one whose impetus to destroy is as indispensable to his overall makeup as his creative drive. What this means is that the overman cannot be a transcendence *tout court* of "man", but rather should be thought of as the preservation of those aspects of the modern consciousness which allow for his (the overman's) own self-overcoming. In other words, the valuations of the overman -his creative productions- must go through the following process. First, they must become reactive, become truths which are believed in as such. Second, through the power of Socratic reason -genealogical investigation- they must be exposed as mere perspectives. This must result in a general breakdown of truth as such, which breakdown leads finally to the re-emergence of new truth claims, new productions of the artistic impulse. This process as a whole is active nihilism, the logic of which is symbolized by the figure of the music practicing Socrates.<sup>1</sup>

The chapter begins with an examination of some claims which have been made to the effect that Nietzsche's overman represents an attempt to carry on the project of Young-Hegelianism. The overman, on this argument, is an ideal type which is projected beyond man and which, if not for certain social and historical obstacles, could be concretely realized. The overman is the essence of man, man divinized. Next, I move to a consideration of the overman as active nihilist. Here I try simply to fill out the account of the overman as creator/destroyer outlined above. Finally, I supplement this picture of the overman with

an examination of Nietzsche's comments on the problems of "health" and "sickness". I argue that, for the overman, just as incomplete forms of nihilism are made use of in the overall interests of creative valuation, so (by analogy) sickness is used in the service of an overall health. Throughout the discussion, I maintain the point that the overman represents both a preservation and a transcendence of man, or, more accurately, that the transcendence is really nothing beyond the valuative transformation of that which is preserved.

### **3.1 THE OVERMAN: MAN DIVINIZED?**

A frequently found interpretation of the overman and, by extension, of Nietzsche's project of "overcoming nihilism", sees Nietzsche as doing roughly what the Young-Hegelians were trying to do. This is the claim that Nietzsche, like Feuerbach, Strauss, Marx, *et al.*, is with the doctrine of the overman, attempting to provide for the worldly rehumanization or even divinization of man. Nietzsche, as one such author has it, is held to "love man in general" (Yack, 316) and this love makes his project one of removing the social barriers to the full realization of humanity in the world (a project which of course does describe the efforts of the Young-Hegelians in general). Seeing Nietzsche in this light is very interesting and the accounts which are offered along these lines are often quite subtle. I therefore want to pay close attention to this type of analysis as it surfaces in the arguments of Yack, Jackson and Rosen. Though these interpretations differ in their respective approaches to the problem, they all culminate in the charge that Nietzsche leaves us with a dualistic conception of the overman and/or that the overman is an essentially reactive type, one whose valuations can have little or no positive content of their own.

Bernard Yack views Nietzsche as longing for a "total revolution". As Yack sees it, the Young-Hegelian movement in general -of which Nietzsche is held to be a reluctant member- is marked by a fundamental

conceptual contradiction. While each of the Young-Hegelians denies or tries to avoid positing a fundamental break between human freedom on the one hand and natural necessity on the other, they all in fact presuppose this division and, moreover, fail to overcome it. Nietzsche, for his part, draws distinct "dichotomies between human and animal being, conscious self overcoming and blind impulse, the willing of meaning and senseless suffering" (Yack, 318). This dichotomy, says Yack, forms the basis of Nietzsche's distinction between man and animal (ibid). And so "humanity" for Nietzsche "is something that man must assert *against* nature and realize in the world" (Yack, 320, my emphasis). Moreover this overcoming of nature is a project for humanity in general, although the majority must realize *their* humanity by paving the way for the overman, who, it seems, is alone capable of making the leap over nature.

Yack complicates this already problematic picture by extending his analysis to Nietzsche's criticism of culture. Nietzsche, according to Yack, is influenced by the Schillerian notion that Greek culture represents "unfree harmony", that Kant's insights into the limits of critical reason allow for "free disharmony", and that the new aesthetic culture will synthesize these two into a "free harmony" (Yack, 323). Civilization, what we have analysed above<sup>2</sup> as "democratic culture" remains mired in free disharmony since it does not allow for whole individuals whose knowledge is reflected in and bound by the cultural setting. This is the culture of the *Bildungsphilister* (the philistine) who is possessed of a hypertrophied historical sense and a consequent multiplicity of "styles". And this inability to transcend the state of free disharmony -although a version of free harmony is always there, in the offing- is a mark not only of Feuerbach, Marx, etc., but also of Nietzsche too insofar as he cannot really think out his own notion of "free harmony". Yack makes reference to the music practicing

Socrates as the paradigm for Nietzsche's version of the transformation of critical reason into aesthetically free harmony (Yack, 329), but maintains that this ideal is not conceptually realized in Nietzsche's thinking.

So although Yack seems to take the overman as artist as a serious concept, he undermines his commitment by insisting that reason, and reason alone, must be the integrating element of consciousness:

To restore the identification with the world as it is provided by the tragic sense, we must *consciously* use the knowledge we have gained about our need to limit our knowledge. In short, we must impose myth upon ourselves by means of reason and freedom (Yack, 334).

Yack is right that myth must be "imposed" as cultural form on our knowledge. This is the task of the overman as political artist, for example. But as Yack would have it, this means that the overman is condemned to a dualism, he personifies two different and irreconcilable ways of being: self-overcoming and childlike affirmation (Yack, 350). Although Yack recognizes the need for these elements to be present together, he nevertheless insists that Nietzsche does not offer a plausible way of understanding how this unification can actually be accomplished. This commits Nietzsche to both affirm (that is, perpetuate) and deny (deny using) the dichotomy between "nature" and "freedom".

A full criticism of this conception of the overman will emerge only later in this chapter when I have offered my own characterization of the overman. For now, it should be noted that Yack's point rests on two claims. First, that Nietzsche wants to overcome, in the sense of transcend, "nature" through "freedom"; and second that reason, that is, critical consciousness must itself ultimately effect the unification of consciousness in a specific cultural-historical setting. On this view, by overcoming the diremptedness of consciousness the overman is ideally

freed from the nihilism of democratic culture and achieves a status of pure affirmation, beyond nihilism.

A similar thesis is put forward by F.L. Jackson. Although he does not address in detail the problem of the overman, Jackson's comments have profound significance for any treatment of this problem. As he sees it Nietzsche, like other "revolutionary" thinkers of his time, is offering a pseudo-Hegelianism which in effect dogmatically radicalizes the notion of subjective freedom (Jackson, 142). According to the thinkers of what Jackson calls the first phase of revolutionary philosophy (after Hegel) -Feuerbach, Ruge, Bauer, etc.- all worldly limits to subjective freedom "must be swept aside and the actuality of freedom demanded" (Jackson, 45). The primacy of individual freedom is here presupposed and used as a conceptual bulwark for the desired social and/or cultural redemption of humanity. All such philosophy has its *sole* meaning in revolt from transcendental idealism, and has no content of its own apart from this dependency (Jackson, 148-9).

Moreover, there is a second historical moment to revolutionary philosophy which carries over this essentially negative drive. With Nietzsche and Marx, revolutionary philosophy splits into two mutually hostile camps: humanism (Marx) and individualism (Nietzsche). Both these schools take as their starting point the radical freedom of the human subject. Each believes itself to have articulated that principle most faithfully and therefore accuses the other of misunderstanding the fundamental tenets of human freedom. And it is precisely over the question of how "alienation" -"the legacy of idealism" (Jackson, 152)- is to be overcome that the schools divide. While humanism maintains that an individual cut off from the practical intersubjective quest for concrete freedom (revolutionary praxis) is on that account alienated, existential individualism holds that such a subsumption of the individual to the interests of the collective forfeits the immediate freedom of the individual, thereby alienating him from his nature qua free subject.

On Jackson's argument, then, the overman, as Nietzsche's version of the most complete embodiment of the principle of subjective freedom, is defined essentially by his opposition to idealism as it has become manifest in the theses of revolutionary humanism.<sup>3</sup> "The cultural program" which the overman seeks to effect is "entirely negative in principle" (Jackson, 164). This is where we see the similarity between Jackson's thesis and that of Yack. Nietzsche's articulation of the problem of freedom, as these authors see it, can be understood as essentially reactive, as a freedom *from* certain concrete "dehumanizing" conditions.

Both Jackson and Yack are right to see such a position as entrenching a division between humanity as it is on the one hand and humanity as it will or ought to be on the other. The position of existential individualism, for its part, culminates in an absurd particularism - typified by Stirner's extreme egoism<sup>4</sup> - which posits "...the individual's radically unique existence for himself as the being who is already there before all universals and objectifications" (Jackson, 154). In this respect, there is, apparently, no significant distinction to be made between Nietzsche's overman and Stirner's involuted proprietor. In any case, according to Jackson's argument, both these types - despite their authors' protestations to the contrary - represent an ideal for humanity which, because it is only antithetically defined, merely revolts against and "antagonizes" the tradition rather than overcoming it (Jackson, 164). We will see that this conception of the overman as in the main reactive is inadequate.

A third, related argument is offered by Stanley Rosen. He claims that Nietzsche cannot support the doctrine of the overman because the latter depends upon a standpoint beyond the world (Rosen, 195). On Rosen's view, Nietzsche posits a distinction between "base" (or destructive) and "noble" (or creative) nihilism, the former referring to the valuations of the herd, the latter to those of the overman.

Presumably, these two types of nihilism represent distinct and mutually separate states of consciousness and so, Rosen maintains, Nietzsche makes it impossible to conceive of the move from base to noble modes of valuation (this is the case for individual as well as cultural transformations). Since Nietzsche does not provide us with a primary self-consciousness (as Hegel does) or with the notion of a unified, transcendental apperception (as Kant does), we are left with a dirempted view of both consciousness and culture.

Nietzsche's overman, as Rosen pictures him, thus suffers from a fundamental dualism (Rosen, 196), where an ideal of humanity is set up but the conceptual tools for the achievement of that ideal are not provided. What this means, according to Rosen, is that Nietzsche cannot give an adequate account of *recognition* between master types and slave types. On Rosen's argument Nietzsche posits an absolute separation of the types so that the master -who is held to be noble and affirmative- is unattainable for the slave -whose values are base and negative- while the former is held to be the essence and perfection of the latter (as the divinization of humanity as such).

Because he does not provide us with a means of unifying the disparate moments of consciousness, says Rosen, Nietzsche leaves us condemned to the "alienation" of nihilism. What Nietzsche fails to see is that because it is concretely intelligible, nihilism can and must be overcome (Rosen, 197), thus providing for the sublation of the master/slave opposition which transforms nihilism as such. Rosen here presupposes that only a Kantian or Hegelian notion of unification will make sense of the problem of how to unify seemingly disparate types. Since Nietzsche subscribes to neither of these (so the argument runs) his opposition between affirmative being and negative being (master and slave morality) must be absolute. But we will see that this argument trades on a mischaracterization of Nietzsche's position on affirmation and negation: two modes of being which are *never* posited by Nietzsche

as strictly opposed.

What the views of Yack, Jackson and Rosen have in common is the (implicit or explicit) picture of Nietzsche as just another Young Hegelian, though perhaps the most idiosyncratic. Upon the death of god and the fall of the transcendent there ensues, as a *reaction* to this crime, a mad scramble to divinize man himself. What this produces are various versions of man's "essence" and the strict separation of the latter from his "existence". Essence is the divine predicate of the subject man, while existence is his state as personified essence. Feuerbach has perhaps formulated this problem most starkly:

What the subject is lies only in the predicate; the predicate is the truth of the subject -the subject only the personified, existing predicate, the predicate conceived as existing. Subject and predicate are distinguished only as existence and essence. The negation of the predicates is therefore the negation of the subject (Feuerbach, 242).

