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Abbreviations

The vast majority of my citations of Friedrich Nietzsche are from the 15-volume *Kritische Studienausgabe*, edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, with the pagination that has remained consistent since the 1980 edition. My citations from the *Kritische Studienausgabe* (KSA) will be footnoted as follows:

KSA 3:480

where the first number (3) indicates the KSA volume and the second number (480) indicates the page number within that volume.

This study also cites Martin Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe* heavily. After the first appearance of any volume in the *Gesamtausgabe*, my citation approach for recurring volumes is similar.

GA 6.1:311

The first number (6.1) indicates the *Gesamtausgabe* volume and the second number (311) indicates the page number within that volume.

Introduction: Nietzsche, the Death of God, and the Body

The final chapter, called “Why I am a Destiny,” of Nietzsche’s last book, *Ecce Homo*, begins as follows:

I know my fate. There will come a day when the memory of something monstrous will be tied to my name – of a crisis such as has never transpired on earth, of the deepest collision of conscience, of a decision conjured up *against* everything that had hitherto been believed, demanded, pronounced holy. I am no human being; I am dynamite.

And yet, for all that, there is nothing in me of a founder of religion – religions are plebeian affairs; I find it necessary to wash my hands after contact with religious people ... I want no “believers.”¹

The phrase “And yet, for all that [*Und mit Alledem*],” which in other contexts might come across as an unassuming or even deflationary expression, here initiates a rather startling volta. The claim that follows, namely, that Nietzsche’s thought is not religious, is a surprising one to make in this particular moment, because Nietzsche could hardly have been speaking in more religious tones in the preceding sentences. He foresees the greatest crisis in the history of the earth, which is clearly some kind of future battle (“collision”) that will take the form of an apparently apocalyptic

¹ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*. 8th edition. Volume 6, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich: de Gruyter 2008), 365. Nietzsche’s *Kritische Studienausgabe* cited hereafter thus: KSA 6:365.

All translations mine unless otherwise indicated.

“decision.” This crisis will upend all that is believed, and will overturn the meaning of the holy.² The first paragraph conveys a prophecy, not only in the loose sense that it speaks predictively and darkly of the future, but, more precisely, in that it speaks with future perfect tensing, of the memory of an event whose meaning will only be revealed at a later date, an event which remains obscure today, at the time of its announcement. Silke-Maria Weineck observes that the future perfect is the tense native to the prophet: the prophet, whose madness often identifies her as a spokesperson for the divine, delivers her message in terms not accessible to “historical reason – i.e., reason defined and delimited by its historical place.”³ This message must wait for the dawn of a new kind of comprehension that supersedes the reason of today, but this mode of comprehension is destined to arrive after the event in question.⁴ This need for a new kind of comprehension, rather than mere access to previously unknown facts, separates prophecy from simple prediction. As such, “the only accurate tense for the movement of [prophecy’s] revelation is future perfect: this will have been true.”⁵ The prophet, then, is always untimely, *unzeitgemäß*.

This simultaneous rejection of religious belief and stylistic evocation of divinely inspired madness plays out at another, more familiar place in Nietzsche’s writing: the madman passage of *The Gay Science*, where we find the most famous announcement of the death of God. In that passage, the madman arrives in what is simply called “the marketplace” and delivers a jeremiad to the townspeople whom he accuses of being the murderers of God. His speech is met, however, with blank, uncomprehending stares: “I have come too soon,” he concludes, “It is not yet my time

² One might argue that the way the sentence about the “crisis” is constructed leaves open the possibility that “the holy” will simply be annihilated. That is strictly true, but the inclusion of the word “hitherto” seems to imply that there will be new, different “beliefs,” “demands,” and holiness after the crisis.

³ Silke-Maria Weineck, *The Abyss Above*. Albany: State University of New York Press 2002, 5.

⁴ It is in this sense that Nietzsche’s message is delivered in a future perfect tense. The future perfect verb tense speaks of what will have happened at a future time. The German language does not use the future perfect often, and Nietzsche does not actually use the future perfect grammatical construction here, but the sense of his communication is future perfect, since he speaks of a memory of something that will have happened at a future point.

⁵ Weineck, *Abyss Above*, 2.

[*Ich bin noch nicht an der Zeit*].”^{6,7} Having delivered his prophetic, future-perfect message about the disclosure to come, the madman proceeds to break into various churches in order to deliver a *requiem aeternam* for God.⁸

Certainly, the madman is not simply identical to Nietzsche. Yet we would risk misreading this episode if we were to fail to recognize critical parallels between the madman’s way of speaking and Nietzsche’s own, over his two decades of philosophical writing. Unlike David Strauss (*Untimely Meditations I*), or the overburdened academic historian (*Untimely Meditations II*), or the modern scientific researcher (*Genealogy of Morals III*) – in other words, unlike the enervated, decadent atheists who for Nietzsche define modernity – Nietzsche himself, like the madman, cannot stop speaking in modes and terms that are evocative of the religious tradition whose “death” he announces.⁹ How total, then, is the break with the Christian God who has died? What exactly will or should replace Christian religion, and just how anti-Christian, or anti-religious, will it be, if its prophets continue to speak in the tropes of Christianity?

The death of God is a cataclysm, both Nietzsche and the madman tell us, but one whose meaning remains opaque in the present. This notion is reflected in the intellectual situation in the German-speaking world in the half-century or so on either side of Nietzsche, in which many

⁶ KSA 3:481.

⁷ *Gay Science* §343, which is sometimes contrasted with the madman passage given its self-described “cheerfulness” regarding the death of God, actually aligns with the madman passage in its claim that “the event itself is much too great, too distant, too remote from the capacity for comprehension of many, for its tidings even to be said to have arrived yet – to say nothing of the possibility that many might already know what this event really means” (KSA 3:573).

⁸ KSA 3:482.

⁹ Heidegger, in his “Nietzsche’s Word: God is Dead,” suggests that, in his consideration of the death of God as a path out of metaphysics, Nietzsche remains metaphysical precisely because he is anti-metaphysical: “However, as a mere countermovement [to metaphysics, Nietzsche’s philosophy] necessarily remains, like everything ‘anti-,’ essentially shackled to that which it challenges” (Martin Heidegger, “Nietzsche’s Word: God is Dead.” In *Holzwege. Gesamtausgabe* Volume 5, 8th edition. Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrman. Vittorio Klostermann: Frankfurt am Main 2003, 217). Perhaps the same logic can be applied to Nietzsche and religion: he remains ensnared by religion precisely because he pushes hard against it.

Heidegger works will hereafter be cited as such after their first mention: GA 5:217.

thinkers agree that philosophy must in some sense be secularized or brought down to earth but diverge greatly on what exactly this should mean in practice. For Ludwig Feuerbach, making philosophy earthly means the humanization of previously divine ideals. For Karl Marx, it means departing from such ideals in favor of their material, productive basis.¹⁰ For Husserl, what we might describe as the corresponding move – the one that brings philosophy down to earth – means turning neither to ideals nor to material production, but to “things” as phenomenally appearing.¹¹ For Freud, on the other hand, drives are more basic than phenomena, and can cause distortions of phenomena (indeed, the history of the divine can be read as one such distortion). My point is that the attempt to turn thought in a secular direction after the death of God can and does take many forms. As Nietzsche and the madman both say, the human meaning of the death of God remains undecided.

What does Nietzsche’s own vision for post-death-of-God thought look like? Zarathustra calls on us to “Remain true to the earth” in the wake of God’s death,¹² but such a phrase could be aligned with any of the diverse thinkers named above. What is the identity of “the earth” in this command?

If we take “the earth” to be synonymous with “nature,” we find a possible answer in Leo Strauss’s reading of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, delivered in a 1959 course at the University of Chicago.¹³ I mention Strauss’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s post-death-of-God project both in order to confirm what it gets right and to highlight how it exemplifies a kind of trap into which we

¹⁰ From the “Theses on Feuerbach”: “Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the human essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations” (Karl Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*. 2nd edition. Ed. Robert C. Tucker. Norton: New York 1978, 145).

¹¹ Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen II*. 5th edition. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag 1968, 6.

¹² KSA 4:15. Zarathustra continues, “Once the sacrilege [*Frevel*] against God was the greatest sacrilege; but God died, and those sacrilegious ones died with him. To commit sacrilege against the earth is now the most dreadful thing, and to esteem the entrails of the unknowable higher than the meaning of the earth.”

¹³ Leo Strauss, *Leo Strauss on Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Ed. Richard L. Velkley. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2017.

might fall when certain Nietzschean terms that will be prioritized in this dissertation are not sufficiently scrutinized. Strauss identifies Nietzsche as the avatar of the third wave of modernity. The first wave, represented by Hobbes and Locke, coalesces around the thought of the natural rights of humanity.¹⁴ The second wave, encompassing Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel, rejects the “natural” in “natural right,” so that “Nature is simply replaced by reason” as the standard of right.¹⁵ Nietzsche starts the “third wave,” the wave in which we still live, in which “universal standards in any sense are abandoned.”¹⁶ Yet, in the version of modernity to which Nietzsche aspires, the past is not simply jettisoned. Nietzsche wants a kind of return to nature, but, after the first two waves of modernity, nature cannot be what it once was. “This is Nietzsche’s fundamental problem: to find a way back to nature, but on the basis of the modern difficulty of conceiving of nature as the standard.”¹⁷ Rather than serving as the standard, nature is incessantly spoken of as being in the process of being “conquered” in modernity.¹⁸ In Nietzsche’s thought, this “conquering” is so endemic as to earn the title of nature itself, such that, ultimately, “Nature is the will to power,” where “will to power” is the name of this globalized conquering.^{19,20} Since this revolution in the concept of nature can only occur in the modern absence of “universal standards in any sense,” it is only possible in the third wave of modernity, led by Nietzsche, under the auspices of the fundamentally modern “major premise ... that God is dead.”²¹ Correctly and importantly, Strauss

¹⁴ Strauss, *Leo Strauss on Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 6.

¹⁵ Strauss, *Leo Strauss on Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 6.

¹⁶ Strauss, *Leo Strauss on Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 7.

¹⁷ Strauss, *Leo Strauss on Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 15.

¹⁸ Strauss, *Leo Strauss on Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 75.

¹⁹ Strauss, *Leo Strauss on Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 139.

²⁰ In some ways, this way of speaking about Nietzsche and nature parallels the Romantic project as defined by M.H. Abrams, under which modern humanity must perform a “circuitous return” to nature that is realized via a new form of perception that (as with Nietzsche’s will to power) in some sense finds nature within the human being (M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*. New York: Norton 1973, 323). Perhaps the most obvious difference is that Abrams’s Romantic views this move as one that ultimately results in harmony, such that the Romantic insight completes a movement of “unity achieved, lost, and regained” (284), whereas Nietzsche’s thesis of the will to power postulates eternal strife not only among the various beings that make up nature, but even within them.

²¹ Strauss, *Leo Strauss on Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 68.

recognizes that will to power is always embodied will to power for Nietzsche. To situate the human being in nature-as-will-to-power thus means to consider the human being in the first instance not as ensouled or as rational animal but as a kind of body. Thus, one way of articulating Nietzsche's return to nature is to point to his purported discovery that "Thyself is body,"²² or that "self is body,"²³ or that "man is radically bodily, his virtue is radically passion."²⁴

There is much that is right in Strauss's reading of Nietzsche and his place in modernity. Equally important for our purposes here, however, are the reading's shortcomings, which become evident when Strauss turns explicitly to the phrase which triggered our discussion of him in the first place, namely, "Remain true to the earth." Nietzsche's "task," says Strauss, "is to be entirely at home in this world, to be loyal to the earth."²⁵ This comfort on earth, this sense of being at home, corresponds to the task of becoming the proprietor of this "home": "Man must now exercise rule over the whole planet. Man, that is to say, not this or that nation, must become owner of the earth."^{26,27}

This notion that Nietzsche seeks a future humanity that would be "entirely at home in this world" betrays a failure to recognize the very deep sense in which nature-as-will-to-power is *unheimlich* in Nietzsche's thought, the sense in which it is never at home even when it is most at home. The will to power is not power but is almost its lack: it is the eternal striving after a power that is as yet unrealized. The will to power, then, has never found its home, and never will, even if it comes into its own in a new way in a liberated future.²⁸ Embodied will to power always confronts

²² Strauss, *Leo Strauss on Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 49.