For Feuerbach, the humanization of God becomes the supreme task for all future philosophy. As he would have it, it is the Christian God which is thus humanized, although from Nietzsche's perspective one need not insist on this in order to preserve the form of man-as-ideal -predicate. One needs only to postulate an essence -a "species-being" - for humanity and then show how the realization of that essence is being thwarted in the concrete socio-historical sphere. Even Stirner, who is a sharp critic of the attempt to predicate man's essence, himself posits an ideal of man-as-proprietor whose being as such is not fully realized precisely to the extent that external objectifications -of morality, religion, etc.- impinge in any way on it. With Stirner, god is not expelled from the universe, rather the Feuerbachian god-man becomes the egoistic man-god.<sup>5</sup>

I want now to consider Gilles Deleuze's Nietzschean criticism of Young-Hegelianism. Deleuze does not make reference to the authors I

have been examining, but since I have characterized their projects as placing Nietzsche within the lineage of Young-Hegelianism, Deleuze's comments on this topic will be pertinent. Put succinctly, all efforts to idealize man as a divine type, to postulate and then seek to realize a human essence operate within the valuative framework of the negative-reactive nihilist. Any attempt to dialectically reconcile man and god, finite and infinite, and so on, is, Deleuze claims, nothing "...but the old affinity of will to nothingness and reactive life" (Deleuze, 1983, 159). *Will to nothingness* because there is still a projection of man outwards, into the beyond of an ideal type. There is still the insistence on a quasi-divine predicate to the human subject. *Reactive life* because this appeal to the beyond is essentially a revolt, a reaction to previous (or contemporaneous) and evidently inadequate conceptions of human essence. As we have seen (with Jackson), the original revolt is against Hegelian Idealism and that revolt is taken up into the revolutionary movement itself, so that Nietzsche's "existential absolutism" -as personified in the overman- is essentially an attempt to free itself from the residual manifestations of idealism (as humanism).

Before moving to an examination of the overman as active nihilist, I want to summarize what I think is wrong with the conception of the overman as reactive-negative. The authors whose descriptions of the overman I have been considering (especially Jackson) are right to assert that revolutionary ideal types (as such) derive most of their content from that which is opposed. Such philosophy *is* essentially reactive. But to reduce Nietzsche to a mere revolutionary is, I think, to miss his account of the power and function of affirmation in the valuations of the overman. It can be shown that although there is a necessary element of reactive behaviour in those valuations, that behaviour is transformed in the interests of affirmative willing. On the other hand, to project an ideal of man into some beyond is an act of pure affirmation. This too is an inadequate way of seeing the overman.

Although affirmation is essential to his valuations, affirmation which is cut off from negation collapses into a form of incomplete nihilism, since the means for destroying what has been affirmed are denied (pure affirmation thus begets unassailable truths). The overman as active nihilist avoids both of these valuative pitfalls, and so we must now turn to an examination of the overman thus conceived.

### 3.2 THE OVERMAN AS ACTIVE NIHILIST

Most of Nietzsche's statements concerning the overman appear in the preface and book four of Thus Spoke Zarathustra. What I want to consider in this section of the chapter, is the character of the overman with specific attention to his respective relations to the last man and the higher man. In what sense is the overman tied to these latter figures, that is, in what sense are the valuations of the overman dependent on his psychological proximity to the last man and the higher man? Or indeed, is the overman a type which is fully and necessarily *beyond* man as such (as Deleuze, for example, thinks)? Investigating these questions will involve a thorough examination of the nature of the valuations of each of these types. What this means is that their respective ways of affirming and negating -as modes of the will to power as valuation- must be explored. In the final section of this chapter, I will examine the problems of "health", "sickness" and "convalescence" as these states describe the overall economy of the overman's will to power. What will emerge is a picture of the overman which corresponds neither to the ideal type theories (outlined above), nor to Deleuze's "a-human" characterization (which will be criticized below), but which, by showing the overman's simultaneous dependence on and transcendence of "man", steers a middle course between those two positions.

Here the following question confronts us. If nihilism is a condition, *the* condition, of modern man in his most decadent form, and man as

such is something to be overcome, how can we insist on nihilism as a quality of the overman? As Zarathustra tells us,

The most cautious people ask today, "How may man still be preserved?" Zarathustra, however, asks as the sole and first one to do so: "How shall man be overcome?" (Z., IV. Of the Higher Man, 3).

The opposition between man and overman would seem to be absolute. Indeed, if we look at the kind of being Nietzsche takes to be constitutive of man<sup>6</sup>, we will see that this is a highly plausible interpretation of Nietzsche's thoughts on the matter. Nietzsche deplores the decadence, the physiological and hence spiritual weakness, of modern man. But the problem is that neither the last man nor the higher man possesses the strength of spirit which is the key feature of the "laughing lions" (Z., IV. The Welcome) whom Nietzsche praises in distinction from the "weary and wilted" (ibid.). And so the active nihilist, although his nihilism marks his partial contact with man (the purely epistemological insight into reality as chaos is something which the active nihilist obviously shares with the passive nihilist and even with the reactive nihilist, in the latter's more honest moments), escapes Nietzsche's radical critique of man. But this is precisely what needs to be explained: what is the exact nature of the overman's contact with man, what is the exact nature of his independence from man and, finally, what is the nature of the relation, within the overman, of this simultaneous dependence and independence? In order to make these problems clearer, we need to examine Nietzsche's (and Zarathustra's) attitude to "man".

Zarathustra's most disparaging attacks on man are reserved for the "masters of the present", whose sole and guiding question is, "how may man preserve himself best, longest, most agreeably" (Z., IV. Of the Higher Man, 3). This is the last man, the one who represents the greatest danger to the overman since his (the last man's) valuations

push back what Nietzsche sees as the forward historical movement of the will to truth. The most cherished beliefs of the last man are those of "freedom", "progress", "justice", "virtue" and "great events" (Z., II. Of Great Events). Zarathustra's critique of the last man is a corollary of the general Nietzschean attack on democratic state culture. The last man is seen as the optimistic defender of this culture and its fetishistic attachment to "great events". The last men are the "superfluous", the "flies of the market place" who garrulously proclaim the virtues of humanism's heaven on earth. Nietzsche's attack on Strauss in the Untimely Meditations should be seen in this light, for example. Strauss represents for Nietzsche precisely that type of philistine (*Bildungsphilister*) who has lost the ability to despise himself since he blithely reifies the values of the cultural philistine. As Strauss himself confesses, "culture", for the last man, merely serves the sentiments of democratic patriotism:

..besides our profession, I say, we try to keep our minds as open as possible to all the higher interests of mankind: during recent years we have participated in the liveliest way in the great national war and the construction of the German state...We assist our understanding of these things through historical studies which have now been made easy even for the unlearned by a series of attractive and popularly written historical works...and...we find in the writings of our great poets...a stimulus for the spirit and the heart, for the imagination and the sense of humour, that leaves nothing to be desired. Thus we live and go our way rejoicing (UM, 17-18).

The last man lives in a world of kitschy slogans<sup>7</sup>, newspapers and "optimism". He is, as we have seen<sup>8</sup>, the reactive nihilist who leaps into God's empty seat so as to dismiss the call of Nietzsche's demon to affirm (or even to recognize) the loneliest loneliness. His valuations typify what Deleuze describes as the "old affinity of will to nothingness and reactive life" (Deleuze, 1983, 159), although, importantly, he is blind

to this fact. Blind, because these two types of will, *when working in conjunction*, depend upon (and in fact reinforce) the naivete and faithfulness, the *belief* of those who project them. Reactive nihilism is a regression because it depends upon and reinforces the will to nothingness (which is the key feature of incomplete nihilism). This is why Young Hegelianism is both an advance and a regression in the progress of the will to truth: it appears as a result of the death of god (the fall of the Hegelian transcendent), but reacts to this event in a cowardly fashion by divinizing man himself. Strauss is both a Young Hegelian (murderer of God) and the archetypal last man (creator of a new god).

Zarathustra's relation to the higher man is more ambiguous and complex. These men have been led to reject the "generic activity" (Deleuze) of the last man. Therefore Zarathustra calls on the higher man to will the overman. What the higher man recognizes is that the last man cannot affirm. But the higher man himself, insofar as he is the representative of humanity, suffers from the same defect. But what does he "represent"? He represents the status of the last man (as negative-reactive valuator) *made problematic*. In the higher man the negative-reactive will has become conscious of itself. So, what distinguishes the higher man from the last man is that the former recognizes his decadence and thus disturbs the equilibrium which the last man, in his blindness and fear, had established between the reactive life and the will to nothingness. That is, he understands the sources of the last man's valuations -chiefly the need for easy self-preservation- and cannot, therefore, believe in those valuations. But the higher man also knows that he himself cannot affirm and this is why he despises himself. Each higher man -the leech, the sorcerer, the retired pope, the ugliest man, the voluntary beggar and the shadow- has in some way fallen from grace with both God and man (the last man):

That you despise you higher men, that lets me hope.  
For the great despisers are the great reverers.  
That you have despaired, in that there is much to  
revere. For you did not learn how to surrender,  
you did not learn petty prudences. For today the  
little people lord it: they all preach surrender and  
resignation and prudence and industry and  
consideration and the long *etcetra* of the small  
virtues (Z., IV. On the Higher Man, 3).

Given the fact that the higher man seems authentically to reject the valuations of the last man, god -as the wholesale regression to some form of reactive nihilism- now represents the "greatest danger" of the higher man; and the death of god, if its consequences are fully enacted by the higher man, represents his greatest potential liberation. The last man reacts to the emptying of the divine seat by creating replacement gods and thus providing himself with a warm place to live; but the higher man, because he is nauseated by this activity, has become an anchorite, wandering in strange new forests of godlessness. This is where Zarathustra finds him and Zarathustra praises him for not (so far) abdicating his responsibility to push the will to truth to its furthest boundaries: "I count nothing more valuable and rare today than honesty" (Z., IV. Of the Higher Man, 8).

But if the higher man recognizes this need for the terrible truth, will indeed go so far as to recognize, with Zarathustra, the need to repudiate all values hitherto, why does he, the higher man, nonetheless fail? After Zarathustra informs his disciples -the higher men- of what is to be their singular role in helping to overcome the last man, he moves off to his cave to commune with himself and his animals. His solitary musings are interrupted, however, by the sweet-smelling vapour of incense, rising up to his cave. When he returns to his guests, he is, like Moses before him, righteously angered to find them kneeling around an ass and praying to it. The all affirming ass (which can only

bray "Y-ea") has become the distorted symbol of Zarathustra's teachings on affirmation. The ugliest man describes the animal thus:

He bears our burden, he has taken upon himself the likeness of a slave, he is patient from the heart and he never says Nay...He does not speak, except he always says Y-ea to the world he created: thus he praises his world. It is his cleverness that does not speak: thus he is never found to be wrong (Z., IV. The Awakening, 2).

The higher man is evidently not strong enough to bear a godless universe. The god he has seen fit to create and bow down before and which he no doubt thinks Zarathustra himself will find an adequate delty, is *affirmation* itself, "pure" Yes-saying.

All the higher men agree that god, in this form, seems "most worthy" of belief (Z., IV. The Ass Festival, 2), and yet Zarathustra chastises them for having become as "little children, that is, pious" (ibid.). Nietzsche leaves little doubt as to what is being portrayed here: the misinterpretation of one of Zarathustra's fundamental tenets. Zarathustra teaches that laughter and affirmation are signs of divine health, strength and the courage to bear meaninglessness. Evidently, though, laughter and affirmation can mean just the opposite: they can force the gaze away from the abyss and become absolute values themselves. This is a critical point. Although for Nietzsche the ability to dance signifies a certain freedom, that freedom is negated if the dance takes place anywhere but on the abyss -the abyss of active nihilism. To move away from that abyss is always to slip into some form of incomplete nihilism. Mere childishness, which as such is not accompanied by negation and destruction, is then simply "stupid" (ibid.), a form of piety with which the godless Zarathustra will have no truck.