²³ Strauss, *Leo Strauss on Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 45.

²⁴ Strauss, *Leo Strauss on Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 43.

²⁵ Strauss, *Leo Strauss on Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 68.

²⁶ Strauss, *Leo Strauss on Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 66.

²⁷ C.f. chapter 2 of this dissertation, where I discuss how Heidegger positions Nietzsche as the avatar of a kind of modern thought that finally fulfills the command of Genesis, where God tells Adam and Eve to "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion ..." (Genesis 1:28, King James).

²⁸ I defend this claim in more detail in chapter 1.

a power with which it can never be entirely “at home,” namely, Dionysian Becoming.²⁹ This power, constantly confronting the body within and without, must nevertheless remain forever outside the grasp of human comprehension. Becoming is always an incomprehensible threat to the human being (see chapter 3), despite the fact that the human being emerges from Becoming. Thus, on Nietzsche’s picture of the will to power, there is always an absolutely foreign danger threatening human life – from at home, we might say. As long as human life does not cut itself off from Becoming entirely, it can never rest easy, as indicated in the perpetual dynamism of the will to power. To borrow the phrasing of the last note in *The Will to Power*, “this world” is indeed a “household [*Haushalt*]” that consists of “the will to power and nothing else besides,” but it is a home in which all life is constantly departing from itself, on the way to something new.³⁰ This home, then, is built upon the impossibility of homeliness (in chapter 4 we will consider a figure in Nietzsche’s writing who embodies the eternal, harrowing engagement with Becoming as a constant struggle, Ariadne).

While Strauss reads Nietzsche as seeing the will to power as the cipher to a shadowless view onto all reality, the thought of the body-as-will-to-power in fact invites us to always see an abyssal darkness at the heart of our view of the world, reminding us of the finite reach of our vision and comprehension. This abyssal darkness is Becoming. If this mistake were confined to the Nietzsche reading offered by Strauss, it might not be worth engaging at such length here, but it is my sense that many different sorts of readings of Nietzsche commit this kind of error – not only in professional Nietzsche scholarship, but in academic appropriations of Nietzsche elsewhere. One interesting aspect of Strauss’s blunder is that it blinds him to one of the facets of Nietzsche’s

²⁹ This claim will be substantiated in the direct discussion of the figure of Dionysus in chapter 5. The groundwork for that discussion will have been laid in chapter 2, where I analyze the dynamics of the Nietzschean body up close.

³⁰ *Will to Power* §1067 (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*. Voltmedia: Paderborn 2002, 703-704), *Nachlass* 1885 38[12], KSA 11:610-611.

thinking with which he explicitly claims to be in tune: what we might call the ambivalent religious vibe of Nietzsche's thinking, to which I referred above. Strauss cryptically claims that Nietzsche's writing prepares the way for a "terrible" "religion of the future,"³¹ yet his belief that to "remain true to the earth" means to be "entirely at home" on earth flattens the quasi-religious darkness and mystery in which the concept of "the earth" is immersed (more on this in chapter 5).

The reading I offer in this dissertation seeks to remain conscious of this aura of religiosity in Nietzsche, present in the passages we addressed at the outset and also in the command to "remain true to the earth." What I mean here by "religiosity" – admittedly a loose word, which could carry contrary meanings in other discussions – is the persistent relevance of the divine, for Nietzsche, which manifests itself not only in the sense of loss when confronted with the death of the old God, but also in the celebration of Dionysus, the new God to whom Nietzsche dedicates himself as a "disciple." Yet it is not just the fact that Dionysus is referred to as a god that might invite us to speak of echoes of Christian religiosity in the Nietzsche text. Nietzsche attacks Christianity's use of the power of the mysterious, but an air of aestheticized mystery seems to surround many of his own key concepts and terms. For instance, he criticizes the otherworldliness [*Jenseitigkeit*³²] of Christianity but then reinvents the word *Jenseits*, so consistently used to refer pejoratively to the "beyond" of the Christian heaven, so that it has a positive connotation (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse*); he condemns what he sees to be the anti-knowledge stance of Christianity religion, but then claims to be the disciple of an "unnameable" and "unknown" god;³³ he pledges allegiance to the sensible earth over the supersensible Christian God but then goes on to shroud the identity of this "earth"

³¹ Leo Strauss, "Note on the Plan of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*," as Appendix in *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche* by Laurence Lampert. Chicago University Press: Chicago 1996, 188-205, 193.

³² For example, *Beyond Good and Evil* III, §25 (KSA 5:404).

³³ "Ariadne's Complaint" in the *Dionysus Dithrambs*, KSA 6:398, 399, discussed in chapter 3 and, to a lesser extent, in chapter 5.

in deep mystery, putting into question its status as “sensible” (see chapter 5). A friend of mine, referring to the concept of a person having (or not having) a “musical ear,” once suggested that there are people who have (or don’t have) a “religious ear,” meaning that tropes, figures, and atmospheres associated with the religious tend to resonate with them, whether they count themselves as religious or not. He suggested that Nietzsche is an atheist with a religious ear, an atheist who cannot stop speaking in what comes across, in a Christian context, as a quasi-religious manner.³⁴ This seems entirely right to me, and this dissertation seeks to avoid tone-deafness with respect to this religious resonance. Chapter 1 explores Christian remnants in Nietzsche’s conception of history, and chapters 3 and 5 discuss Nietzsche’s cult of Dionysus, in an attempt to substantiate in more detail the manner in which Nietzsche performs a kind of religiosity.

The ambivalence of Nietzsche’s relationship with the religious emanates from the strange status of the body in his thought. “Physiology,” a term that Nietzsche uses frequently to describe his own thinking, is on one level a way of approaching human life that is presented as a hard-headed, secular practice that concerns itself with what we might tentatively call material reality. With Nietzsche, the body’s physiological needs and naturally determined impulses become the point from which the philosophical observation of human life and culture emanates. The body is, for Nietzsche, a hierarchy of forces called “drives.” In observing the human being as an interplay of drives, Nietzsche positions himself against previous theological and philosophical conceptions of the human that constitute the human being in its possession of a soul or reason. He takes such starting points to be metaphysical presuppositions. Physiology, then, resists metaphysics. This implies a certain historical situatedness for physiology: physiology is the way of thinking that belongs to the future – or, to a specific future, a future which has moved beyond metaphysics (in

³⁴ From a conversation with Nishan David Naratharajan, spring 2022.

this way, Nietzsche's sense of his own positioning in relation to the history of metaphysics presages Heidegger's).³⁵ In summary, physiology orients thought toward "the earth" by considering the human being as an earthly body, and by rejecting the outdated metaphysical presuppositions associated with the Christian past, thereby participating in the death of God. It is not without reason, then, that Nietzsche is sometimes spoken of as a naturalist, especially in Anglophone readings in the last three decades or so.³⁶

If, however, we continue to follow the "guiding thread of the body" through Nietzsche's thought, we find that Nietzschean physiology's pursuit of this body does not remain simply and straightforwardly secular.³⁷ Nietzsche's physiology sees a body in constant engagement with what Nietzsche calls "Becoming" or "chaos" or "flux," founding itself in an act of "incorporation" that reifies or ossifies this flux into the being that the body is.³⁸ As it seeks to "incorporate" Becoming, however, the body also perpetually loses its contact with Becoming, as it forces it into beinghood. This flux that has always already been lost is personified in the figure of Dionysus, who at times seems to serve as the focal point of a new religious stance, as the god of Becoming who replaces the Christian God. Dionysus, as the god of Becoming, is absolutely ineffable and incomprehensible. In this way, physiology turns out to be importantly double-sided. If it initially looks like a "naturalist" mode of engagement with the world of earthly beings, it turns into a contemplation of the mysterious – and deified – vanishing point of all human knowledge and experience. The guiding thread of the body does not lead, then, to a place that is obviously and straightforwardly secular, but rather to an engagement with what might be understood as a new

³⁵ See *Human, All Too Human I* §10, KSA 2:30.

³⁶ See chapter 1 for a discussion of the limitations of this view.

³⁷ The phrase "guiding thread of the body" recurs in Nietzsche's work, and will be discussed at more length in what follows. Perhaps the most important instance of the phrase occurs at *Nachlass* 1884 27[27], KSA 11:282.

³⁸ The dynamics of incorporation will be explored at length in chapter 2.

kind of divinity. In saying this, however, we should not let the Nietzsche who takes himself to be the disciple of an incomprehensible god subsume the empirically minded Nietzsche who genealogizes the historical operation of the body's drives: "the earth" is not simply the nature of naturalism, but it is also not simply the abyss into which that nature dissolves. Nor can we simply call Dionysus "a new kind of divinity" without articulating the exact sense in which this is an accurate description, as this would fail to take seriously Nietzsche's countervailing claim that "there is nothing in me of a founder of religion." For these reasons, I will explore the precise meaning of Dionysus in chapter 5.

A Brief History of Nietzsche's Death of God

In what follows, I will narrate the history of Nietzsche's death of God as it is received and deployed by certain influential voices in twentieth-century Continental philosophy. My focus here is not the death of God broadly speaking, in every way in which that phrase has been invoked, including the ways it has been used apart from discussions of Nietzsche. Nor will I give a comprehensive history of scholarly interpretations of Nietzsche's death of God, as this would inevitably involve redundancy in combination with my discussions of other scholars in the chapters that follow. At the moment, I only wish to outline the readings of some very influential readers of Nietzsche, whose responses to his thought and to the notion of the death of God in particular have been influential beyond Nietzsche scholarship narrowly defined. Then I will briefly touch upon the interpretations of two more recent scholars whose work has had a particularly strong influence on my own. These pages will hopefully allow the reader to think through the broader significance of the death of God in Continental philosophy after Nietzsche. They will also give some indication

of the general direction of my interest in this topic, and of the holes I intend this dissertation to fill in the history of the discussion surrounding this theme.

Martin Heidegger offers the first enduringly influential engagement with the death of God, most importantly in his *Nietzsche* lectures, delivered at Freiburg im Breisgau from 1936-1940, but not published in German until 1961. Today, when Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche is invoked, it is often used as a foil, as an example of how not to read Nietzsche. In the context of my project of reading Nietzsche's death of God as a physiological event, however, Heidegger must be taken seriously: on his reading, the death of God is centrally an event of the body, of the *Leib*. For Heidegger's Nietzsche, the historical task of overcoming metaphysics takes place as the attempt to eradicate "the supersensual [*das Übersinnliche*]" and to secure "the sensuous" or "appearance" as the totality of beinghood.³⁹ To this task corresponds the replacement of the Cartesian *ego* with the body as the true source of representation, as the anchor of sensuous beings. The death of God is the moment when the supersensuous is finally overcome, and the body can take its place as the master and source of all beings. The act through which the body furnishes the beings of the world is not the passive perception of Descartes's *ego*, but the ecstatic outward propulsion of the will to power, which takes place according to the dynamics of "incorporation," *Einverleibung*. The body that realizes the specifically modern opportunity to "incorporate" the entirety of beings bears the name *Übermensch*, or overman. The death of God thus corresponds to the radical empowerment of the human being as it manages, finally, to seize the earth as its own. In Heidegger's eyes, this conclusion unfortunately misunderstands what metaphysics is, and thus how it could be overcome.

³⁹ Translations in this dissertation are generally mine, but here I am following David Krell's translation decisions from his translation of the *Nietzsche* lectures (*Nietzsche: Volumes One and Two* by Martin Heidegger. Trans. and ed. David Farrell Krell. San Francisco: Harper Collins 1991, and *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four* by Martin Heidegger. Trans. and ed. David Farrell Krell. San Francisco: Harper Collins 1991). Translations from the *Nietzsche* lectures will be mine, as well, but in general I will seek to follow Krell's rendering of the major recurrent terms of the lecture series.

For Heidegger, for whom metaphysics is the forgetting of Being, Nietzsche's exaltation of the world-wielding power of the subject-as-body is ultimately a preoccupation with beings that precludes the authentic and sustained posing of the question of Being.

One obvious recurring objection to this utterly coherent picture of Nietzsche is that its rigid systematization of Nietzsche's philosophy feels out of touch with the actual experience of reading the Nietzschean text, which is often non-linear in its argumentation, ironic in its delivery, and ambivalent in its intentions. Hence Gayatri Spivak's astonishment, for instance, that Heidegger can find in Nietzsche someone who asks the question of Being "but does not question the questioning itself!"⁴⁰ The (limited) defense of Heidegger that can be advanced in response to such complaints is by now almost as familiar as the line of objection: Heidegger was responding to an established way of reading Nietzsche as a thoroughly unsystematic irrationalist, a thinker who appealed to avant-garde movements and some Bohemian, extra-academic philosophers, but whom many regarded as not ultimately rigorous enough to be taken seriously in the university setting.⁴¹ Specifically regarding the thesis of the death of God, this meant resisting the simplistic reading that it implied the victory of nature or passion over any and all lawfulness.⁴²

⁴⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translator's Preface" to *Of Grammatology* by Jacques Derrida (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press 1976), ix-xc, xxxiv.

⁴¹ Some such readings are briefly discussed in chapter 3.

⁴² The most extreme expressions of this sort of reading had resulted in the glorification of impulsive murder. In Germany, for example, Nietzsche's notion of the death of God as a liberation from all morality has been seen as an inspiration for Paul Kornfeld's "The Seduction" (1915), in which the hero kills a member of the bourgeoisie simply out of a feeling of disgust. In Arnolt Bronnen's Nietzsche-inspired *Parricide* (1920) and *The Birth of Youth* (1922), the protagonist murders his father and gangs of youth trample the elderly on horseback while proclaiming themselves to be God. In Russia around the turn of the century, philosopher Lev Shestov had read Nietzsche's thought through a frame that had been developed with a heavy reliance on Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, in which the naive Raskolnikov's act of murder is premised on the notion that, in an atheist's world, "there are no barriers" and "all is permitted" (Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*. Trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. Vintage House: New York 1992, 27 and 274). The liberating move "beyond good and evil" after the death of God would mean, for Shestov's Nietzsche, to be a stronger, but not less murderous, Raskolnikov. All this is to say that Heidegger, in presenting his inflexible, metaphysical Nietzsche in the programmatic way that he does, may be motivated by the desire to counteract a presentation of Nietzsche that championed senseless, impulsive violence and unreason. See chapter 3 of Stephen Aschheim's *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany, 1890-1990*, called "The No-So-Discrete Nietzscheanism of the Avant-garde," for a discussion of Kornfeld, Bronnen, and other German-language writers inspired by Nietzsche from the pre-war to the interbellum period (University of California Press: Berkeley 1992, 17-

French poststructuralist readings of Nietzsche's death of God can be read as a reaction to Heidegger's suppression of the vitality of the Nietzschean text – although there is also clear continuity in the basic terms in which Heidegger, on the one hand, and writers such as Jacques Derrida and Sarah Kofman, on the other hand, write about the death of God. The death of God still catalyzes and enables an attempt, on Nietzsche's part, to think beyond metaphysics, and many of the same frameworks for understanding what metaphysics is, such as Heidegger's "onto-theology," are still referenced in the evaluation of this attempt.⁴³ However, the verdict regarding the degree of success of that attempt is far more positive in Derrida's and Kofman's analysis than in Heidegger's. Derrida asserts that metaphysical conceptions of Being are dependent upon a certain understanding of language wherein the signifier is always reabsorbed by the signified it represents, in "absolute presence ... constituted as self-presence,"⁴⁴ in a movement that parallels the Christian movement of Parousia. "The sign and divinity have the same place and time of birth. The age of the sign is essentially theological."⁴⁵ The death of God corresponds to the "end of the book," where the book is the textual paradigm that assumes the above-described closed circuit of signifier and signified. Nietzsche, as a thinker of the death of God, contributes to the end of the book: "Nietzsche, far from remaining *simply* (with Hegel and as Heidegger wished) *within* metaphysics, contributed a great deal to the liberation of the signifier from its dependence or derivation with respect to the logos and the related concept of truth or the primary signified."⁴⁶

50, especially 65 and 68). For Shestov on Nietzsche, see *Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Nietzsche*. Trans. Bernard Martin. Ohio University Press: Athens, OH 1969.

See especially Shestov 213, where he claims that the notion of the *Übermensch* had already been fully developed in *Crime and Punishment*.

⁴³ See chapter 2 for a discussion of the meaning and importance of Heidegger's "onto-theology."

⁴⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University 1976, 16.

⁴⁵ Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 14.

⁴⁶ Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 19.

Nietzsche, then, is a thinker of writing, the paradigm that resists the logocentric closure of the book. We can see clear parallels to Derrida's "liberation of the signifier" in Kofman's "metaphor":

after the 'death of God' all concepts change their meaning, lose their meaning ...

The 'death of God,' abolishing any proper, any absolute centre of reference, plunges man into Heraclitus' 'becoming-mad.' Thus once sense (in both senses of the term) has been abolished ... [m]etaphor can emerge from having been forgotten ... With God dead, the philosophical axe attacks the roots of the tree of metaphysics.^{47,48}

We can see here, from Heidegger to the French poststructuralists, both continuity in assumptions about the philosophical task that is implied by the death of God (namely, the task of thinking beyond metaphysics) and disagreement or development regarding what exactly that task means in practice for Nietzsche.

Certainly, readings like those of Derrida and Kofman illuminate an indisputably crucial aspect of Nietzsche's death of God that is missing in the brutish, hegemonic power of Heidegger's post-death-of-God *Übermensch*. Alexander Nehamas, an American whose reading of Nietzsche could in many ways be aligned with those of Derrida and Kofman, correctly says that the death of God is the birth of a new opportunity for self-creation, and that this self-creation (if we manage to make it a reality) will take the form of new self-interpretations. The death of God, then, corresponds to a new freedom in "writing" the story of who we are.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Sarah Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*. Trans. Duncan Large. Stanford: Stanford University Press 1993, 108-109.

⁴⁸ Roughly analogous to Kofman's "metaphor" is Paul de Man's "literature," which designates the kind of writing that, unlike philosophy, knows that the signifier will not be reabsorbed by the signified. De Man says that in Nietzsche's work, "Philosophy turns out to be an endless reflection on its own destruction at the hands of literature" (*Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*. Westford, MA: Yale University Press 1979, 115).

⁴⁹ Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1985, 91.

Still, we must observe that a crucial insight about Nietzsche's death of God that is present in Heidegger is disregarded and lost in the readings of Derrida, Kofman, and Gilles Deleuze: Heidegger recognized that modernity is thought in physiological terms by Nietzsche, that the death of God is an event of the body – and, even more specifically, an event in the history of “incorporation.” As will become clear, I believe that we should follow Heidegger in this basic textual orientation. There seems to have been little room for the Nietzschean body in the interpretations of Derrida and related thinkers, who tended to read Nietzsche's fundamental insights as observations about language.

Despite all the differences between the reading of Nietzsche on offer from Heidegger and the most well-known French readings of the 1960s and 1970s, there is a deficiency common to all of the interpretations we have mentioned so far: what is called “the death of God” is not understood centrally in terms of the transition from Christianity to secular modernity. This is perhaps a debatable claim; certainly, Heidegger and Derrida do speak of the Christian God in their discussions of the death of God. In both cases, though, the death of God is the closure of a metaphysical epoch whose inception appears to predate Christianity. It is thus possible to produce a summary of these readings of Nietzsche's death of God in which the Christian God and the notion of divinity do not play main roles – which is what I take myself to have briefly done above.

Jean-Luc Marion, thinking through Nietzsche's death of God primarily in his 1977 *The Idol and Distance* and 1982 *God Without Being*, continues the consideration of God's death as the closure of metaphysics while correcting the above-described tendency of previous influential Continental readers of Nietzsche to move the matter of divinity to the periphery of the discussion. For Marion, Nietzsche's philosophical project is centrally the pursuit of a new relationship to the divine. It will become clear that I disagree with Marion's reading in important ways. However,

Marion is critically sensitive to the fact that, for Nietzsche, the aspiration towards a post-metaphysical philosophy corresponds necessarily to “another dawn of the divine.”⁵⁰ For this reason, despite the fact that Nietzsche is more often in the background than the foreground of his discussions of the death of God,⁵¹ Marion’s reflections on this topic seem to me to be a moment of underappreciated importance in Nietzsche studies.⁵² Nietzsche explicitly pursues a newly imagined god after the old, metaphysical god has passed away, and to assume that the designation of Dionysus as a god is not seriously meant would be to ignore the timber of many of Nietzsche’s invocations of him. Marion recognizes all of this. In this way, he allows what I at the outset called Nietzsche’s ambivalent relationship to religiosity to shine through, and places Nietzsche’s struggles with divinity at the center of what had appeared in Heidegger, Derrida, and Kofman as the (I argue) overly secularized story of the death of God as the closure of metaphysics. With the latter writers, the event called the “closure of metaphysics” had not just attended, but had subsumed, the event called the “death of God.” Marion amends this, without forgetting the questions that had motivated previous Continental philosophers’ explorations of Nietzsche.

It is, however, two of Marion’s students whose work has most directly influenced this dissertation. I am thinking of Didier Franck’s *Nietzsche and the Shadow of God* and Barbara

⁵⁰ Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*. 2nd edition. Trans. Thomas A. Carlson. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press 2012, 31.

⁵¹ The important exceptions to this are *The Idol and Distance*, in the introductory section (“The Marches of Metaphysics”) and the first main section (“The Collapse of the Idols and the Confrontation with the Divine: Nietzsche”) (*The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*. Trans. Thomas A. Carlson. New York: Fordham University Press 2001, 1-129).

⁵² Of course, Marion is not the only writer to consider Nietzsche’s death of God from a Christian point of view. Nor is he the only one to recognize that some sort of engagement with the divine continues to matter to Nietzsche –Thomas Altizer sees this, as well. However, Altizer’s association of the divinity that is pursued by Nietzsche with Mircea Eliade’s sacred betrays a serious misunderstanding of the meaning of Nietzsche’s Dionysus, which will be discussed at length in chapter 5. See Altizer’s chapter on Nietzsche, “The Sacred and the Profane,” that concludes his work on Eliade called *Mircea Eliade and the Dialectic of the Sacred* (Philadelphia. Westminster Press: 1963, 176-200) and his essay in the well-known *New Nietzsche* volume, “Eternal Recurrence and Kingdom of God” (In *The New Nietzsche*. Ed. David B. Allison. 2nd edition. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1985, 232-246).

Stiegler's *Nietzsche et la critique de la chair* (not yet translated).⁵³ I will address these readings at some length in middle chapters (Franck in chapter 2, Stiegler in chapter 3), so I will not discuss them in detail here. Franck and Stiegler write about Nietzsche in very different registers and with very different intertexts, but both retain Marion's recognition of the importance, in Nietzsche's thought, of old and new encounters with the divine. What is different in Franck and Stiegler than in Marion is their insistence on the centrality of the body: with both Franck and Stiegler, the death of God might be called a physiological event. This is a return to the Heideggerian position, but this time, Franck and Stiegler are dealing with more viable conceptions of the Nietzschean body, under which (in different ways for Stiegler than for Franck) this body is delimited in its possibilities and its power. This is the right starting orientation from which to consider the death of God.