This failure of the higher man should, I think, give us pause when we consider the meaning of "becoming-child", as it unfolds in the famous "metamorphoses of the spirit" (Z., I. Of the Three Metamorphoses). As

Nietzsche (or Zarathustra) would have it, the healthy spirit should pass from being a camel (beast of burden) to a lion (the rebellious "I will") to a child (the creative, as opposed to reactive "I will"). What is important to remember here is that each stage of spiritual metamorphosis can only emerge from the one previous to it and is therefore in some sense dependent on that previous stage. There is a circular logic to the process of the metamorphosis. And so the camel, who bears on his back all previous values -including the will to truth- takes us into the "lonliest desert", where a new form of life may emerge: the lion. The lion, born in this desert, seeks to overthrow the external imposition of value. He fights the dragon who says, "all values have already been created and all values are in me" (ibid.). The lion, however, because his task is only to rage against the system of values, cannot authentically create *new* values. What the lion does do, though, is "create...freedom for new creation" (ibid.). At this point the child must emerge to fulfill the project of creative valuation:

The child is innocence and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a sport, a self-propelling wheel, a first motion, a sacred "Yes". For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred "Yes" is needed: the spirit now wills his own will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers his own world (ibid.).

Yet as we have seen, though in a crucial respect "innocent", the child cannot be allowed to supercede *tout court* its forebears, lest it become a *mere* child, a giddy, reactive "affirming" ass. The Socratic lion has cleared the way for the child, but the way must constantly be cleared even after the birth of the child (before every one of its re-births) so that the latter can be given the gift of creative space.

Considered generally, the metamorphosis is a marvellously condensed metaphorical recapitulation of the history of nihilism. The camel, of course, is the transcendent, the realm of valuation which, by its nature, draws into itself that which it is not. Being the seat of truth

itself, it defines the world on its own terms. This is its burden. But since it bears the truth, it also cultivates truthfulness and this is why the camel allows for the birth of the lion. The lion then rejects the truth claims of the beast of burden and every other external authority. But the lion also represents a moment of great uncertainty and possibility. On the one hand, his rebellious will can remain merely rebellious, in which case the will inevitably becomes passive or, on the other hand, his rebellion can occasion a retreat to the valuation of the camel and his will thus become reactive (establishing a relatively permanent reactive truth). A third possibility remains: the transformation to the child. This "laughing lion" (Z., IV. The Welcome), must not only create values, but must emerge from his creative act "innocent" and "forgetful"<sup>9</sup>; he is not an end but a "beginning", the movement of his creative impetus is that of a "wheel" rather than a linear progression (Z., I. Of the Three Metamorphoses). Understanding the meaning of these designations is imperative in describing the figure of the overman/child/active nihilist.

We can characterize the valuations of this child by saying that its affirmations must be linked to its negations (the inability to achieve this link was the failure of the higher man). The child is not a static being but a *process* whose affirmations must, first, become reactive (that is, become truths which, like the camel, bear the burden of that which they appropriate) and, second, be destroyed by the negations of the lion. This whole circular process is itself active nihilism, the process by which truths become hardened and are subsequently destroyed, creating space for further and higher affirmations. But if this is true then the camel and the lion are as essential to the process of active nihilism as is the child, and there is no sense in which the "evolution" from one of these stages to the next is a full transcendence of the original stage.

It is because he misunderstands the nature of this process that the

picture of the overman offered by Deleuze is unacceptable. Deleuze claims, rightly I think, that the last man is defined by the "becoming-reactive" of his valuations. The last man (and also the higher man) addresses the species-being of man and is thus always engaged in transcendental activity. But in his attempt to dissociate completely the overman from the last and higher men thus conceived, Deleuze makes it difficult to understand how his conception of the overman could be a truly affirmative type (where affirmation is understood as informed by negation). Deleuze does seem to recognize this problem. He writes, for example,

affirmation is necessary and sufficient to create two negations, two negations form part of the powers of affirming which are modes of being of affirmation as such (Deleuze, 1983, 180).

But "negation" here is being employed in a very strange way. For the overman, Deleuze goes on to say, negation "changes sense, it becomes a power of affirming, a preliminary condition of the affirmative" (Deleuze, 1983, 176). This, I think, is right but what exactly does the act of negation negate if not valuations which have *become reactive*? Deleuze thinks that the overman as such is beyond reactivity, but surely affirmative valuations would not have to be negated if they had not, in a very basic sense, become believed. If this were not the case, if the affirmation were not accompanied by a becoming reactive, then negation would be simply superfluous, since the affirmation, upon being pronounced, would simultaneously pronounce itself meaningless. But this robs the notions of affirmation and negation of any concrete sense.

It is in light of this critique of Deleuze that we should understand Zarathustra's otherwise perplexing remarks on the eternal recurrence of the last man. The knowledge that the last man must recur is the principal source of Zarathustra's "nausea", and a truth from which he must long convalesce:

"Eternally recurs the man of whom you are weary, the small man" -thus yawned my sadness and dragged its feet and could not go to sleep...My sighing sat on all human tombs and could no longer get up. My sighing and questioning croaked and gagged and gnawed and wailed by day and night: "Alas man recurs eternally! The small man recurs eternally!" (Z., III. The Convalescent, 2).

It is Zarathustra's failure to grasp the reality and significance of this fact that, up until book four of the text, does not allow him to fully understand the doctrine of eternal return<sup>10</sup> or, concomitantly, the nature of the overman. I think that the meaning of the eternal return of the last man is contained in the nature of the valuations of the overman as active nihilist. Since the last man is by definition the one whose valuations are blindly believed, the last man as such is a stage which each of the overman's valuations must pass through. This is absolutely necessary if the force of destruction is to have any fodder for *its* project. To be sure, the last man has been denied as an end in himself, but he cannot be fully eradicated lest the crucial link between the spirit of creation and that of destruction be sundered. Reactive nihilism is thus a middle point between creation and destruction, it is an indispensable mode of active nihilism.<sup>11</sup>

If this is true how can we make sense of Deleuze's claim that the overman and the higher man "differ in nature, both in the instances which produce them and in the goals that they attain" (Deleuze, 1983, 168)? Deleuze thinks of an overman hopping from mountain peak to mountain peak, breathing only the rarefied air of the heights and never contacting that creature of the depths, man. Ironically, Deleuze seems himself to be offering a purely affirmative overman, since the valuations of the latter, on Deleuze's picture, are utterly dissociated from the reifications of the last man and, consequently, from any vigorous conception of negation. As I am arguing, the overman as

active nihilist contains within himself reactive and passive elements as moments (passive nihilism considered here as a necessary stage between reactive nihilism and creation). As the paradigm for the overman, the music practicing Socrates makes manifest this tension. Socratism, as the collection and destruction of "conventions", is the force which "pursues science to its limits" (BT, 17) and thus allows for the denial of those limits in the instantiations of creative "illusion". Here, the genealogist is united with the artist in the process which is active nihilism.

In chapter one, I talked about the "new self-consciousness" of the will to truth which does not allow it to repose in "truths".<sup>12</sup> This obviously needs to be qualified here, which I will do by way of summarizing this section. Qua negator, the overman actually needs truths<sup>13</sup>, just as Socrates needs to find interlocutors -think of Meno or Euthyphro- who are faithfully devoted to their truths. Qua affirming, the overman must have the power to destroy or creation itself will become stagnant. So while one can separate the components of the overman as music practicing Socrates, it must be stressed that this is only analytically possible. The artistic Socrates is, in the figure of the overman as essential as the socratic Musician. As bearer of destructive knowledge, Socrates shows us *where* the overman stands (beyond a final truth, in the knowledge of chaos); as artist, the musician tells us *how* he stands there (creatively, affirmatively).

So, the overman is neither wholly (or mostly) reactive, advocating only a freedom *from* certain cultural restraints, since this neglects his essentially affirmative impetus, nor do his valuations manifest a will to nothingness, since there is in them a highly qualified though ineradicable preservation of man as he is. These two points weaken the representation of the overman as the idealization of "Nietzsche the Young Hegelian". Moreover, the overman cannot be thought of as a purely

affirmative being, one who is completely cut off from modern man (as the last man). This conflicts with the thesis of Deleuze. Here we come up against a paradox which, however, the conception of the overman I have advanced should be able to explain. If reactivity and passivity are moments of the overall makeup of the overman and if incomplete nihilism represents a kind of sickness (or weakness), as I have argued in chapter one, then how do we account for Nietzsche's claims that the overman is a pre-eminently "healthy" type of being? In order to answer this question, we need to examine briefly Nietzsche's reflections on "health" and "sickness".

### **3.3 THE OVERMAN: REFLECTIONS ON HEALTH AND SICKNESS**

In the preface to the first book of Human, All Too Human, Nietzsche offers us a description of his own philosophical labours which bears a striking resemblance to the characterization of the overman I have put forward:

anyone who could divine something of the consequences that lie in...profound suspiciousness... will also understand how often, in an effort to recover from myself, as it were to induce a temporary self-forgetting, I have sought shelter in this or that -in some piece of admiration or enmity or scientificity or frivolity or stupidity; and why, when I could not find what I needed, I had artificially to enforce, falsify and invent a suitable fiction for myself (and what else have poets ever done? and to what end does art exist in the world at all?) (HA, I. Pr., 1).

Nietzsche goes on to describe his need to "cure" himself of his knowledge again and again by imposing upon himself the fiction that he was not isolated (ibid.). But, if health is got by reposing in such "illusions", then how can we describe the last man or the ascetic priest -two types of truth mongers- as sick and decadent? Do we want to refer to them as "cured", since they have apparently mastered the art of self-

forgetfulness and established for themselves and their followers a relatively permanent "faith"?

Here we must be careful. As Nietzsche would have it, the "great health" is great only to the extent that it has emerged from and overcome a great sickness, a prolonged period of critical "suspicion". In fact, this type of sickness is necessary every time "we begin to make things easier for ourselves" (HA, II. Pr., 4), that is, *become sick* in a perhaps more damaging sense (by reposing too long in a truth). This is the only way in which one can overcome oneself, as Nietzsche himself had to become sick in order to develop a suspicion of romantic pessimism, for example, and move on to a new, healthier conception of pessimism, tragic pessimism (HA, II. Pr., 5). The latter example is important because romantic pessimism, which generalizes meaninglessness to all human endeavours (WP, 32), is itself a necessary stage in the overcoming of every truth. As we have seen in the characterization of the overman as active nihilist, the "healthy" type must *live through* the following passage: a truth must become believed, then there must be a sickness as a consequence of the suspicion aroused by the belief (the genealogical investigation into its forgotten origins), a generalization of this suspicion and, finally, the willed emergence of a new truth, a new cure and a temporary health. Each of these stages, if taken out of the logic of the movement as a whole and allowed to attain self-sufficiency, is a sickness. The process itself, which demands the subordination of these sicknesses, is the "great health".<sup>14</sup>

The insistence on actually living through these states is not, moreover, something which the overman can avoid. Nietzsche is not being merely metaphorical here. It is crucial to his thinking on the matter of "overcoming" previous values that, since those values are the product of the "physiological basic drives" of the one who posits them, they cannot be overcome on a merely conceptual level. Nietzsche wants

to get to the root of the "morality" in question and this demands not just a conceptual confrontation with it but also an empathic understanding of the basic processes which give rise to it. This is why Nietzsche describes those he wishes to praise as being "dangerously healthy, *ever again healthy*," why the great health is something which one "acquires continually, and must acquire because one gives it up again and again and must give it up" (GS 382, my emphasis). The great health, then, is the move away from the final stage of incomplete nihilism -that is the "severe suspicion" of passive nihilism- to the temporary and willed forgetting of the insights achieved at that stage. But it cannot be overemphasized that the emergence of artistic "illusion" as cure is dependent on two things: the sickness of suspicion which preceded it and the sickness of dogmatism which it becomes and which finally gives birth, once again, to the process of health which is the movement of sickness.