I intend, however, to treat Nietzsche with less reverence than do Franck and Stiegler. While both scholars see the Nietzschean body as importantly finite, I place even more emphasis on the limits of the body's capacities, arguing that the body's very unity is constantly (chapter 2) – but especially during modernity (chapter 3) – under threat. The body, always in the position of reacting to the threat posed to it by the absolutely alterior flux of Becoming, can never be purely “active” (chapter 4). These observations force us to challenge certain familiar Nietzschean aspirations, which seem to rely on a human being unlike the decidedly limited, embodied human being whom his own text shows us (chapter 4). The limitations of Nietzsche's human body, in particular its constitutive inability to enduring satisfy its desires, also potentially complicate his claim to be an anti-Christian thinker in some ways (chapter 1, chapter 5).

⁵³ - Didier Franck, *Nietzsche and the Shadow of God*. Trans. Bettina Bergo and Philippe Farah. Evanston: Northwestern University Press 2012.

- Barbara Stiegler, *Nietzsche et la critique de la chair : Dionysos, Ariane, le Christ*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 2005.

Ultimately, my goal is not only to shed light on the body that is revealed by Nietzschean physiology, but also to show how “physiology” is a name for philosophy as Nietzsche practices it.⁵⁴ Physiology is the kind of post-metaphysical thinking that only becomes possible after the death of God. It is the philosophical stance taken by the “disciple ... of the god Dionysus,”⁵⁵ the god of Becoming, who can only be engaged via the “guiding thread of the body.” Physiology, the investigation of the body as hierarchy of drives, is the key to understanding the human world, and it is also the mode of thought that allows an engagement with the unthinkable, represented by Dionysus, the god of the chaos of Becoming that exceeds the human world. When we consider Nietzsche’s philosophy as physiology, we come to see Nietzsche as a thinker of finitude, although in a different way than Martin Heidegger is a thinker of finitude. Our finitude, for Nietzsche, is founded in our inability ever to “incorporate” Becoming, our tragic incapacity for any direct contact with Dionysus. Discipleship to Dionysus is dedication to a god whom we cannot look at.

Chapter-by-Chapter Summary

Chapter 1, “The Death of God and Nietzsche’s History,” is split into two main parts. In the first half of the chapter, I pose and answer the question of what history is, for Nietzsche, answering the question in a more or less chronological way beginning with *The Birth of Tragedy*. I argue that Nietzsche comes to understand history as physiological history, as a history of human drives. Nietzsche’s “genealogy” is always an investigation of the embodied human being.

⁵⁴ Eric Blondel might be said to approach a similar thesis regarding the importance of physiology, although Blondel evinces little interest in Nietzsche’s historical thought, and thus does not spend much time on things like the death of God. In practice, this results in a fairly different kind of Nietzsche study than I am offering here. I will discuss Blondel’s remarkable work on Nietzsche at some length in chapter 1 (see his *Nietzsche: The Body and Culture*. Trans. Sean Hand. Stanford: Stanford University Press 1991).

⁵⁵ KSA 5:238.

In the second half of the chapter, I investigate the ways in which Nietzsche takes this physiological history to be a repudiation of Christianity and Christian history. Nietzsche's body is the body as a coalition of drives [*Triebe*]. In *Antichrist*, Nietzsche records Paul's attempt to write this body out of history. The death of God represents a dawning self-awareness on the part of the body, such that Christianity's dis-embodied history becomes untenable, providing an opening for Nietzsche's physiological mode of history to assert itself at Christianity's expense.

However, I challenge the degree to which Nietzsche's own sense of history is actually anti-Christian. I do this by initiating a dialogue between Nietzsche's history and the form of history presented in Augustine's *City of God*, asking whether *The City of God* really is guilty of the suppression of the body of which Nietzsche accuses Paul and, by extension, Christianity. Through this intertextual engagement, we see that there is a stronger Christian vestige in Nietzsche's historical outlook than he is willing to admit. For both Nietzsche and Augustine, the truly historical paradigm depends on a certain asceticism that is not only a prescriptive or ethical stance, but a deep conviction about the way things are: the body can never ultimately have it wants. By Augustine, this condition applies only to the postlapsarian body, and is abolished in the apocalyptic transfiguration of the world. Nietzsche allows us to hold out no such hope for such a transfiguration. I conclude that if we understand Nietzsche on his own terms, he might even be said to have radicalized Augustine's Christian asceticism in his engagement of the body and history, by making the suffering of the body, and its inability to sustainedly satisfy its desires, eternal.

In chapter 2, "The Body, Metaphysics, and Heidegger's Nietzsche," I study the dynamics of the body in question up close, through an investigation of the word *Einverleibung*, incorporation. Since Heidegger is the first and most influential reader of Nietzsche to recognize

the tremendous importance of this term, the chapter proceeds as a critical engagement with Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche. The global critique of Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche is rooted in a polemic against Heidegger's understanding of *Einverleibung* in its function as the constituting process of the Nietzschean body.

Before advancing my argument against Heidegger, however, I observe that many objections to Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche as a metaphysician have been raised without devoting serious attention to Heidegger's delineation of the centerpiece of this alleged metaphysical system, namely, the *Leib*, the body. For this reason, for the first half or so of the chapter, I simply offer a summary of the Heideggerian position on Nietzsche, delivered in such a way as to highlight the body's centrality, recounting his understanding of Nietzsche's historical importance. This history culminates in the completion of metaphysics as the body's dominance over all beings in the death of God.

I then turn to "incorporation" as it actually appears in Nietzsche's text, and, through an analysis of the passages in which this word appears, I revise Heidegger's reading of incorporation and the Nietzschean body. Nietzsche's status, on Heidegger's reading, as the culminating figure of Western metaphysics depends on the notion that the body, in Nietzsche's thought, is the last Western subject. I argue, however, that an investigation of the body in Nietzsche does not reveal him to be an unwilling participant in the metaphysical tradition beyond which Heidegger seeks to move; rather, we should see in the Nietzschean body a human finitude that has more resonances in Heidegger's own thought than Heidegger would care to admit. Ultimately, I show, an investigation of the actual dynamics of the Nietzschean body, as read through the careful tracing of the word "incorporation" to which Heidegger invites us, yields a fundamentally delimited body that operates according to what we might call a kind of physiological asceticism. The close-range

scrutiny of the body thus resonates with the investigation of the historical body of chapter 1: in both cases, a body of finite capacities turns out to operate according to an ascetic logic.

The third chapter, “The Modern Body Overwhelmed,” places this finite body into its modern historical context after the death of God. For Nietzsche, I argue, modernity is an incapacity for suffering. The body’s capacity for suffering is always limited, but this capacity implodes in modernity. Christianity had been a protective mechanism against suffering, so that the death of God leaves the body newly exposed and vulnerable. I examine the important but underexamined word “idol” (as in *Twilight of the Idols*) in Nietzsche’s thought, and I argue that idolatry is the stance that protects the decadent body from Dionysian Becoming and the threat of suffering it implies. I analyze in turn the various entities that Nietzsche identifies as modern idols, such as reason, scholarly knowledge, the state, and Richard Wagner. The overcoming of idolatry, I propose, is made possible only in the death of God. In its broadest terms, then, the opportunity Nietzsche sees opening up for the human being after the death of God bears a resemblance, in its broad outlines, to that identified by Marion, the Catholic theologian: in both instances, a newly vital relationship to divinity can take root only after a certain idolatry is overcome in the death of God – and, while the identity of the god in question of course differs in the two cases, in both cases, the god in question is in some sense a god “without Being.”

In chapter 4, “The Pursuit of a ‘Higher History,’” I read the figure of Ariadne as the countermovement to modern idolatries. Opposed to those idolatries, which seek to forget the body in order to avoid pain, Ariadne’s “thread” should be associated with the “guiding thread” of the body, the thread followed by physiology. This chapter critically delineates the degree to which Nietzsche’s highest aspirations, such as a “revaluation of all values,” “active force,” and the *Übermensch*, are viable: Ariadne represents a certain ideal for Nietzsche, one that naturally follows

from the general train of his thought on the body, but the logic of her character also seems to undermine these other aspirations.

The chapter investigates the meaning of woman in Nietzsche's thought, first discussing the basic drive configuration that Nietzsche defines as "woman" and subjects to misogynist attacks in his most well-known discussions of the sexes, such as *Beyond Good and Evil* §231-239. The same drive configuration returns, but revalorized, in the female figure of Ariadne. This orientation of the drives, condemned in the form of "woman" but subtly celebrated in the form of Ariadne, is that of a reactive life form founded in fear. In Ariadne, reactivity becomes the authentic acknowledgement of the finite body's inability to conquer Becoming, the acknowledgement of our inferior status with regard to Dionysian Becoming. Without wanting to deny or explain away Nietzsche's misogyny, as many critics have done – indeed, his misogynist passages on woman are critical to understanding who Ariadne is – I see Ariadne as the site of a covert revaluation of the sexes in Nietzsche's late thought, when a certain degree of (stereotypically feminine) receptivity and humility become necessary for the finite human being's encounter with Dionysus as radical Becoming. Following the Western tradition's tendency to code the flesh as female and reason as male, Nietzsche condemns male "rational" philosophy for wanting to do "away with the *body*,"⁵⁶ and through Ariadne genders physiology's insight into the finite body as female.

The fifth chapter, "Dionysus, The God After God," turns from Ariadne to her lover Dionysus, performing a sustained inquiry into the meaning of the god to whom Nietzsche pledges his "discipleship." This chapter shows how Dionysus is ultimately the key to understanding Nietzsche's physiology. I start by observing an interpretive difficulty we are faced with when trying to understand the meaning of Dionysus for Nietzsche. Dionysus seems to have two

⁵⁶ KSA 6:74-75.

apparently incompatible meanings, as the god of the sensual and of Greek culture's embrace of the sensual, a god of the earth, the sexual, and wine, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the god of the pre-phenomenal (and thus absolutely non-sensual) flux of Becoming – the dark god of that which exceeds and precedes all the beings of the earth (the meaning of Dionysus changes, of course, from *The Birth of Tragedy* to his return in the late Nietzsche's writing, but this characterization of the god as paradoxically double in meaning remains valid, I think, from the beginning to the end of Nietzsche's philosophical career).

Observing that Heidegger twice accuses Nietzsche of being a “negative theologian,” I read this double status of Dionysus onto the God of so-called “negative theology” as this God appears in the disputes between Jean-Luc Marion and Jacques Derrida. I observe that Dionysus, both sensual and trans-sensual simultaneously, apparently faces a difficulty similar to the quandary that Derrida sees in the God of negative theology: he must be accessible enough for discipleship, yet “other” enough to overcome the onto-theological order of metaphysical being. Just as Derrida accuses negative theology of attempting to have it both ways in a manner that is not ultimately viable, Nietzsche appears to seek to have it both ways with Dionysus, allowing him to escape beinghood by defining him as the Becoming that outstrips beinghood, but also making a human “discipleship” to Dionysus possible by making him accessible via sensuality. I propose understanding this double status via Zarathustra's rhetorical question, “Is not seeing itself – seeing abysses?”⁵⁷ – a phrasing which, I argue, offers us a rubric with which to understand physiology's orientation toward the world. Physiology, the study of the body that analyzes that body's ways of impressing Becoming into beinghood, sees abyssal Becoming *in* beings, as the reality of flux that promises their destruction. In this way, as opposed to the “idolatrous” modes of vision Nietzsche

⁵⁷ From “On the Vision and the Riddle.” KSA 4:199.

ascribes to philosophy hitherto and to Christianity, physiology sees beings in a way that always acknowledges the limits of its own vision, that always sees the limits of conceptuality. As the study of the finite body engaged in the reifying act of incorporation out of the flux of Becoming, physiology confronts Becoming as the limit of knowledge and of beinghood, but it does so via the study of the beings of “the earth.” Seeing is thus always seeing abysses for physiology. But physiology’s objects of study do not simply dissolve into incomprehensible flux – to the contrary, physiology will perpetually study the various modes of incorporation, as manifested in different sorts of bodies, as the act of constant reification out of Becoming, which always remains tragically beyond embodied human experience. To physiology’s double-sided orientation to the tangible world of beings and to Becoming, beyond all human experience, corresponds Dionysus’s double status as god of Becoming and god of the earth. Far from repeating the *Jenseitigkeit* that Nietzsche condemns in the Christian God, Dionysian flux is experienced through an engagement with the beings of the earth as the abyssal source from which they are always already tragically separated. Physiology is the name of post-metaphysical thought, for Nietzsche, in that it places all beinghood under a kind of erasure, as a “falsification” of Becoming. Paradoxically, physiology, as discipleship to Dionysus, turns toward the divinity that escapes sensibility precisely by studying the sensible world.

Chapter 1: The Death of God and Nietzsche's History¹

Although our topic is ultimately the death of God as a historical event of the body, we must start at a bit of a distance from the death of God, by investigating the nature of the history within which the death of God appears. The death of God is the greatest physiological event that explodes onto the scene in a history that is itself understood by Nietzsche in physiological terms. For any of that to make sense, the first claim that must be defended and elucidated is the assertion that Nietzsche's history is physiological.

For this reason, the first part of this chapter will be dedicated to showing how Nietzsche's history comes to be physiological history, the history of the body as embodied will to power. Once I have offered a narrative of the development of this sense of history, I will then briefly discuss how Nietzsche understands the body that guides history (a topic which, of course, will be returned to, from multiple angles, throughout this dissertation). Finally, I will explain how Nietzsche sees the advancement of his physiological history as a move against Christianity.

The discussion of Nietzsche's history will be roughly chronological, beginning with Nietzsche's early works. It is easy, in the early works, to read him as an anti-historical thinker – a fact which has been reflected in scholarly responses to Nietzsche in diverse ways. I argue, however, that this view is mistaken. Nietzsche is neither dispositionally anti-historical nor deeply skeptical about our ability to make substantive claims about historical reality. His frustration with academic historians, evident especially in *The Birth of Tragedy* and the first two *Untimely Meditations*, is not best understood as a conviction that modern society is too historical (some of Nietzsche's rhetoric, especially in "On the Uses and Abuses of History for Life" notwithstanding), but rather

¹ A version of the latter half of this chapter is forthcoming in the *Journal of Religion* as "Nietzsche's Confrontation with Christianity via the Body and History" (Volume 103, Number 2, April 2023).

reflects an inchoate sense that professional historians are failing to see real history because they are preoccupied with a certain kind of superficial history. This criticism begins more negative than positive - what counts as real history will not become clear in Nietzsche's thinking for some time. Ultimately, however, Nietzsche comes to see history as the history of the body. I trace this change in his thinking through the especially clear example of his developing reading of Socrates, whose status as a physiological calamity only becomes explicit long after *The Birth of Tragedy* when it is then read back into the Socrates of *The Birth of Tragedy* by Nietzsche as he later comments upon that early text.

After briefly showing how the notion of physiological history is at work in many of Nietzsche's works of the 1880s, I will begin addressing the precise dynamics of the physiological as Nietzsche understands them, by examining the body as embodied will to power. This is a topic that will stay with us throughout this study (see especially chapter 2). We will turn to 1888's *Antichrist*, which I read as a clash between two different views of history, that of Paul and that of Nietzsche. Once I have adumbrated the fault lines between Nietzsche's own physiological history and Paul's allegedly anti-physiological history, I bring Nietzsche's reading of what he understands to be Christian history into dialogue with Augustine's *City of God*. Here at the outset, I would like to offer a brief explanation of my choice of *The City of God* as an intertext for Nietzsche's argument about Christianity's "falsification of history [*Geschichts-Fälschung*]"² in *Antichrist*. The argument of that work, after all, centers on Paul, not Augustine – and Heidegger demonstrates that philosophy can in fact read Paul as living his faith in an integrally historical way, such that there is strictly no need to look to some other figure as a hypothetical interlocutor.³ Historicity, in the

² KSA 6:195.

³ Heidegger, Martin. *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens*. In *Gesamtausgabe* 60. 2nd ed. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann 2011.

sense of standing in history in a certain way, is certainly not irrelevant to our concerns here, but as the word *Geschichts-Fälschung* implies, Nietzsche is also very concerned, more specifically, with the act of writing or narrating a history, in a narrower textual sense, which Augustine can more straightforwardly be said to do than Paul. Additionally, for Augustine, the question of one's ability to see or think historically is – almost explicitly, as we will see – positively associated with what Nietzsche calls the Christian ascetic view of the body, making his *City of God* a uniquely fruitful counterpoint for a Nietzschean reading of history on which, to the contrary, asceticism shrouds historical perception.

My ultimate claim regarding Nietzsche's own understanding of his historical project in *Antichrist* is that he seeks, with his new historical paradigm, to supplant and defeat a Christian history which he understands as effacing the body. I will conclude that his success in this regard is only partial. An engagement with *The City of God* forces us to push back, to a certain degree, on Nietzsche's charge that Christianity seeks to obscure the role of the body in history. More importantly, perhaps, an analysis of how exactly the death of God and the eternal return reshape history after Christianity suggests that Nietzsche's history retains, or perhaps even reinforces, Christianity's ascetic stance toward the body. This is because resurrection, in the eternal return, comes to represent not a liberation from the perpetually unsatisfied striving of the carnal drives, but, instead, its eternalization, echoing and deepening Christianity's ascetic assertion that the desires of earthly flesh cannot be enduringly satisfied. In short, the death of God's disarming of the Christian apocalyptic historical structure makes impossible any hope for deliverance from the postlapsarian plight of the desirous, earthly body that had been described, in terms surprisingly resonant with Nietzsche's, by Augustine.

The Development of Nietzsche's Sense of History

There is an often-repeated story about how the Christian God dies, on Nietzsche's account. We can summarize it as follows. As Nietzsche makes clear in works like *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Christianity nurtures an impulse toward psychological self-exploration, or rather, toward psychological self-interrogation, as the Christian conscience continuously questions whether the individual's motives for acting in a certain way are pure. To ensure the efficacy of this self-questioning, Christianity also places a high importance on truthfulness, making it one of the most important virtues, so that the conclusions drawn by the conscience can be trusted as honest, accurate conclusions. The result, after two millennia of Christianity, is a European culture that is much more psychologically self-aware than its pagan, Roman predecessor, more sophisticated in its ability to read its own motivations and drives. This culture is also peopled by individuals who feel a strong moral obligation toward truthfulness. Ultimately, this combination of self-awareness and honesty, which was itself created by Christianity, is the demise of Christianity: the "two-thousand-year-long breeding [Zucht] of truth" leads to a Western humanity that "forbids itself the *lie that is belief in God*."⁴ As it comes to better grasp the self-interested motivations for its belief in God in the first place, this self-understanding makes continued belief in God unsustainable. Nietzsche emphasizes God's own role in his own death in *Ecce Homo*: "Speaking theologically – listen well, for I rarely speak as a theologian – it was God himself who lay down as a snake at the end of his day's work under the tree of knowledge: thus he rested from being a god."⁵

⁴ KSA 5:409.

⁵ KSA 6:351.

God, then, both invites the believer to knowledge and, simultaneously, forbids it. Nietzsche here encapsulates the impossible, and ultimately fatal, contradiction at the heart of Christian religion as he sees it: Christianity insists upon an ethical imperative toward truthfulness, but pursuit of the truth at some point becomes incompatible with the tenets of Christian faith. Christianity must be fundamentally conflicted, encouraging discoveries that it must, at the same time, suppress.

One of the axes upon which this dynamic plays out is the reading of history. The modern epoch that is the era of the death of God is also, for Nietzsche, the era of the “historical sense,” an era in which our engagement with history is both altered and amplified. God dies because we have come to read history in a new way, and to move beyond the nihilism that is the result of the death of God will require a reconfigured history. Christianity has obscured the “real” history that Nietzsche intends to show us, covering it over with a false history that corresponds to its metaphysical claims. We will explore how Christianity obscures history, and how Nietzsche intends to defeat this suppression of history, in this chapter.

But what is history, for Nietzsche, apart from the topic of the death of God? Does it make sense to speak of a “real” history, which Nietzsche wants to represent to us, which he believes to be *capable* of being represented? The latter question is motivated both by some common-sense observations one can make about Nietzsche’s intellectual biography, on the one hand, and by questions posed by recent Nietzsche scholarship, on the other. Nietzsche, as is well known, began publishing as a philologist at Basel (and thus, as a professionally trained reader of history), until the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1872 threw his career in philology into a crisis from which it would never recover. Reading classicists’ analysis of Nietzsche’s historical claims in that work, as carried out by Michael Stephen Silk and Joseph Peter Stern in 1981,⁶ one has the sense

⁶ See *Nietzsche on Tragedy* by Michael Stephen Silk and Joseph Peter Stern. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1981.

that Nietzsche at times forsakes the sort of engagement with history that has any hope of correspondence with the actual facts of the past, in favor of a mode of writing that is supposed to be a sort of art (this, of course, was what many of Nietzsche's contemporaries, most famously Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, believed). Some commentators have made stronger and more global claims about Nietzsche's allegedly negative relationship with history, saying, for example, that "Nietzsche hated history."⁷ Anthony Jensen has termed Nietzsche a representational anti-realist with regard to the past, meaning that (according to Jensen) while he believes history to be pragmatically important, he does not believe we can ever accurately represent history.⁸

While I take Jensen's thesis about Nietzsche and history to be incorrect (for reasons that will become clear over the course of this chapter), it is true enough that in much of Nietzsche's work from the early 1870s, we can see an impatience with a brand of historicizing that is overly obsessed with representational accuracy down to the most fine-grained detail. This is a well-recognized aspect of Nietzsche's early work, and we will discuss this tendency only briefly here. The kind of history that Nietzsche is rejecting is basically professionalized, academic history, the kind of history done by people paid to be "philologists" or "historians."⁹ In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche seeks to replace their narrow-minded concerns with fact-gathering with an ambitious attempt to reveal a transhistorical, Schopenhauerian insight that will be expressed through the historical observation of one specific time and place. Insight into the eternal striving of the will (represented by Dionysus) can only reach its most profound depth when it is sublimated into beautifying art (represented by Apollo), because without this sublimation such an "insight" cannot

⁷ Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1978. 32.

⁸ Jensen, Anthony K. *Nietzsche's Philosophy of History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2013.

⁹ Indeed, Glenn Most suggests that "We will not be too far off if we translate the title of Nietzsche's essay as «The Use and Abuse of History Departments for Life»." Glenn Most, "The Use and Abuse of Ancient Greece for Life." In *Cultura tedesca* 20 (2002), 31-53, 32.

be borne by the human psyche beyond a certain point. There is thus a causal relationship between the appearance of Dionysian and Apollonian culture in ancient Greek history: Apollonian epochs follow Dionysian epochs with a kind of psychological necessity, relieving the burden of Dionysian wisdom when, if left unmitigated, it would become too much to bear. Nietzsche thus tells us that the history of Greek art before Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides can be divided into “four great artistic stages”: “[1] out of the ‘Bronze Age’, with battles between the Titans and its bitter folk philosophy, [2] the Homeric world develops under the sway of the Apollonian drive toward beauty ... [3] this ‘naïve’ nobility is again swallowed up by the flood of the Dionysian breaking in [with Archilocus and early lyric poetry¹⁰] and ... [4] the Apollonian raised itself up against this new power to the rigid majesty of Doric art and the Doric worldview.”¹¹ The Apollonian, then, follows the Dionysian, until the two impulses are finally synthesized in the great tragedians, when the Apollonian no longer relieves, but rather sublimates, the Dionysian. Such a causal “rule,” however, would require some consistency with regard to what counts as “Dionysian” and “Apollonian”: in other words, if what is Dionysian always gives way to what is Apollonian, what is called “Dionysian” should refer to more or less the same thing in all Dionysian epochs, and what is called “Apollonian” should always be basically the same. Silk and Stern point out, however,¹² that this is not the historical reality with regard to the historical cults of Apollo and Dionysus, as Nietzsche would have known. Dionysus, for example, “seems to have been a wild god” early on, but later, in Athens, “he presents a much tamer appearance,”¹³ until we can say that “[t]he cult of Dionysus, in fact, in sixth-century Athens became respectable.”¹⁴ Orgiastic festivals involving, for instance,

¹⁰ That this stage refers to Archilocus and lyric poetry is made clear in the next chapter, §5.