Clearly then the process which is active nihilism and which is embodied in the overman has the same logical structure as the process which describes the really healthy individual. We saw that the active nihilist is not simply the child but is rather the entire circular process of child-become-camel, camel-become-lion, lion-become-child, and so on. The great health too is the entire structure of the movement of sicknesses, played over again and again in the healthy individual. In passages such as the following, Nietzsche hints at this similarity of structure:

In the end, lest what is most important remain unsaid: from such abysses, from such severe sickness, also from the sickness of severe suspicion, one returns *newborn*, having shed one's skin, more ticklish and malicious, with a more delicate taste for joy, with a tenderer tongue for all things, with merrier senses, with a second dangerous innocence in joy, more childlike and yet a hundred times subtler than one has ever been before (GS, Pr., 4).

Nietzsche's thoughts on health and sickness thus help us to further flesh out the character of the overman. The increased "subtlety" of the "newborn", as Nietzsche describes it, will and must harden into dogmatic truths, because if it does not, it will not be overcome in its turn (one cannot become suspicious of that which one has not fully ceased being suspicious of). For Nietzsche, the overman is the figure in whom the will to truth -symbolized by Socrates- has become supplemented by the will to forget -symbolized by the artist. Each will, combined as they are in a single individual, is but a moment of, a way towards, the other. Since the overman must always pass through the process of incomplete nihilism he is, *ipso facto*, a nihilist. But the fact that the passage -as the progress of the will to truth- is in the service of a higher health, means that the nihilism of the overman has become *active*, has become a positive force for spiritual regeneration, and has thus forestalled the ultimate triumph of one or another form of incomplete nihilism.

But the picture of the overman, and a full understanding of the problem of nihilism, is still incomplete. What is missing is the detailed description of the psychological and moral makeup of the overman which shows why he is compelled to be actively nihilistic. So far, we have seen *how* he is but we need to supplement this sketch with an answer to the question of *why* he is this way and not, rather, nihilistic in an incomplete way. We know that the emergence from the knowledge gained by the death of god demands a heroic act of will (this is the response the overman makes to Nietzsche's demon at the moment of the loneliest loneliness). The opposite consequence, that is, the utter abandonment of willing is an equally possible response to the death of god. What then drives this heroic will, the will *to will*, rather than to dissolve in torpor and despair? What motivates the push to the final stage of the will to truth, which is to negate *that very will* and move into the realm of "illusion"? The answer is: the thought of the eternal

return of the same. It is this thought which is the most important possession of the overman. It is what imbues the will to health and forgetting, and equally the will to sickness and truth, with the principle of movement. The doctrine of eternal return thus reinforces the interpretation of active nihilism I have been advancing in this chapter. It is therefore to the the explication of the eternal return that we must now move.

#### 4. NIHILISM AND THE ETERNAL RETURN

"God" as the moment of culmination: existence an eternal deifying and un-deifying. But in that not a high point of value, but a high point of power

(WP, 712).

My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it -all idealism is mendaciousness in the face of what is necessary- but *love* it

(EH, II: 10).

We began this study with Nietzsche's analysis of the history of nihilism and must therefore finish with his account of the culmination of that history. The doctrine of eternal return eludes incomplete nihilism by restoring time and becoming to themselves, by refusing to read the concepts of "progress" and "goal" into history and by following the implications of this refusal to their end. With eternal return there is no attempt to project the meaning of time outside of time itself. One is forced to recognize the radical valuelessness of the world (that is, that our valuations do not and cannot reflect the "real" structure of the world) and the ineliminable place and function of man *qua* valuator within that world. As we will see, the doctrine of eternal return has a twofold function: first, it makes manifest the nature of the world as will to power through the genealogical investigation into "truths" and, second, it gives rise to a radically affirmative stance in the face of knowledge of the world as will to power. This stance, what Nietzsche calls the "joyful wisdom", is what makes possible the "redemption" of humans through the valuations of the artist. Thus the doctrine of eternal return further enhances the notion of the circularity of self-overcoming which is the mode of being of the overman (the thinker of the return).

I begin the chapter with a brief analysis of Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power. This doctrine is an inseparable component of the theory of eternal return insofar as it constitutes the framework within which all valuations -indeed all "beings"- function. It is the basic "what" of the world to which we are held to return. Next, I will examine the thought of eternal return itself as the essential counterthought and antidote to incomplete nihilism. And finally, I look at Nietzsche's views on "redemption", a concept which is itself at the heart of all (incompletely) nihilistic appropriations of history but which Nietzsche reevaluates to serve as the psychological principle guiding the movement of the thought of eternal return. Redemption, on Nietzsche's

new understanding of the term, is supplied by creative valuations which redeem us *for* the process of suffering and creation rather than *from* it.

#### 4.1 THE WILL TO POWER.1

One of Nietzsche's main tasks in formulating the theory of will to power was to radically de-humanize the world, to reaffirm the primacy of Becoming but by no means "make it safe" for humans (that is not to destroy one moral system simply to replace it with another). Rather the will to power is held to be the essential "truth" of reality, its postulates extend to every facet of nature, including humanity. Two key concepts in Nietzsche's presentation of the theory are "preservation" and "enhancement" -they constitute the formal movement of the will to power which is at bottom the self overpowering of power. The will to power, that is, states that the "essence" of power is simply to overcome, overpower itself at every moment and it uses whatever means are available -like "values"- to achieve this purpose. Stated very generally, what this means for human beings, who are essentially value creating, is that valuations are creations of the will to power which are used as tangible conditions for the preservation and enhancement of the species.

Heidegger emphasizes this aspect of the will to power. He sees it as a constant projection, outward and upward, of the transforming possibilities of life (Heidegger, 1984, chs. 1, 12, 17, 23). The confrontation of value and force -that is a particular configuration of wills to power- is, for a force, the marking off of itself, its ultimate act of differentiation. The contact, conflict and appropriation of the other rather than reflexive self knowledge constitute the "identity" of a will to power at any moment. Deleuze refines this point by defining the will to power as "the element out of which issue both the quantitative difference of related forces and the quality that, due to this relation,

devoives to each force (Deleuze, 1988, 97). The flux of Becoming is the interaction of reactive and active forces, reactive forces being those which direct their movements below themselves to the dogmatic, belated suppression of their other (for example the *ressentiment* of slave morality), active forces being those that go to the "end of their consequences" (master morality, for example) (ibid.).

What makes the notion of will to power so compelling and complex is that Nietzsche is not simply telling us that reactive forces correspond to forms of life which seek to preserve themselves and active forces to those which seek to enhance themselves. This is an abstraction of types which Nietzsche eschews.<sup>2</sup> As Nietzsche would have it, any form of life as such contains within itself the conflict between active and reactive forces. Although he often talks disparagingly of the drive for self preservation, calling it a "distress" and a "limitation" (GS, 349), Nietzsche also recognizes that a form of life which did not impose such limitations on itself would simply not be able to preserve itself. What Nietzsche polemicizes against is the Spinozistic doctrine which sees self-preservation as the law of organic life.

According to Nietzsche, the view that things strive essentially to preserve themselves is a key conceptual component of the fiction of substantial being, against which the theory of will to power is chiefly directed. What is "real", on the view Nietzsche is criticizing, is that which has become, which has lodged itself firmly in Being and from that position exerts its energy simply to solidify its own stasis. Nietzsche does not deny that this happens -that things act in the interest of self-preservation- and, indeed, must happen. What he rejects is the ontology that follows from it. The elevation of self-preservation to the seminal law of nature presupposes and reinforces the belief in material substance, which belief is, for Nietzsche, an expression of the nihilistic will to believe dogmatically in something which is, technically, non-

existent.

Again, though, Nietzsche's critical point here does not commit him to a denial that forms of life which are essentially reactive and preservative exist. What he wants to show however is that such forms of life are by no means the norm and that they can in any case be described in terms of the will to power rather than by reference to doctrines of substance ontology. The strength of the view that attributes substantial being to things is that it can posit a world which, because it is composed of discrete, definable entities whose interaction can be described in terms of cause and effect, is calculable, regular, knowable. There is a fixed "subject" behind every one of that subject's attributes and this subject has an ontological status which qualitatively marks it off from everything which is not exactly like it. On Nietzsche's view there are two closely related problems with this position.

First, for Nietzsche, the key to understanding the nature of a "thing" is to grasp the *conflict* it exhibits between active and reactive forces. But this is not to say that a form of life is some-*thing* over and above (or behind) this conflict. There is no sense in which one can speak of a thing with active and reactive "attributes". Rather, "a thing is the sum of its effects"<sup>3</sup> (WP, 551). Linguistic restrictions force us to speak even here as though the thing in question is in some way independent of its effects. But this is merely a grammatical illusion (though a necessary one). By reducing "things" to their effects on other things (which are themselves merely effects), Nietzsche has effectively denied that there is a qualitative distinction between things written into nature (such a distinction presupposes the mutual isolation of phenomena). Zarathustra's animals express this insight as follows: "In every Now, being begins; round every Here rolls the sphere There. The centre is everywhere... (Z., II The Convalescent, 2).

Nietzsche, however, does not simply dispense with the notion of qualitative difference, but insists rather that this difference is merely a function of the quantitative relation between contacting forces:

Every atom affects the whole of being -it is thought away if one thinks away (the) radiation of power will. This is why I call it a quantum of will to power. It expresses the characteristic that cannot be thought out of the mechanistic order without thinking away this order itself (WP, 634).<sup>4</sup>

For Nietzsche there can be no literally true ontology of the world (or any part of it). The world is a pulsating intensity of competing forces (WP, 702), radically unstructured, and this is what leads him to (paradoxically) refer to the will to power as the ultimate fact of the world. It is an ultimate fact which is not a substratum and which resolutely defies univocal description. It is chaos. With the theory of will to power the world's centre of gravity has been transposed downward from the transcendent and been fragmented, like a billion falling stars, into the river of Becoming.

This brings us to Nietzsche's second point of criticism of the doctrine of substantial being. The unfathomably diverse complexity of functions which is the world as will to power makes any attempt to unify reality a matter of grafting systems onto the flux (which necessarily does violence to the flux). What ontologizers fail to see is that "substance" is just such a humanization, a belated attempt to cope with the flux by organizing a small portion of it. According to the will to power there are strictly speaking no two things in nature which are exactly alike. However, because of the deficiencies of the human capacity for perception and knowledge, the differences, minute as they often are, are subsumed by the qualities of perceived sameness. As Alphonso Lingis points out,

...scientific detectives find that there are no two grains of sand absolutely identical, no two hands with the same fingerprints, no two typewriters with the same type, no two revolvers that scratch their bullets with the same striations (Lingis, 39).

The will to unite parts of nature is strictly correlative to the need to survive, to function in a world of radical dissimilarity (this is precisely the source of nihilistic values). Thus when Nietzsche calls the world valueless, he is not commenting disparagingly on the worthlessness of values. He is simply saying that every valuation depends on the whole, not vice-versa.