¹¹ KSA I:42.

¹² KSA I:171-173.

¹³ Silk and Stern 171. See also Silk and Stern 171-175.

¹⁴ Silk and Stern 173.

the dismembering and raw consumption of an animal, give way to a god whose behavior and associations are respectable enough to earn him a place among the Olympians.¹⁵ At times, Nietzsche explicitly owns the non-literal nature of the history he offers, telling us on the first page of the first chapter, for example, that he is “borrowing”¹⁶ the names Dionysus and Apollo from the Greeks, suggesting that his usage of these terms will not always reflect their historical meaning for the Greeks, but will be invested with a significance that Nietzsche himself will assign to them. The point, for Nietzsche, is not to offer a detailed study of the historical development of this or that cult, situated in this or that specific time and place; rather, Nietzsche is trying to use these context-bound cultural phenomena to illustrate timeless truths about art, psychology, and human existence.

In the wake of professional philology’s caustic response to *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche goes on to criticize the narrowly specialized historical practices of the academic world more explicitly two years later in the *Untimely Meditations*. He condemns the massive fact-gathering efforts of modern historians in “On the Uses and Abuses of History for Life,” in ways that are well-known. He argues that “modern man ultimately carries around with himself an immense quantity of undigestible stones of knowledge.”¹⁷ This is in large part the fault of historical research, of which there is a stifling, unhealthy amount: “I seek to understand as a detriment [*Schaden*], infirmity, and shortcoming of the time something that our time is justifiably proud of, its historical education, because I believe that in fact we are all suffering from a consuming historical fever [*wir alle in einem verzehrenden historischen Fieber leiden*], and that we should at least acknowledge that we are suffering from it.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Silk and Stern 172-173.

¹⁶ “Diese Namen [Apollo and Dionysus] *entleihen* wir von den Greichen ...” (KSA 1:25).

¹⁷ KSA 1:272.

¹⁸ KSA 1:246.

The early works' impatience with *Historie* as practiced by academic historians, of which the above comments are only a brief sketch, is easy to recognize. Less obvious, however, but equally important to emphasize, is the fact that there is also a sense in which the early Nietzsche sees himself as saving history from the historians, rather than simply trying to alleviate our "historical fever" by making us less historically oriented in our outlook.¹⁹ Nietzsche's rhetoric, admittedly, does not help us see this. His summary name for everything that "Uses and Abuses" is condemning is "the historical sense [*der historische Sinn*]"²⁰ (although the phrase will later come to have a positive connotation for Nietzsche, until in *Twilight of the Idols* it names the trait that philosophers hitherto most needed and lacked²¹). At the outset of the work, he tells us that "There is a degree of sleeplessness, of rumination, of historical sense, at which living beings are harmed and ultimately meet their demise, whether it be one human being, a people, or a culture."^{22,23}

¹⁹ Glenn Most has pointed out that the text's memorable opening scene, in which we see humanity jealously observing the animal that cannot remember, is the only part of the work that is compatible with the belief that the essay, as a whole, is "an attack upon mere ratiocination, bloodless cerebralism, in the name of organic vitality or undirected activity or as a vitalist tract on the virtues of living only in the present moment and the dangers posed for that present by the dead hand of the past" ("On the Uses and Abuses of Ancient Greece for Life" 31). As it turns out, "the first chapter, which alone seems to give some support to such misreadings, turns out to be misleading" (31).

In reality, Most says, "Nietzsche's real target from the very beginning has not been intellectualism per se, nor the past as a basic category of human existence, nor even an awareness of the past as such [emphasis mine], but rather «science (*Wissenschaft*) . . . the demand that history be a science»" (32). The title forecasts this: "Historie" here means history as a scholarly field. "Nietzsche's target, in short, is a specific mode of professionalized discourse within the contemporary institutional division of academic labor: on the one hand, a set of State-supported and State-controlled institutions for the training, examination, recruitment, and advancement of a caste of loyal functionaries; on the other, the consciousness of methods and values shared by these functionaries and instilled by them in the minds of their young wards" (32).

²⁰ See, for example, KSA 1: 246, 268, 305. Also KSA 1:295, although here the wording admittedly leaves open the possibility that a "historical sense" other than the modern one could be healthy and worthy of Nietzsche's approval.

²¹ KSA 6:74.

²² KSA 1:250.

²³ While I am making the case in this chapter that this kind of assertion in the early pages of "Uses and Abuses" is *not* ultimately as anti-historical as it sounds, it should be noted that others have seen, in the foreword and section 1, a valorization of "forgetting" that resonates with some of Nietzsche's comments about forgetting elsewhere. Gunter Figal (*Nietzsche: Eine philosophische Einführung*), for example, sees in the animal a "power to forget" (55) that mirrors a power of forgetting needed by humans, for Nietzsche, in order to create. There are clearly passages in the Nietzsche corpus to support this view of forgetting.

With a different vocabulary, Paul de Man also emphasizes the vitality of forgetting, focusing on the early pages of "Uses and Abuses" in order to argue that the young Nietzsche's attitude here embodies "literary modernity." He reads the work as thoroughly anti-historical ("That history is being challenged in a fundamental way is obvious from the start" [*Blindness and Insight*, 145]; "Nietzsche's *ruthless forgetting*, the *blindness* with which he throws

When we investigate further what exactly Nietzsche means by “the historical sense,” however, we see that the phrase in fact names a paradigm that is condemned precisely for obscuring history. As the late chapters of *Uses and Abuses* make clear, the modern “historical sense” is, for Nietzsche, not only an exaggerated concern with the collection of historical facts; it is also the conviction that “history” is a process whereby humanity inevitably progresses toward a rational end – a conviction that Nietzsche sees as fundamentally misguided. This is what is wrong with Hartmann (discussed at length in *Uses and Abuses*) and Hegel (mentioned intermittently), as well as David Strauss, addressed in the first *Untimely Meditation*. The comfortable conviction that history is developing inevitably in the right direction is the opiate of the educated class, rendering individuals smugly confident in the illusory conviction that no fundamental change of course is needed. This conviction is part of what is called the “historical sense.” Nietzsche sees a connection between a teleological view of history and academics’ drive, discussed above, to know the facts of history exhaustively. People believe that “it is in any case a good thing to know everything that has

himself into an action lightened of all previous experience, captures the authentic spirit of modernity” [emphasis mine] (147) (Jonathan Arac and Silke-Maria Weineck have disputed these extreme formulations well, I think).

More recently, Vanessa Lemm reads the importance of the animal’s forgetfulness as an important through-line that helps us understand Nietzsche’s sense of the human being as a struggle between forgetful, creatively productive “animality” and human, remembering “culture.”

I do not wish to discount the importance of forgetting in this and other Nietzsche texts, and will in fact return to this topic in the conclusion of this study. It is my position, however, that the celebration of forgetting importantly needs to be hedged by an acknowledgement of the importance of history, given Nietzsche’s indications, discussed below, the history is properly for the strong.

See:

- Günter Figal. *Nietzsche: Eine philosophische Einführung*. Reclam: Stuttgart 1999.
- Paul de Man. *Blindness and Insight*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1988. 142-165.
- Paul de Man. *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*. Westford, MA: Yale University Press 1979. Pages 79-134.
- Jonathan Arac. “Aesthetics, Rhetoric, History: Paul de Man and the American Use of Nietzsche.” In *Why Nietzsche Now?* O’Hara, Daniel T., ed. Indiana University Press: Bloomington 1985. 417-434.
- Silke-Maria Weineck. *The Abyss Above*, chapter 3: “Nietzsche: The Marketplaces of Madness,” 79-120.
- Vanessa Lemm, *Nietzsche’s Animal Philosophy: Culture, Politics, and the Animality of the Human Being*. Fordham University Press: New York 2009.

transpired, *because* it is too late to do anything better. In this way, the historical sense makes its servants passive and retrospective” [emphasis mine].²⁴

In a way that distantly foreshadows the third book of the *Genealogy of Morals*, here Nietzsche speaks in a way that emphasizes continuity through the death of God. The ideological constant, that which remains after secularization, is the false belief in the inevitable, permanent victory of good over evil, at the end of history. Whatever social form present society takes, this form must somehow serve that ultimate end, in some way, whether the manner in which it serves that end is seen or invisible. The belief in “progress” reinforces the stability of the current order, an order which is moving toward the right goal, as belief in divine providence might have before God’s death. Such complacency is allowed to become suspended only intermittently and on an as-needed basis; it is the rule. “In this sense, we still live in the Middle Ages, and *history [Historie] is still a disguised theology*, as the reverence with which the unscholarly [*unwissenschaftliche*] laity treats the scholarly [*wissenschaftliche*] caste [*Kaste*] is a reverence inherited from the clergy. What one gave to the church before, one now gives to scholarship [*Wissenschaft*], albeit more sparingly” [emphasis mine].²⁵

What I wish to emphasize for the moment, however, is not that this is a socially unhelpful and unhealthy aspect of the “historical sense” for Nietzsche; rather, I want to stress that he sees it as superstitious, ideological, and *inaccurate*. In other words, the phrase “historical sense,” when used in the sense discussed above in referring in part to the teleological worldview of Hartmann and Hegel, refers to a paradigm that actually obscures the reality of history. The “historical sense,” then, does, in one sense, refer to a paradigm that wants to see *more* of history than one ought to want to see (more factual minutiae), but in another sense, it refers to the mentality of someone who

²⁴ KSA 1:305.

²⁵ KSA 1:305.

is fleeing from the reality of history [*Geschichte*] in order to take refuge in a comforting crypto-apocalyptic history [*Historie*] that makes one's life in the present as a social actor significantly less complicated, as it implies that the outcome of history is a foregone conclusion regardless of the individual's actions. In this sense, it must be emphasized that what Nietzsche calls the "historical sense" in 1874 may actually be called "anti-historical," or resistant to history. The modern academic circumvents a real confrontation with history via the "historical sense." Nietzsche is not roundly scoffing at scholarly attempts at historical accuracy; he is, at least in part, claiming that "*Historie*" in its current form actually fails to be as "accurate" as it should be.

The fact that what Nietzsche wants here is *not* a humanity that would confront history *less*, but is, rather, a strong and small select group of individuals who would confront history *more lucidly*, is borne out by much of what Nietzsche ultimately has to say in the work, whose admittedly rather vague, and sometimes ambivalent, proposals for an improved relationship with history certain do not ultimately amount to a suppression of history. The multivalence of the word "*Historie*" is abundantly clear in a passage like the following:

[T]he origin of historical [*historischen*] education – and its inherent, thoroughly radical opposition to the spirit of a "new age," a "modern consciousness" – this origin *must* itself be historically [*historisch*] recognized again; history [*die Historie*] *must* itself solve the problem of history [*das Problem der Historie*], knowledge *must* turn its barbs against itself.²⁶

²⁶ KSA 1:306.

Historie has, throughout the essay, often referred specifically to the academic model of historiography that has been condemned by Nietzsche, the one that has come to be antithetical to “Life.” Yet, the path away from this *Historie* must itself be *historisch*, must be a new kind of *Historie*. To the modern European, thoroughly and inescapably imbued with the historical sense, running away from history is not an option. Nietzsche does admittedly tell us of ancient Greece that “there we find ... the reality of an essentially unhistorical [*unhistorischen*] education and, nevertheless – or rather, as a result – an unspeakably rich and vibrant [*lebensvollen*] education,”²⁷ but the degree to which the Greeks can be an example for us must be curtailed by the degree to which we are fundamentally historically oriented beings, in a way in which they are not.²⁸ Today, only a new kind of confrontation with history can solve the cultural malaise caused by the current, established way of engaging history.