A "moral" interpretation of the world is so seductive for humans because it assumes that a valuation can be an objective *evaluation* which acts as a law to condition the whole. Nietzsche's deconstruction - to use the current jargon- of the "real world" in Twilight of the Idols, a task which is equivalent to telling the history of nihilism, amounts to a dissipation of the burdens which allowed us to live. The interpretation of the world as will to power, by exhibiting the partiality of all those moral systems, paves the way for a new valuation which, *qua* valuation, is necessarily a humanization but which need not for that reason nihilistically deny the reality of the primal flux (on the contrary). This new valuation, the thought which distinguishes the overman from all previous types of "man" is the eternal return.

#### **4.2 THE ETERNAL RETURN**

To ask what "ring" surrounds mankind -whether it be God or the world or both or neither- is, according to Heidegger, equivalent to explicating the doctrine of eternal return (Heidegger, 1984, 11). The doctrine is essentially a belief in the sense of a taking to be true. The ring which surrounds us -which we erect around ourselves- defines our "world" and with it us as beings in the world. When we take eternal

return as true, then, we have located ourselves in reality in a very singular fashion. As we will see, the eternal return is the "ring" which surrounds and defines the comportment of the overman,<sup>5</sup> and the world as will to power is that which the overman as such wills that there be a return *to*.

It will be necessary right from the outset to distinguish two phases of the thinking of eternal return. The first is the will to the *discovery* of the world as will to power. This, properly speaking, is "what" is returned to. The second is the will to *creation* which ensues upon this discovery. The distinction is somewhat artificial since these two moments are, insofar as they belong to the thought of eternal return, essentially defined by one another on the one hand, and their function in the economy of the whole on the other. But although they must be seen as subordinate to a process which gives them their respective meanings, the distinction helps us to understand the process as a whole by means of an analysis of its parts.

As we have seen in the examination of the world as will to power, the view that a thing is the sum of its effects removes phenomena from their mutual isolation and effectively connects everything in the world with everything else. This is the epistemological insight to which Nietzsche wishes to bring us precisely when we are secure in our "truths", when we have become comfortable amongst the world of things and our own, relatively independent and instrumental status vis-a-vis those things. But as Nietzsche would have it, we possess a merely "accidental" relation to ourselves and the world when we are in such a state. We are "fragments", scattered amongst other fragments. As Zarathustra tells us,

Verily, my friends, I walk among men as among the fragments and limbs of men. This is what is terrible for my eyes, that I find man in ruins and scattered as over a battle-field or a butcher-field.

And when my eyes flee from the now to the past,  
they always find the same: fragments and limbs  
and dreadful accidents -but no human beings (Z, II.  
On Redemption).

This passage is important because it explicitly (if obliquely) links the problem of fragmentation to the question of time, especially the past. According to Nietzsche, our dogmatism, our inability to carry out the project of creative valuation is a result of our failure to overcome the past because of our dogmatic belief in substance. We believe that things simply *are*, that they perdure over time. This in fact is how we measure their being: the ability to remain constant over time. Nietzsche thinks that the belief in ontology is thus rooted in an erroneous conception of time past.

Nietzsche attacks the latter view by rehabilitating the place of the will in the world. Not only does the belief in substance promote fragmentation, it also engenders a spirit of revenge against all that has past, the "it was" (ibid.). The will's "ill-will" is essentially directed at the "it was". This means not that the past is not there, or that it is wrong to see the past as in some sense "gone", but that the will exists in an inadequate relation to the past. "It was" as such has gained for itself substantial being, it is lodged firmly, like a "stone" (ibid.), in Being. Recognizing the immovability of the past, the will is lead to depreciate its own past (or the substantial events which comprise that past), to gnash its teeth on account of its creative impotence vis-a-vis the past (the inability to change or even selectively forget past deeds) and, finally, to seek punishment as a means for salving the conscience of the will to revenge. The very inability to "will backwards" is translated in Christian mythology, for example, into the great cosmic punishment that is existence. "Original sin" is perhaps the most obdurate world historical stone.

Nietzsche, however, insists that we transform the "it was" into the "thus I willed it" (ibid.). To fully understand his point here, we need to recall the main features of the discussion of perspectivism in chapter two. There it was argued that Nietzsche's doctrine of perspectivism commits us to the view that the world does not exist apart from our interpretations of it. Or rather, that interpretation is where human consciousness and "the world" meet. Nietzsche thinks that it makes no sense to speak on the one hand of our interpretive gestures and on the other of the "objects" of those gestures as though the two were in principle distinct and the latter were free from the interests of the former. Such a view (that is, the one Nietzsche is criticizing) effectively removes human interest from consideration of phenomena, and enshrines an impossible "objectivity" as the highest epistemological goal. Nietzsche uses the insights which his doctrine of perspectivism gives him on this point to attack the concept of the "it was". What the initial moment of the eternal return (as genealogical investigation) discovers, then, is that the self was always there in the creation of the past. "Thus I willed it" is (in part) the *discovery* of the real structure of the "it was". This discovery releases the "it was" from its isolation by showing it to be a part of a larger whole which includes, inextricably, the self and the world. But if the self and its creations are merely part of a large network of effects, then any single "thing" -or any single self- no longer has a merely accidental relation to what surrounds it (although not until the creative act emerges can we really speak of a "necessary" self).

Nietzsche is not, of course, denying the existence of "things" (nor of selves). The "it" might very well be the same in the "it was" as in the "thus I willed it". Notice, however, the *place* of the "it" in each of these formulations. In the "it was" -the position of ontology- the "it" is primary, antecedent to its determinations; "thus I willed it" places the "it" *after* the creative act. The thing in question -an object, a self, a

culture- can only be thought of in relation to the one who has willed it, defined it in a specific way. This is Nietzsche's point. But if the self is implicated in the network of effects like any other thing, then it is subject to the very same reduction of ontological quality to quantum of force as is anything else on this scheme.<sup>6</sup> Zarathustra's animals make the same point:

But the knot of causes in which I am entangled recurs and will create me again. I myself belong to the causes of the eternal recurrence (Z. III: The Convalescent, 2).

Time as a process which has a goal has been reduced to a spatial relation between phenomena -the knot of effects- and this latter has in turn been reduced to a pulsating intensity of forces. Eternal return represents in its first stage a discovery of the world as will to power. This, as we have seen, is a terrible state, the moment of the dismemberment of Dionysus, the breakdown of all form, the fragmentation of all individuality. What is held to recur at this point is this very chaos, the godless, hence unintelligibly diverse world. It recurs as diversity precisely to the extent that nothing in it perdures. So time, as duration, simply cannot be measured, since technically it does not "pass".

This, we will remember, is the stage at which Nietzsche's demon enters the scene and asks us to affirm our loneliest loneliness. The mere discovery that the world as will to power recurs eternally is not sufficient to escape incomplete nihilism. As we have seen, there is more than one way of answering the demon. Thus the next phase of eternal return is to affirm it, to want it. Insofar as one is fated to be merely one effect in a network of effects, one must love this fate -*amor fati*. But the recurrence of the *discovery* depends on the creation of values whose origins are discovered. Ironically, then, to crave the return of diversity is to insist that one move temporarily away from it towards creative unification. This must be the case, since the return of diversity depends on the destruction of stable forms.

This is why *creation* is an essential component of the thought of eternal return. Indeed creation must become heavy with truth, its creatures must become entrenched and grave:

Where all time seemed to me a happy mockery of moments, where necessity was freedom itself playing happily with the sting of freedom.

Where I also found again my old devil and arch enemy, the spirit of gravity, and all that he created: constraint, statute, necessity and consequence and purpose and will and good and evil.

For must there not be that *over* which one dances and dances away? For the sake of the light and the lightest, must there not be moles and grave dwarfs? (Z. III: On Old and New Tablets, 2).

Thus to affirm the return of diversity, the purity and innocence of the moment, entails that one must employ truths as means. We have seen that this is exactly how the overman employs his truths. But this is by no means the whole story regarding our creations. Although our creations can and must become burdens to us, they begin much more triumphantly, as products of our affirmative stance to the world as will to power. The creative stance is thus an expression of one who loves fate, but it is also a redemption from the valuelessness of becoming and as such marks the step out of passive nihilism (which remains impotent in a meaningless world).

To say "thus I willed it" is to discover one's place in a world of radical flux; but to redeem oneself from the passive nihilism which knowledge of this flux must surely engender, one must be able to say "thus I *will* it". This is the meaning of Nietzsche's call to "become what you are" (EH, epigraph). The discovery of self is inseparably united with the creation of self. This creation removes one from the "in vain" occasioned by the discovery, while the discovery, for its part, is what every creation must return to. And so, although the process of eternal return as a whole is overwhelmingly destructive, art redeems us from

the suffering that the process engenders and its emergence is thus the high point of the circle of self-overcoming. In order to refine this point and to see how Nietzsche uses it in reference to the problems occasioned by a conception of time as linear and teleological, we need to examine his statements on "redemption".

#### 4.3 REDEMPTION AS ART

When Zarathustra tells us that "all his art and aim (is) to compose and bring together what is fragment and riddle and dreadful chance" (Z. II, On Redemption), he is expressing what he sees as the process of human redemption: a creative emergence *from* the world as will to power which is at the same time a will to affirm the world as will to power. In The Will To Power, Nietzsche makes a similar point:

Art as the *redemption of the man of knowledge* - of those who see the terrifying and questionable character of existence, who want to see it, the men of tragic knowledge.

Art as the *redemption of the man of action* - of those who not only see the terrifying and questionable character of existence, but live it, want to live it, the tragic-warlike man, the hero.

Art as the *redemption of the sufferer* - as the way to states in which suffering is willed, transfigured, deified, where suffering is a form of great delight (WP, 853: II).

It is important to see that Nietzsche wants to preserve the notion of redemption as the psychological principle of the thinker of the eternal return. Of course, redemption is also the seminal principle of incomplete nihilism, so we must understand the way in which Nietzsche wants to transvalue the concept.

According to Nietzsche, to ascribe a teleological movement to time, to write the concepts of "purpose" and "goal" into history is to attempt to redeem mankind from the sufferings of becoming (with the promise of an afterlife, for example). Whenever we interpret our earthly travails as somehow "intentioned", as though they are part of a grand cosmic

scheme, Nietzsche says that we "corrupt the innocence of becoming" (WP, 552). This is the light in which Nietzsche criticizes the Pauline interpretation of Christ, for example. Christ's sufferings on the cross become paradigmatic for human suffering in general. Earthly life is then held to be a crucible through which the Christian passes with eyes fixed on the beyond. The meaning of suffering is transposed out of suffering itself and located instead in the utopian alleviation of suffering. Suffering is necessary, but only as a stage which is ultimately fully transcended. As Nietzsche would have it, this Christian interpretation of suffering and redemption characterizes all forms of incomplete nihilism (though its manifestation is often less dramatic than with Christian mythology).<sup>7</sup> So if Nietzsche is to retain the notion of redemption, he can only do so by detaching it from its traditional association with teleological, linear conceptions of time. This is why we must examine this particular transvaluation in the context of the doctrine of eternal return.

We have seen that Nietzsche glorifies the moment which contains the process of self-overcoming through the thought of eternal return. He then asks, "... can we remove the idea of a goal from the process and then affirm the process in spite of this? -This would be the case if something were attained at every moment within this process" (WP, 55). The key to avoiding the slip into incomplete nihilism (while employing its forms) is to posit the value of that which is attained as a function of the process itself. Incomplete nihilism, of course, does precisely the opposite: the process -of suffering, of decay, of the passage of time generally- is held to be subordinate to a value which is in principle at least partially external to that process (this is the origin of the "mendaciousness of Idealism" (EH, II. 10)). For Nietzsche, the greatness or beauty of the creation lies not in its ability to reflect a transcendent truth, but rather in the quantum of energy which has been harnessed and unified (this is

why, in the first epigraph to this chapter, he speaks of "god" as a high point of "power" rather than "value").