The development of this new historiographical direction turns out to be a project for Nietzsche’s entire career; in the present work, Nietzsche unfortunately gives us few indications of what the new historiographical direction ought to be, besides to tell us that it must be more truthful. He does say that it ought to serve “life,” but how “life” should be understood – not for a more mature Nietzsche, but for the Nietzsche of this text – is left frustratingly unclear. Certainly, we can say that this early Nietzsche believes that life requires creative power. Ultimately, however, a clearer view of what history should offer us will only arrive once Nietzsche gives us a clearer sense of what life is – once, in other words, he conceives of life as embodied will to power. One thing he does indicate in the second *Untimely Meditation*, however, is that his own *Historie*, to the extent that it reveals the *Geschichte* that was hidden by the teleological Hegelian view of history and by

²⁷ KSA 1:307.

²⁸ “One doesn’t *learn* from the Greeks: their manner is too foreign, it is also too fluid [*flüssig*] to affect us imperatively, ‘classically’” (“What I owe to the ancients,” *Twilight of the Idols*, KSA 6:155).

the apocalyptic history that preceded it, will be dangerous. Any *Historie* is dangerous in that it has the potential to weaken values whose history it investigates; the more perceptively history is viewed, the more dangerous the *Historie* in question would be, in this sense. Thus, the history already in place in the nineteenth century is already dangerous to values, but Nietzsche's own *Historie*, if it is to allow a clearer view of *Geschichte* than the academic *Historie* currently practiced, would certainly not be *less* dangerous. The potentially enervating power of a culture's increasingly accurate historical representations are summed up in the following statement: "History [*die Geschichte*] can only be endured by strong characters [*Persönlichkeiten*]; it extinguishes the weak ones completely."²⁹ Only the strong can handle the hard truths of history ("How much blood and horror lies at the bottom of all 'good things',"³⁰ Nietzsche will say much later, in the *Genealogy*, as he traces the origins of *Strafe* and *Schuld*). We should note that here, Nietzsche is talking not about academic *Historie*, but about *Geschichte*, historical events viewed truthfully, as they actually occurred. This difference is important; the unveiling of *Geschichte* is dangerous, but academic *Historie* has precisely failed to reach this level of danger that Nietzsche's would, because its optimism has hindered the obtainment of a real view of *Geschichte*. The truthful confrontation with history should only be undertaken by those strong enough to withstand the experience of the enervation of their values, an enervation which we see already in the modern world's historical engagement with Christianity:

That which one can learn by observing Christianity, which has become smug and unnatural from the effects of a historicizing treatment, until finally an entirely historical treatment – in other words, a just treatment – dissolved it into pure

²⁹ KSA 1:283.

³⁰ KSA 5:297.

knowledge about Christianity and thereby annihilated it, one can also study in everything that lives: that it stops living, when it is dissected all over, and that it lives in a painful and sickly manner, when one begins to perform historical dissections upon it.³¹

Nietzsche's new sort of history will have to be practiced, therefore, by a sort of spiritual elite.³² With this quotation, we can already see how the well-known dynamic described at the outset of this chapter, whereby a culture of aspiration toward self-knowledge that is created by Christianity actually kills Christianity, is a dynamic that involves history. As the Christian culture of "truth," developed over 2,000 years, begins to historically self-evaluate, it becomes a danger to itself.

In this way, far from *simply* wanting to jettison any hope of a factually accurate portrayal of history in favor of artistic *Anschauung* [*Birth of Tragedy*] and "Life" ["Uses and Abuses"] there is a strain of thought present even in the early Nietzsche's writings wherein he criticizes scholarly history not for a lack of artistry but for a lack of clarity: the present age has become unable to really see history precisely because of its scholarly practices of *Historie*. The teleological view of history indicated in the phrase "historical sense" is superstitious, incorrect, "theological." Just as David Strauss's historical optimism had been criticized not only for its psychological implications but also for its naivete, its lack of correspondence with reality, Nietzsche makes argues in §8 of "Uses and Abuses"³³ that teleologically oriented observers of history craft a kind of theodicy that ends up seeing progress and happiness where there is in fact much pain and weakness.

³¹ KSA 1:297.

³² See John Richardson on the enervating effects of looking into the past on *all* values for Nietzsche. "Nietzsche's Problem of the Past" by John Richardson. In *Nietzsche on Time and History*. Ed. Manuel Dries. Berlin & New York: De Gruyter 2008. 87-112.

³³ KSA 1:302-311.

So the stance that Nietzsche is criticizing, the stance named by the phrase “historical sense,” ends up being excessively historical *only by being insufficiently historical* – that is, by running from the reality of history. It chooses superstition, theology, and a covertly Christian and outmoded apocalyptic view of history over historical reality. Only when all of the movements of “history” have been blessed with this secularized theology is it “in any case a good thing to know everything that has transpired,”³⁴ to gather huge stockpiles of historical facts. This fact-based obsession with minute accuracy is the result of an *inaccurate*, optimistic historical paradigm, that of teleological progress.

We have been arguing, then, that, rather than wanting to run away from history, or to give up on the accurate representation of history in favor of an artistic engagement with history, the early Nietzsche does, in some sense, want to get to the bottom of history, to find real history, which has been hidden under the illusions of Christian history and its inheritor, the *Historie* practiced in the 19th-century academy. What, however, is the “real” history, *Geschichte*, for Nietzsche, at this stage of his thought? What history is he claiming to uncover, in the Basel years of the early 1870s? Just as importantly, for a philosopher who continually questions the value of truth and of the “stones of knowledge” that we carry around with us, *why* would we want access to this concealed history?

The development of Nietzsche’s sense of history, as we will see, can be understood beginning from the observation that, at this early stage, Nietzsche’s text gives us only vague answers, answers that needed to be refined. The latter question, that of the value of history, proves easier to answer, if in an incomplete way, than the former: indeed, the title of the second *Untimely Meditation*, “Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben,” suggests that the value of

³⁴ KSA 1:305.

historiography is the paramount concern of the essay. We can say that in both works, history is to be used toward the purpose of revaluation, taking this word in a more modest sense than the sense in which Nietzsche will later use it: through an engagement with history, we can find new values, values that Nietzsche finds preferable to the values of the present. Precisely what values should be served, however, is a question without a stable answer, changing even from 1872 to 1874. In the later chapters of *The Birth of Tragedy*, it becomes clear that Nietzsche's historical work is to serve art, Wagnerian art, a new kind of art that would marry the Apollonian and Dionysian tendencies at work in Greek tragedy; in "Uses and Abuses," *Historie* ought to serve "life," but, as we noted above, what the word "life" means for Nietzsche beyond the obvious is never really explicated. Late in "Uses and Abuses," Nietzsche does speak of historiography as a way of building Schopenhauer's "republic of geniuses,"³⁵ which may seem like an endorsement of the monumental mode of history, whose strengths and weakness have already been analyzed early in the essay. Nietzsche says that "the task of history is to be the mediator between them [the citizens of the republic of geniuses], and thus time and again to induce the creation of great individuals and lend them strength."³⁶ Apparently violating his assertions elsewhere that history has no goal, he claims that "the goal of humanity cannot lie at the end, but only in its highest specimens [*Exemplaren*]."³⁷ So historiography might serve art, genius, and "great individuals." *Historie* practiced the right way is to serve higher values, but the word "values" represents ideals that at this stage remain plural, fluid, and vague.

Equally undecided, in these early texts, is what principle governs historical change, for Nietzsche. Reason, Nietzsche makes clear when speaking of Hegel, Hartmann, and Strauss, does

³⁵ KSA 1:317.

³⁶ KSA 1:317.

³⁷ KSA 1:317.

not motivate history – but what does? The figure of Socrates in *The Birth of Tragedy* is a convenient case to observe here, because Socrates remains an important figure for Nietzsche, allowing us to compare his depictions of Socrates as the “the one turning point [*Wendepunkt*] and vortex of so-called world history”³⁸ both early and late. In *Twilight of the Idols* in 1888, the chapter called “The Problem of Socrates” makes clear that Socrates’s physiological “degeneration,” combined with his ability to perceive the same degeneration around him, was the basis of his cultural influence in Athens: “And Socrates understood that all the world *needed* him – his remedy, his cure, his personal device of self-preservation ... Everywhere the instincts were in anarchy.”³⁹ These are the same terms in which Nietzsche looks back on the Socrates of *The Birth of Tragedy*, in the “Attempt at Self-Criticism” in 1886 and in *Ecce Homo* in 1888. In 1886, Nietzsche claims that the “Socratism” identified as the philosophical culture of Athens is a sign of “decline, exhaustion, sickness, the instincts anarchically coming undone.”⁴⁰ In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche has mixed things to say about his first major book, but he is satisfied to have identified “Socrates as a *décadent*,” as a sign of “degenerating instinct, which turns itself against life with subterranean vengefulness.”⁴¹ Socrates as a motor of historical change, then, is understood primarily as a kind of physiological specimen, a kind of sickness, who at the same time offers a viable strategy for dealing with the sickness that he is by turning life against itself as it stifles the instincts, making him a parallel figure, for the older Nietzsche, to the early Christians. Socrates, in 1886 (“Attempt at Self-Criticism”) and 1888 (*Twilight*, *Ecce Homo*), is a physiological turning point, *Wendepunkt*, of history. It may be, however, that this physiological reading of the Socrates of *The Birth of Tragedy* is a revisionist one. In the original text of the *Birth of Tragedy* (as opposed to the “Attempt

³⁸ KSA 1:100.

³⁹ KSA 6:71.

⁴⁰ KSA 1:12.

⁴¹ KSA 6:311.

at Self-Criticism”), Socrates is *first* introduced as the covert genius behind an *aesthetic* principle governing the work of Euripides: “everything must be conscious to be beautiful.”⁴² As the main focus turns to Socrates in §13, Nietzsche emphasizes that Socrates represents a departure from the instincts. He does not say, however, as he will later, that Socrates departs from the instincts out of a deep sense of his own decadence – that he departs from the instincts, so to speak, as a matter of instinct. In this sense, the Socrates of the *Birth of Tragedy* does not obviously stand as an instance of (weak) physiology as an ultimate source of ideology, as Nietzsche later makes him out to be, and may even be an example of ideology overcoming physiology. Yet in the closing words of the section, Nietzsche does suggest that Socrates’s power over the youth of Athens is at least in part erotic in nature, finally offering us a description of Socrates that clearly resonates with the later Nietzsche’s sense of him.⁴³ On what plane does Socrates operate as a “turning point” of history, in 1872 – the aesthetic, the intellectual, the erotic? Ultimately, in the 1872 text itself, as opposed to Nietzsche’s later commentaries upon it, it is not clear that “degenerating instinct,” degenerate physiology, is what holds Socrates together as a turning point of history. What *does* hold him together as such a turning point – what exactly is the ultimate basis of Socrates’s historical influence - is difficult to say. Certainly, he represents a departure from the instincts, but what ultimately motivates this departure? His physical disposition, or simply his convictions, or something else?

From this brief observation of Nietzsche’s sense of “history” in these early texts, we can say the following about Nietzsche’s development on this topic. The issue of *why* we engage history, and how historical observation can change our values, will remain a concern for Nietzsche, but this question will be deepened and complicated by his developing sense of where we are as

⁴² KSA 1:87.

⁴³ KSA 1:91.

inhabitants of the world that comes after the death of God. His sense of where we are historically will in turn be informed by his answer, not yet given in the early texts, with regard to the governing force of history.