Although I believe that Nietzsche maintained a view of this sort throughout his writings (both published and unpublished), its most comprehensive formulation is to be found in The Birth of Tragedy. There Nietzsche expresses the view that art -great art, like Aeschylean tragedy- achieves a creative synthesis by means of an indomitable will to "illusion". The essence of Hellenic tragedy, for Nietzsche, is its pre-moral stance. The truest art issues directly from the most primordial region of reality -the Dionysian- and this region is necessarily beyond good and evil. But *as art* this contact with the Dionysian is not a simple submission to the Dionysian. Rather art -as myth and music- fixates the chaos in beautiful "illusion". Nietzsche, of course, sees myth as the supreme counter-force to Socratism (here signifying the spirit of optimistic science). A myth describes the "truth" in the peculiar tongue of song, poetry and story, which strike below the surface of a rational, systematized and objective account of history. Beauty, which exists precisely as the beautiful only to the extent that it authentically voices the Dionysian, saves us (temporarily) from the destructive power of the Dionysian by entrenching us in "illusion".

This "illusion", what Nietzsche elsewhere refers to simply as "lies" (WP, 853)<sup>8</sup>, is absolutely necessary lest we find ourselves "expiring in a spasmodic unharnessing of all the wings of the soul" (the dissolution of passive nihilism face to face with the world as will to power) (BT, 127). Thanks to the Apollinian, however, we can avoid this fate and "delight in individuality" (ibid.). In fact, so compelling is the Apollinian screen that we are deluded into believing that *it* is what is real and primary. We forget the origin of the work and take the myth to be the sole reality. This is the point at which the truth of the artist becomes dogmatically entrenched. It is, in this respect, a moment which is analagous to the moment of reactivity in the valuations of the overman.

As for tragedy, the illusion of the supremacy of the "play" is a product of Apollo's "healing power" which makes the spectator believe that the music -the Dionysian- is serving the needs of the drama -the Apollinian- and not vice-versa. Nietzsche insists, however, that this illusion is seen through with the final effect of tragedy. The Dionysian ultimately triumphs in imparting to the spectator a delight which is deeper than the Apollinian, a metaphysical joy attained through the annihilation of the individual. So the great value of tragic art lies not in the revelation of truth considered as the moral dissolution of conflict, but the *return* to Dionysian chaos (the world as will to power). This literary model is the paradigm for Nietzsche's larger project of trying to characterize the circularity of time as against the linear -that is, "moral"- conception. Still, what concerns us primarily in this section is the move into myth considered as redemption. To make this point clearer, we should examine briefly the way in which Nietzsche transmits his notion of the function of tragedy into questions concerning culture.

As Nietzsche sees it, one can test for the ability to respond to tragedy as an "aesthetic listener" (as opposed to a rationalistic culture critic) simply by gauging to what extent one is able to believe myths. As a concentrated image of phenomena, a simplification of reality, myth needs to employ the "miraculous". This obviously strains the credibility of the performance and yet Nietzsche thinks that it does so only for a certain type of spectator -the abstract Socratic person who either dismisses the myth outright as childish fantasy or demands that the claims of the myth be substantiated by or supplemented through the "intermediary abstractions" of scholarship (BT, 135). This point goes beyond tragedy as an artistic genre: Nietzsche thinks that the modern age has seen the reduction of education, morality, the law, the state and culture -all of which were, in more robust times sustained by myth- to the demands of Socratic rationalism.

Now Nietzsche thinks that the worth of a people depends on its ability to interpret experience through myth, which means that the highest task of a people is to organize itself aesthetically. The ability of the Greeks to enact their mythology through tragedy was the very mark of their national character. Therefore, the demise of tragedy with the arrival of Socrates and Euripedes signalled at the same time the demise of myth and the end of an age in the life of a people (the end of a people?). The elements of this triad -myth, tragedy and national character- stand or fall together. As Nietzsche would have it, this simply must be the case if a people is to see itself "metaphysically" rather than "historically". As he puts it, "the aspect of the eternal" must be imparted to life (BT, 137). Eternity, here, is circular, the movement of return, since it is explicitly opposed to a "historical", linear conception of culture.

If a people has managed to organize itself on this basis, Nietzsche thinks it will have redeemed itself from the ugly truth of the world as will to power without having fallen permanently into a form of incomplete nihilism. Again, it must be stressed that artistic creations can only be redemptions in a non-nihilistic sense if two conditions are met: that the form of the creation be a strict function of the depth of its content *and* that this synthesis of form and content ultimately be dissolved once again. For Nietzsche, the cultural achievement of the pre-Socratic Greeks is paradigmatic because their forms exhibited extraordinarily high levels of Dionysian content (pre-moral knowledge). Because tragic mythology is an expression of the truest, most primordial region, its forms are essentially self-justifying. The animated world of individuation always strives belatedly to cope with the influx of Dionysian force. Thus the ever-changing world of "transfiguring illusion" (BT, 143) is but a response (though a necessary one) to the destructive power of Dionysus. A culture with a strong Dionysian undercurrent (one which returns perpetually to knowledge of the world

as will to power) will necessarily have a vibrant Apollinian surface. Conversely, the presence of real surface beauty betrays terrible Dionysian depths.

The key to the symbiosis of the Apollinian and Dionysian, says Nietzsche, is "strict proportion" according to the dictates of "eternal justice" (ibid.). An individual -or a culture- possesses exactly as much Dionysian wisdom as can be expressed in or veiled by Apollinian form. The level of destructive force must always be compensated for by an equal level of recreative power. Nietzsche writes, "...of this foundation of all existence -the Dionysian basic ground of the world- not one whit more may enter the consciousness than can be overcome again by this Apollinian power of transfiguration" (ibid.). So, there is no sense in which the Apollinian strives for ontological correspondence with the Dionysian. Rather, the relation between the two is typified as a quantitative balance of forces in which the Apollinian merely provides adequate formal expression to the Dionysian. The Apollinian has no life of its own but is rather the force of integration, organization, simplification. And, the total effect of tragedy is not complete until this very balance of forces is upset through a resurgence of destructive force, which smashes the established form altogether. This act of destruction, however, makes possible the eventual birth of new "illusions".

The will to "illusion", the ability and need to "lie" which humans possess is, Nietzsche would later claim in discussing his first book, "...the great means of making life possible, the great seduction to life, the great stimulant to life" (WP, 853). Art is the redemption of suffering because it transforms and "deifies" suffering (ibid.). So too do nihilistic conceptions of redemption, it could be said. But, although both Dionysus -the god of return- and "the Crucified" -the god of linear history- deify suffering, there is, Nietzsche maintains, a difference in the meaning of

their sufferings.<sup>9</sup> For Christ, suffering is "the path to a holy existence", "a signpost to seek redemption *from* life", while "Dionysus cut to pieces is a *promise* of life: it will be eternally reborn and return again from destruction" (WP, 1052). For Nietzsche, "whoever has at some time built a new heaven has found the power to do so only in his own hell" (GM, III. 10). But the tragic artist stands above the incompletely nihilistic artist in his *knowledge* of this fact. He sees the essential unity of creation and destruction, the heights and the depths, and cannot will one without the other. This is why he must return again and again to his own hell: he knows that redemption is not escape from but eternal submission to the force of destruction.

I conclude this chapter by reiterating Nietzsche's main purpose in formulating the doctrine of eternal return. As we have seen, incomplete nihilism works by transposing the meaning of life outside of life itself, into some form of beyond. This move invariably translates into a teleology, it always associates its step into the beyond with a linear interpretation of time.<sup>10</sup> Thus the meaning of the present is contained in what is not present, and so the sufferings of the present can be interpreted as divinely ordained. This gives suffering a kind of halo, and the sufferer is one who endures his suffering secure in the knowledge that there is a direct relation between the amount of suffering experienced now and the "bliss" which is his reward in the next world. For Nietzsche, earthly life is also suffering. But as he would have it, since earthly life is the only life, suffering must not only be endured, it must be sharpened, deepened, willed. This world of suffering, of the total absence of protective "illusion", is the world as will to power. It must therefore be returned to eternally, that is, after every "illusion", as the fulfillment of every "illusion". Nietzsche thinks that our "illusions" are our most valuable possessions, but, perhaps paradoxically, we could never have such "illusions" if previous

"illusions" were not first destroyed. Eternal return is therefore the very principle of self-overcoming. With it, Nietzsche insists on the circularity of time and thus overcomes the (incompletely) nihilistic appropriation of history.

## CONCLUSION

Some, perhaps even Zarathustra himself, might consider my analysis of Nietzsche on the problem of nihilism overly "cautious" (cf. Z, IV: Of the Higher Man, 3). After all, I do insist that the overman, Nietzsche's future philosopher/artist, remains to some extent psychologically mired in the valuations of mere "man". Nevertheless, when viewed against Nietzsche's concerns with such problems as art, culture, belief and so on, such a conclusion is unavoidable. Within the analysis of nihilism as a *history*, we are led to the conclusion that the forms of incomplete nihilism -at least those of passive and reactive nihilism- are not to be fully overcome; that the passage through the forms of incomplete nihilism is something which "cultures" as such generally do and will continue to do. With his analysis of the history of nihilism, Nietzsche should be seen as describing how cultures rise and fall and not merely as prescribing a utopian culture for the blessed immoralists who have managed to organize themselves "beyond nihilism".

But Nietzsche is not, of course, only describing this process. More important than his description of the history of nihilism is his belief that we, after the fall of the divine, are in a position to live *relatively* freer from illusions than our forebears, who, living under the yoke of transcendental nihilism, were mere believers. Nietzsche wants us to be conscious of the fact that we have always created our culture and that, *given our knowledge of this fact*, we should be able to create a better culture for ourselves. What it is our privileged historical place to know is that there are in principle no moral barriers standing between us and the "illusions" we choose to create. This does not mean that we can dispense with belief and "illusion" altogether, but, for Nietzsche, it does mean that we do not have to continue thinking like Christians. Nevertheless, as long as we fail to both grasp and will our own cultural

self-overcoming, we will think like Christians (that is, transcendently). It is this distinction between the logic of "transcendental" activity on the one hand and that of self-overcoming on the other which is at the heart of Nietzsche's concern with nihilism.

Nihilism is "complete", "consummate", only when it is the movement, recurring eternally, through the forms of incomplete nihilism. Active nihilism is nothing over and above this movement. Rather, by insisting that each stage of incomplete nihilism must succeed the one before it and be succeeded by the one after it, active nihilism denies each of these forms a life of its own. This is not to deny that the active nihilist actually becomes reactive and passive; but he is not overcome by the logic of any single stage. Reactive or passive nihilism, on the other hand, taken out of the whole, desires only self-preservation and this is why Nietzsche refers to these types of nihilism -together with transcendental nihilism to whose demise they are reactions- as "incomplete". This is important for Nietzsche because the "truths" of the active nihilist represent his moment as a reactive nihilist. However, these truths obtain *all* their value from the passage out of passive nihilism -that Faustian state of helplessness in the face of excess knowledge- on the one hand and the subsequent act of destruction on the other -the emergence of active nihilism. Truths, that is, are expressions of *power* for the active nihilist. How much has been overcome is the central question in analysing the worth of these truths. For the fully reactive nihilist, by contrast, "truth" is always a permanent *value*, something which necessarily transcends the human, all too human.

The burden of this thesis has been to delineate the key conceptual differences between complete and incomplete nihilism. To this end, I have shown how incomplete nihilism is an historical continuum of types whose forms have changed but whose *sine qua non*, the will to posit a

"beyond" which is an escape from this world, remains constant. Nietzsche's call to philosophers to "complete" nihilism is, then, an attempt to overcome simultaneously the history and the logic of incomplete nihilism (which reinforce one another). He does this by showing that once we refuse to allow for the dogmatic self assertion of a single form of incomplete nihilism, we can will a circular process of self-overcoming and that this process need not -indeed must not- take its value from anything external to itself. Its movement is its value. Nietzsche thinks that this is the only way we can affirm *life*, since life itself is just this movement from the creation of stable forms to the painful destruction of those forms. To will the eternal return, which is an expression of affirmation of this process, is, then, to be "faithful to the earth" (Z, PR.: 3), to simultaneously affirm suffering by willing destruction and be redeemed from it through creation. But by doing this we have, Nietzsche thinks, implicitly overcome linear history, which always describes its movement in terms of a value which transcends becoming.

By viewing Western metaphysics since Plato as the unfolding of the "history of nihilism", Nietzsche was able to see himself as finally exposing the hidden history of the West, the way in which all our highest values have been used precisely to depreciate life. By writing such a history, he can also place himself squarely in the position of one who refuses to perpetuate the history of incomplete nihilism or, put differently, who refuses not to advance the history of nihilism as such (as active nihilism). By insisting that nihilism must take its final evolutionary step, into active nihilism, Nietzsche thinks he is culminating Western philosophy, which is a history of grand world-historical narratives. From now on, such narratives are not to be allowed, since *we* have seen to the bottom of them and know that their origins belie their claims to transcendence and ultimate truth. This is Nietzsche's legacy to twentieth-century philosophy. Whether indeed we

can still think historically after Nietzsche is a question which has not yet been answered but which vexes -perhaps defines- the "post-modern" consciousness. Will we allow ourselves a rebirth of Romanticism, one for the "post-historical" age?

### NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

1. However, I must stress that in this thesis I am concerned mainly with elucidating the problem of nihilism with respect to Nietzsche's own thinking on this theme. Although I think that such an analysis forms the basis of an attack on some contemporary appropriations of Nietzsche, that critique must, unfortunately, be reserved for a later project.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 1.

1. cf. WP, 11.

2. There are, amongst those who have written on the subject and in Nietzsche's writings themselves, a number of confusing designations within the typology of nihilism. Nietzsche himself uses "passive" and "reactive", or "complete" and "incomplete", as the occasion demands. He also uses "consummate" to refer to the highest type of nihilism, but does not, to my knowledge, distinguish this from "active" nihilism. Nor does he appear to have a single designation for the type of nihilism typified by Platonism and Christianity. For the purposes of this paper, I will use "transcendental nihilism" (what Michel Haar refers to as "latent nihilism", cf. Haar, 322) to refer to the latter type, "passive nihilism" to refer to the valuation typified by Schopenhauer, "reactive nihilism" to refer to movements such as socialism, utilitarianism, and so on, and "active nihilism" to refer to Nietzsche's own brand of joyful, destructive wisdom. Also, I will occasionally make reference to "incomplete" and "complete" nihilism, the former implicitly encompassing transcendental, passive and reactive nihilisms, the latter specifying only active nihilism. These designations accord well with Nietzsche's statements on the subject of nihilism and, moreover, provide in my opinion the clearest picture of the *movement* of nihilism from one form to the next. At this point, I must also remark the ambiguous place of Kant within this typology. Although in "the history of an error" section from Twilight of the Idols, Nietzsche seems to place Kant in line with Plato and Christianity as what I am calling a transcendental nihilist, it is also plausible to interpret Kant's philosophical project as a reaction to the death of god, the reaction of critical reason (cf. for example, GM, III: 25). I will speak in this thesis of Kant as a transcendental nihilist, but hope that the ambiguity of his position will be borne in mind by the reader.

3. Nietzsche's first formulation of this postulate occurs at GS, 108; cf. also GS, 125, 343; Z, Pr.: 2.

4. Cf. TI, IV: 3,4,5; GM, III: 27; GS, 357.

5. Cf. Schopenhauer (1969), IV: 69; and (1974), ch. 13 for Schopenhauer's views on the problem of suicide. As is well known, Schopenhauer is, in fact, opposed to suicide on the grounds that (a) it is an evasion of the responsibility to pursue knowledge of the world; (b) that it represents the disappointment of the "will to live" (and as such is a capitulation to that will) and (c) that it is in any case futile since it is really only a cessation of "phenomenal" existence.

6. One must, however, be very careful in speaking of Nietzsche's treatment of "pessimism". As with many of his key terms, this one has both a pejorative and a positive meaning, depending on how it is being used. Of course at this point in the discussion, it is the pejorative sense which is being employed. (cf., however, WP, 1020, 1022; GS, 357, 358, 370)

7. This theme, considered as perhaps the central spiritual condition of late nineteenth century Western civilization, is explored with great subtlety in A.S Byatt's novel, Possession.

8. George Steiner also locates a "nostalgia for the absolute" -although he does not explicitly make the connection to Nietzsche- in such twentieth century intellectual movements as Marxism, Freudianism and Levi-Straussian structural anthropology. Steiner's discussion is illuminating in the context of Nietzsche's analysis of modern nihilism. (cf. Steiner, *passim*, but especially chs, 1-3).

9. cf. WP, 966; also A., 54 where Nietzsche says that all great intellects, including his Zarathustra, are skeptics. Such people are beyond "convictions", they are able to see beneath and behind themselves "five hundred convictions". In fact, Nietzsche implies in this section that one is being more "truthful" to the extent that one incorporates more and more perspectives and partialities. In chapter 2, below, I elaborate on this theme.

10. As Bergmann has argued, Nietzsche's "antipolitical" stance is an attempt to isolate and preserve culture from the growing demands of the democratic state. This is precisely what separates Nietzsche's project from, for example, Wagnerism (which had made its peace with the Second Reich) and political anarchism (which generally attacks the state without the aim of preserving a cultural sphere). cf. Bergmann, ch.1.

11. This is a term which will appear often in this thesis and one whose ambiguity demands some clarification. When Nietzsche uses the German word for "illusion", that is *Schein*, he is always, as far as I know, using it not in the negative sense of "mere appearance", but in the sense of a "beautiful shining". As he would have it, the illusion is not a "cover", concealing the more substantial reality; rather, the surface is all there is to the phenomena. To avoid confusion, when I employ the term as *Schein* I will place "illusion" in quotation marks. Otherwise,

the term should be taken to refer to a negative state of deception or deceit. For a discussion of Nietzsche's use of the concept of *Schein*, cf. Rethy, pp 59-68.

12. For an analysis of Nietzsche's concept of genealogy as the counter-tool to traditional philosophical truth analysis, see ch. 2, below.

13. cf. also Z, I "On the Despisers of the Body", where Zarathustra asserts that "soul" is "only a word for something about the body". Also Z., II "On Redemption", where Zarathustra urges his followers to redeem their "chaos" by organizing it. Soul here is the combining into one all that is "fragment and riddle and dreadful chance", that is, the chaos of history and becoming in which the "self" is embedded. I elaborate on these themes, with reference to the doctrine of eternal return, in chapter 4, below.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. cf. also, GS. 354 where Nietzsche claims that "we simply lack any organ for knowledge, for truth". cf. also BGE. 14, 34.

2. Nietzsche parodies philosophers who would malign the senses in the search for "real knowledge": "These senses, *which are so immoral as well*, it is they which deceive us about the *real* world. Moral: escape from sense-deception, from becoming, from history, from falsehood..." (TI. III: 1). cf. also, TI. III: 23; Z. II: 2.

3. TI. III: 2,3; Z. II: 2.

4. cf. GM. I: 13, III: 13, 15; EH II: 10.

5. Although "common-sense" is no doubt an important element in the psychological makeup of a people, Danto is, I think, wrong to reduce the common "inheritance" to common sense. He makes much of section I: 16 of HA, for example, rightly citing it as a fine example of Nietzsche's perspectivism (Danto, 74). But in that passage, Nietzsche is not talking (only) about "metaphysics made routine" (ibid.), but about the "moral, aesthetic, religious" heritage of a people, among other things. That we ourselves have created such a variegated world and that it was not passed from on high to us, does not, for Nietzsche, belittle the significance of such creations (nor does it mean that their significance is fully transparent to "common-sense").

6. This is one of the central points of BT, for example. There it is claimed that full knowledge of the truth of existence -its Dionysian depths- would destroy a person. The veil of Apollinian illusion is therefore required to filter this truth through the world of representation (cf. BT. 7-9). Cf. also, chapter 4 (pp. 88-92), below, for my analysis of the cultural relation between Apollo and Dionysus within the framework of a discussion of the eternal return.

7. Cf. also GS. 344, 347; D. 507. For a comprehensive account of the doctrine of perspectivism and Nietzsche's alleged pragmatism, as well as a critique of Danto on the latter point, cf. Nehamas, 1985, chs. 1&2.

8. cf. also, WP. 259, 557, 558, 567; BGE. 22.

9. Actually, Schacht thinks that Nietzsche operates with a variety of truth "analyses". It is, however, possible to reduce these to correspondence -the first order analysis- and pragmatism -the second order analysis (Schacht, p. 61).

10. For example, in GM, Nietzsche describes how the Christian virtue of neighbourly love originates in a primordial hatred of that type of being whose morality consists precisely in maintaining a "pathos of distance" from "inferior" types (GM. I: 2 & II *passim*).

11. On this point (if it needs reinforcing), cf. WP 616 where Nietzsche writes that our world is "in flux...something in a state of becoming...a falsehood, always changing but never getting near the truth -for there is no truth".

12. For Descartes, who would seem to be Nietzsche's chief target here, sensory perception is not itself sufficient for knowledge. The information it conveys must be understood "clearly and distinctly" by the intellect. Moreover, despite changes in the appearance of material bodies, Descartes holds that the mathematical properties of those bodies remain constant and are the true objects of understanding. Nietzsche, of course, recognizes only that which changes and asserts, moreover, that it is precisely our senses which provide us with "knowledge" (insofar as we may have such a thing) (cf. on these points Descartes' Meditations, especially #2).

13. cf. also GS. Pr. 2, 39; BT III: 18; D. 553; WP. 478, 666; TI. VI: 3.

14. Nietzsche's attacks on essentialist doctrines is by no means limited to the Cartesian *cogito*, or the Kantian *Ding an Sich*. Often, Nietzsche cites modern science -especially physics- as the modern bearer of the belief in essences. According to Nietzsche, the "atom" posited by physicists, for example, "...is inferred according to the logic of the perspectivism of consciousness -and is therefore itself a subjective fiction" (WP. 636).

15. Foucault provides an illuminating etymological and historical analysis of Nietzsche's critique of origins. For Foucault's treatment of the "origin" as a field of valuative disparity, cf. Foucault, 78.

16. The "conditioned" and "unconditioned" are extremely important metaphors for Nietzsche. cf. Z. I: 12, where Zarathustra enjoins his followers "not to be jealous of these unconditioned men...never yet has truth hung on the arm of the unconditional". In GM. III: 24, Nietzsche disparages the modern "free spirits" for their "unconditional" faith in truth as such (cf. also, WP. 555).

17. This seems to be the way, for example, that Nietzsche views Kant's project. Whereas Kant waged "noble war" on such theological concepts as "God", "soul", "freedom" and so on, he nevertheless showed the theologians a "secret path by which they may...with all scientific

respectability, from now on follow their heart's desire" (GM. III: 25). Cf., however, note #2 in chapter one (p. 99), above.

18. Dostoevsky portrays such a tragi-comic figure in his novel Notes From Underground. The anonymous protagonist of that book is a self described "spiteful" intellectual (and civil servant) of late nineteenth century "civilization" who, precisely out of a surfeit of possibilities which his highly developed mind has shown to him, cannot act effectively in the real world.

19. This, again, is a general theme of BT. See especially BT 8 where Nietzsche speaks about such torpor in the context of Hamlet's problem of "knowledge killing action".

20. Nehamas makes a similar point. He analyses Nietzsche's "stylistic possibilities" as an instance of the latter's perspectivism, his attempts to overcome the dogmatism which the use of a single style might lead to (cf. Nehamas, 20).

21. Cf. chapter 4 (pp. 86-93), below, where I elaborate on the theme of art as redemption from (and for) chaos.

### NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. Invoked by Nietzsche in The Birth of Tragedy, section 17. Walter Kaufmann, for his part, sees Nietzsche's bizarre amalgam of "the Roman Caesar with Christ's soul" as "the very heart of Nietzsche's vision of the overman. Being capable of both sympathy and hardness, of loving and ruling, not using claws though having them" (WP, 984 ff.). Although I don't think this epitomization need necessarily conflict with the "music practicing Socrates", the latter seems to me a fitter characterization of what the overman means. There are two reasons for this. First, the figures of the artist and the man of knowledge -especially the artist- would seem to have a more central place than the political leader and the religious leader in Nietzsche's list of great human types (although I do not want to deny the importance, for Nietzsche, of these latter types, especially when they reach the stature of Caesar and Christ, respectively). Second, and more importantly, Kaufmann's version of the overman as a creature who, though possessing claws, does not use them, seems to clash with the Nietzschean notion that a person's affects not be divorced from who or what that person essentially is. Put slightly differently, strength, as a quality of the will to power, cannot be separated from its manifestation without in some way becoming distorted. On this point, Nietzsche writes, "(t)o demand of strength that it should *not* express itself as strength, that it should *not* be a desire to overcome,...desire to be master,...thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs, is just as absurd as to demand of weakness that it should express itself as strength" (GM, I: 13). Kaufmann's overman is marked by an unfortunate dualism which as such is an inadmissible characteristic for the overman and one which the music practicing Socrates does not, as I am describing him, possess.

2. In chapter 1 (pp. 22-23), above.

3. Jackson qualifies his statement on the reactive character of the overman by saying that if existential absolutism does have any content, that content is "arbitrary, because without universality and necessity..." (Jackson, 137). Besides the fact that this trades on a presupposed notion of what "content" is, the statement in any case contravenes the spirit of the rest of the paper that Nietzsche, and indeed all revolutionary philosophy as such, has no content of its own, and is thus wholly reactive.

4. Note the following example of Stirner's "extreme egoism":

Objects are to me only material that I use up.  
Wherever I put my hand, I grasp a truth, which I

trim for myself. The truth is certain to me and I do not need to long after it. To do the truth a service is no case my intent; it is to me only a nourishment for my thinking head, as potatoes are for my digesting stomach, or as a friend is for my social heart (Stirner, 259).

5. Stirner writes, in criticizing his Young Hegelian predecessors, that on their scheme,

God and the divine would entwine themselves all the more inextricably with me. To expel God from his heaven and to rob him of his *transcendence* cannot yet support a claim of complete victory, if therein he is only chased into the human breast and gifted with indelible *immanence*. Now they say, "The divine is the truly human!" (Stirner, 252).

An apt description of Stirner's own position would, however, simply reverse the terms of the last sentence just cited: "The human is the truly divine!".

6. That is, man as reactive or passive nihilist.

7. Milan Kundera, in his incomparable novel, The Unbearable Lightness of Being presents us with a scathing portrait of the last man in the figure of Franz. Franz is a Paris Leftist, who believes fervently in the "Grand March" of social progress:

The dictatorship of the proletariat or democracy? Rejection of the consumer society or demands for increased productivity? The guillotine or an end to the death penalty? It is all beside the point. What makes a leftist a leftist is not this or that theory but his ability to integrate any theory into the kitsch called the Grand March (Kundera, 257).

Such a person is precisely Zarathustra's "fire-dog" and last man, "at best, the earth's ventriloquist...bitter, lying and superficial" (Z. II. Of Great Events). Allan Bloom also provides a scathing description of the rule of the last man (who, ironically, has turned to Nietzsche in support of his ideologies) in modern culture. He writes, for example,

Nietzsche sought with his value philosophy to restore the harsh conflicts for which men were willing to die, to restore the tragic sense of life, at a moment when nature had become domesticated and men had become tame. That value philosophy was used in America for exactly the opposite purpose -to promote conflict resolution; bargaining, harmony (Bloom, 228).

8. In chapter 1 (pp. 14-18), above.

9. At WP, 609, Nietzsche makes the following point about forgetting as the will to ignorance:

It is not enough that you understand in what ignorance man and beast live; you must also have and acquire the *will* to ignorance. You need to grasp that without this kind of ignorance, life itself would be impossible, that it is a condition under which alone the living thing can preserve itself and prosper: a great firm dome of ignorance must encompass you.

On this point, cf. also, WP 514.

10. The theme of eternal return will be explored in detail in chapter four, below.

11. This point of course opens up the thorny problem of Nietzsche's political philosophy, a topic which is beyond the scope of this inquiry. Nietzsche often writes as if the last man is to be preserved as a social basis for the unfettered exercise of the leaders' wills. The herd thus appears as a supremely intelligent mass which allows for the cultivation of the "exceptions". On this argument, Nietzsche writes, "the same conditions which further the development of the herd-animal also further the development of the leader-animal" (Lowith, 261). Nietzsche is never very clear about how exactly this mutual development will unfold. Perhaps the last man concretely instantiates the valuations of the overman and in so doing provides for a relatively secure political order as a temporary "haven" for the overman.

12. In chapter one (p. 25), above. Also chapter two (pp. 40-47), above.

13. On this "need for truth", cf. WP 963, where Nietzsche writes of the "great man" that,

Freedom from any kind of conviction is part of the strength of his will. Thus it accords with that "enlightened despotism" exercised by every great passion. Such a passion takes the intellect into its service; it has the courage even for unholy means; it removes scruples; it permits itself convictions, it even *needs* them, but it does not submit to them.

14. It is because she neglects to notice this essentially circular character of the process of becoming healthy that Karen Carr misunderstands the

meaning of active nihilism for Nietzsche. Carr seems to think that Nietzsche posits "health" as a terminal state. This is why she can say that "(nihilism's) temporary duration was just as necessary as its arrival" (Carr, 49) and that "nihilism is a respite, a temporary lull in the search for truth" (Carr, 50). I want to argue that this latter statement is true only if it is supplemented by its converse: that truths are temporary lulls in the process of nihilism. As regards the question of health, Nietzsche himself states that what he means by "becoming healthy" is "becoming healthier" (HA, I. Pr., 5), a statement which seems, *prima facie*, to support the circular rather than the linear view of the process of "becoming healthy".

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. What follows is by no means intended as a full explication of Nietzsche's conception of the will to power, a task which is obviously beyond the scope of this thesis. As I see it, Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal return is essential to the problem of nihilism (as the counterthought to incomplete nihilism). As for the will to power, my analysis will show that a real understanding of what it means to think the eternal return depends on the will to power as the basic "what" of the world. Will to power, then, is analysed only insofar as it sheds light on the meaning of the eternal return.
2. cf. chapter 3, page..... above where I argue at greater length that Nietzsche does not subscribe to the idea that master and slave types are entirely distinct from one another.
3. cf. Nehamas, chapters 3 and 5, for an excellent discussion of the place of this phrase in Nietzsche's overall views on the world and the self.
4. cf. also, WP, 635, 560, 556, 557, 584.
5. It is important to note that my analysis of eternal return is indifferent to the truth value of that doctrine. While one may interpret eternal return as attempting to establish a cosmological point (that all events in the universe do, in fact, recur eternally), or as a call to the individual to act as if the doctrine were cosmologically true, I prefer to consider the myth as what Bernd Magnus calls an "existential imperative". Briefly, this way of interpreting the doctrine focusses on the attitude or comportment of the one who wills it on the one hand and the power of the doctrine to overcome linear conceptions of history on the other. What kind of "historical" attitude does this doctrine breed? What is the nature of the "stance" to reality taken by one who thinks the thought? How, finally, is this stance related to the attempt to overcome incomplete nihilism? These are among the questions that guide my interpretation of eternal return. For a discussion of the various ways of interpreting this doctrine, cf. Magnus, page 86; also, Stambaugh, chapters 2 and 3.
6. In fact, Nietzsche thinks that it is belief in the "subject" which occasions the belief in "substance". He writes, for example, that "if we give up the effective subject, we also give up the object upon which effects are produced. Duration, identity with itself, being, are inherent neither in that which is called subject nor in that which is called object". Nietzsche goes on in this passage to describe "things" as "complexes of events" (WP, 552).

7. As we have seen in chapter 1, Nietzsche criticizes movements such as socialism for retaining an overwhelmingly Christian view of reality. Although the example was not available to Nietzsche, one need only think of Marx's dream of the "classless society" and the concomitant "withering of the state" as a formulation of the utopian attempt to alleviate suffering in the "next world". Schopenhauer, as the leading exemplar of passive nihilism, sought escape from the pain of suffering (the will) in the contemplation of art, which was held by him to be a relief (be it all too temporary) from the blind strivings of the will. Artistic contemplation, for Schopenhauer, is thus held to be one of the most important activities of human life (on which cf. Schopenhauer, 1969, book 3: "The World as Representation, Second Aspect").

8. Although "lie" here is being used in a positive sense, it should be noted that Nietzsche does not uniformly use the term this way. Often, indeed, he attacks dogmatism for its inveterate will to self-deceit, the lie of "convictions". What Nietzsche is opposed to is not "lying" as such (which is absolutely necessary given the role of interpretation in our apprehension of the world), but the unshakable faith that one's lies are "true", that they "correspond" to the real structure of reality. This latter, Nietzsche characterizes as "the dishonest lie" to distinguish it from the noble, necessary lie (GM, III: 19; cf. also A, 55; also, chapter two, above, where I elaborate on this theme).

9. In the hands of the ascetic priest -the epigone of Paul- the meaning of suffering is given its most sinister and ingenious turn. It is, says Nietzsche, turned inward and becomes the foundation of the guilty conscience and the will to truthfulness. This, as we have seen in chapter 1 above, is how the ascetic priest controls the Christian herd. For Nietzsche's comments on this appropriation of suffering, cf. GM, III: 15, 20. For an interesting though unfortunately too brief discussion of the way in which Romantic thinkers such as Holderlin, Novalis, Schelling and Creuzer appropriate the figure of Dionysus in a Christian interpretation of culture, cf. Habermas, page 92. Dionysus, on their scheme, is equated with Christ as the "god who is coming". Thus Dionysus can be interpreted as advancing and symbolically enriching the linear, Christian conception of history (as well as providing a facile link between Greek and Christian culture). Of course, it is against precisely this understanding of the meaning of Dionysus that Nietzsche's own appropriation of the frenzied wine-god should be understood. At the close of his autobiography, Nietzsche shouts at us, "have I been understood? -*Dionysus versus the Crucified*. - (EH, XIV: 9).

10. Passive nihilism may be considered as an exception to this will to create a teleology. Since it is constituted by insight into the

meaninglessness of all phenomena, it is also aware of the error of all historical projections and is in any case convinced of the utter futility involved in creating such projections. Still, the passive nihilist (typified by Schopenhauer) does crave escape from the world as he knows it. Art, for the passive nihilist, is itself a "beyond" (though not, precisely speaking, an historical beyond).

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