Nietzsche's Physiological History

This governing force, for the later Nietzsche, turns out to be the body. To think historically, Nietzsche will eventually say, means to think physiologically. Nietzsche's ways of naming the body are quite numerous: he speaks of "the body" [*der Leib*], "drives" [*Triebe*], "physiological" forces, or, without using those words, he speaks of nutrition, sex drive, exhaustion, or blood lines. The link between these two terms, however – between the body and history – has seldom been thematized, despite being made explicit by Nietzsche himself, especially in his later texts. From *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* onwards, the governing force of history is the body. To think historically, Nietzsche says repeatedly in the mid and late 1880s, means to think physiologically. Nietzsche's ways of naming the body are quite numerous: he speaks of "the body" [*der Leib*], "drives" [*Triebe*], "physiological" forces, or, without using those words, he speaks of nutrition, sex drive, exhaustion, or blood lines. The body as the prism of history [*Geschichte*] is an enduring theme, and Nietzsche's sense of history cannot be understood without reference to the body. I would like to briefly establish the fact of this link via citation of the full-length works beginning with *Zarathustra*, simply to demonstrate its persistence. *Zarathustra* identifies the body as history's active agent: "And so the body [*der Leib*] goes through history, a changing entity [*ein Werdender*] and a fighter."⁴⁴ The spirit, meanwhile, is relegated to a secondary role: "And the spirit, what is it

⁴⁴ KSA 4:98.

to [the body]?” Merely the “herald, comrade, and echo of its [the body’s] struggles and victories.”⁴⁵ In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche performs the “natural history [*Naturgeschichte*] of morals” as the deciphering of “a sign language of the aspects,”⁴⁶ thereby leading moral history back to the body. He declares that “the will to power,” which is the “essence” of the “world,”⁴⁷ is the ground of “exploitation” as a “basic organic function,” and that it is the “primordial fact of all history.”⁴⁸ Of all of Nietzsche’s works, the *Genealogy* is the most obvious and explicit in its effort to narrate history as corporeal history. The story he tells there is the story of the cultural and moral manifestations of different physiological foundations: on the one hand, the losers of history, “the knightly-aristocratic” class whose “value judgments have as their prerequisite a powerful corporeality [*Leiblichkeit*], a thriving, rich, even overflowing health” [emphasis mine],⁴⁹ and, on the other hand, the winners, those weak bodies who must attack the good health of their betters in order to survive, and who ultimately turn their enervating crusade against the body upon themselves and succeed in gaining an upper hand by sending “a course of poison through the entire body [*Leib*] of humanity.”⁵⁰ In the foreword to *Twilight of the Idols*, to “sound out” the declining idols of the Western world means “posing questions with the hammer and, maybe, hearing as an answer that well-known hollow sound that speaks of *bloated entrails*” [emphasis mine], suggesting a physiological basis for the enervation of values and the historical plunge into nihilism.⁵¹ Then, in the chapter on “‘Reason’ in Philosophy,” as Nietzsche accounts for philosophers’ resistance to history, their lack of “historical sense” (which here has a positive meaning⁵²), he concludes his

⁴⁵ KSA 4:98. Cf. “On the Despisers of the Body,” in which the spirit is merely an “instrument” of the body.

⁴⁶ KSA 5:107.

⁴⁷ KSA 5:107.

⁴⁸ KSA 5:208.

⁴⁹ KSA 5:266.

⁵⁰ KSA 5:270.

⁵¹ KSA 6:57-58.

⁵² While one might want to contest this claim by reference to other published texts, my position is that the valence of this phrase changes, for Nietzsche, throughout his career. While the phrase perhaps receives its most negative

summary of the typical philosopher's paradigm with the words, "And away with the body, above all,"⁵³ thereby linking a stance that willfully resists sustained contemplation of the body to a suppression of becoming [*Werden*] and history.⁵⁴ In *Antichrist*, similarly (although speaking with a far broader chronology here, observing a process that begins with ancient Jews and continues with modern philosophy), we hear the story of the creation of a disembodied history, of the "falsification of history [*Geschichts-Fälschung*]" performed by "priests" and then "philosophers," whereby "historical reality" is "translated" into a history governed by a "salvation-mechanism [*Heils-Mechanismus*]" and then an "ethical world order [*sittliche Weltordnung*]."⁵⁵ Even personal "history" is physiological: Nietzsche insists, in *Ecce Homo*, on telling the story of his own personal intellectual development in large part as the story of how he has been affected by "nutrition, place, climate, rest,"⁵⁶ sickness, and subsequent recovery. Throughout these later works, the corporeal and the historical are intertwined through the key Nietzschean concept of "decadence," which names both a chronological situation (belatedness in history) and a physiological state ("the instinct of denial [*Verneinung*], of decay [*Verderbniss*]"⁵⁷).

In this sense, the specific direction in which the later Nietzsche misreads the Socrates of 1872 is telling: Nietzsche, looking back in the late 1880s, wants his first major work to have contributed to this physiological reading of history, but this requires a rather forced reading of *The*

connotation in 1873 in "Uses and Abuses of History for Life," the first time it is used, and its most positive meaning in Nietzsche's last productive year, it would not be right to speak, here, of linear progressive development towards a more positive meaning. For example, *Human, All Too Human*, published in 1878, describes a lack of a historical sense as the "hereditary defect [*Erbfehler*]" of all philosophers (KSA 2:24). Then, in 1887's *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche's treatment of the "historical sense" appears to be decidedly ambivalent (KSA 5:158), before 1888, when it almost seems to sum up what sets Nietzsche apart from the tradition, in his own mind.

⁵³ KSA 6:75.

⁵⁴ As I hope I make clear in the following discussion, for Nietzsche, one philosophizes *from* the body and *for* the body, regardless of the ideological stance a philosopher takes *toward* the body – even when this ideological stance is a stance of suppression. We might draw a rough comparison here to Freudian drives that must be refracted, suppressed, or diverted, but that cannot necessarily be gotten rid of via the adoption of a paradigm that denigrates them.

⁵⁵ KSA 6:195.

⁵⁶ KSA 6:295.

⁵⁷ KSA 6:330.

Birth of Tragedy. Now, what it means, in a more substantive sense, to offer a “physiological reading of history,” what precisely it means to read history through the body, will be fleshed out only later in the chapter (see the discussion below of the body as will to power). For the moment, I wish only to trace the broadest contours of Nietzsche’s changing stated position on how to read history and, momentarily, to show what shape the broader Nietzschean narrative of Western history will take, from a birds eye view. Through the changing interpretation of Socrates, we can see why the later Nietzsche sometimes accuses the earlier Nietzsche of being “idealist.” I take this pejorative word to be extremely broadly defined in Nietzsche, to indicate any paradigm that takes there to be a human reality that is not bound up with the body – at one point he defines idealism as “ignorance *in physiologicis*.”⁵⁸ In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche says that *The Birth of Tragedy* “smells offensively Hegelian, it is merely in some formulas tainted with the funerary perfume [*Leichenbitterparfum*] of Schopenhauer. An ‘idea’ – the opposition Dionysian-Apollonian – translated into metaphysics; history [*Geschichte*] itself as the development of this ‘idea.’”⁵⁹ “The idea” that motivates historical development in the earlier, misguided text is not rational, but aesthetic (indeed, on the same page, Nietzsche discusses *Vernünftigkeit* as entering Greek culture as a world-historical force only with Socrates). *The Birth of Tragedy* is idealist to the later Nietzsche⁶⁰ because it imagines artistic genius as history’s redeeming force, without tying this force strictly to physiological conditions. Nietzsche claims, in *Ecce Homo*, to have overcome idealism only with *Human, All Too Human*,⁶¹ suggesting that the *Untimely Meditations*, as well,

⁵⁸ KSA 6:283.

⁵⁹ KSA 6:310.

⁶⁰ This analysis may appear to stand in some tension with Nietzsche’s reflections on Socrates’s role in the work, discussed above. If idealism really is “ignorance *in physiologicis*” (a characterization that comes directly from *Ecce Homo*), then Nietzsche seems to absolve his earlier self of idealism with regard to *The Birth of Tragedy*’s treatment of Socrates. Here, though, Nietzsche is talking explicitly about “the opposition Dionysian-Apollonian,” and not about Socrates.

⁶¹ KSA 6:322-323.

are written by an author not yet free from the influence of idealism. Among the signs of idealism are “the ideal,” “genius,” “belief,” and “conviction”⁶² as celebrated terms. The Nietzsche of “Uses and Abuses” may still have put too much emphasis on “beliefs” and “convictions,” inasmuch as he seemed to hope that changing the beliefs and convictions of his time and place could lead to cultural regeneration. As we can see in the treatment of the slaves of the *Genealogy* or *Twilight*’s Socrates, however, beliefs and convictions do not lead cultural change, but merely support the historical direction favored by a certain physiological orientation (in the case of the slaves and Socrates, that of decadence).

It is the body as the guiding force of history that unifies Western history into a coherence that allows us to speak of *a* history of Western culture for the mature Nietzsche. Athens and Jerusalem, the traditional fountainheads of Western culture, are opposed ideologically, as the respective sources of rationality and irrational faith. Physiologically speaking, however, they look similar, according to Nietzsche. To be “*absurdly rational* [*absurd-vernünftig*]”⁶³ to the point of stifling the instincts, on the one hand, and to renounce the body in the ascetic posture demanded by irrational faith, on the other, are both decadent denials of the body, which take place with a kind of physiological necessity, and which correspond to historical epochs of decline. This is the basis of why “Christianity is Platonism for the ‘people.’”⁶⁴ It is important to note how early these renunciations of the body emerge in Western history, and how decisive they are for the course of the rest of this history. Sometimes Nietzsche speaks as if history is simply the battleground of different physiologies that take part in a back-and-forth struggle for supremacy, saying, for instance, that the “real opposition” of history is the one between healthy, life-affirming instincts

⁶² KSA 6:323.

⁶³ KSA 6:72.

⁶⁴ KSA 5:12.

and “the degenerating instinct” which has “Christianity, the philosophy of Schopenhauer, in a certain sense already the philosophy of Plato, the entirety of idealism as typical forms.”⁶⁵ We should not allow such a way of putting things, however, to hide the fact that there is a clear directionality to the Nietzsche’s physiological history of the West, and that it is the direction of decline: “Plato ... wanted ... to prove to himself that reason and instinct of themselves approach one goal, that of the good, of ‘God,’ and since Plato, all theologians and philosophers are on the same track, meaning that in moral things *up till now* it has been instinct, or what the Christians call ‘faith,’ or what I call ‘the herd,’ *that has won*” [emphases mine].⁶⁶ The “herd’s” “instinctive” attempt to submit the drives of the body (its instincts) to reason (or what it calls “reason”) and faith has generally been successful. Time and again in Nietzsche’s work, we see that slavish and decadent life forms tend to win out. Greek tragedy gives way to Socratic dialectic; Roman nobility succumbs to slavish Christianity; European nobility loses ground to democracy. Gilles Deleuze memorably observed that the “idea of a historical degeneration of cultures occupies a prominent place in Nietzsche’s work... It is the source of Nietzsche’s disappointment: culture begins ‘Greek’ but becomes ‘German’.”⁶⁷ In summary, “Nietzsche presents the triumph of reactive forces as something essential to man and history.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ KSA 6:311.

⁶⁶ KSA 5:112-113. “Instinct” here means “herd instinct,” which explains why Nietzsche here says that instinct “wins” historically, whereas he elsewhere characterizes Platonism and Christianity as forces that suppress instinct. In such passages, “instinct” means, more generally, the drives and appetites of the body.

⁶⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson. New York: Columbia University Press 1983, 139.

Since I am quoting Deleuze’s take on Nietzschean history more or less favorably and have emphasized Nietzsche’s opposition to a teleological history, and since I have mentioned Hegel in particular, I want to make clear that I do not endorse Deleuze’s belief, largely unsupported by the corpus, that Nietzsche consciously viewed his own work as a whole as a revolt against Hegel, or that he formed his own sense of history with Hegel in constant view as an antagonist. Daniel Breazeale shows several ways in which the Nietzsche text works against this thesis. See Daniel Breazeale, “The Hegel-Nietzsche Problem,” *Nietzsche-Studien* 4 (1975): 146-164.

⁶⁸ Deleuze 166. Regarding the “reactive,” see *Zur Genealogie der Moral* §11-12. KSA 5:308-316. Focus on the “active” and “reactive” in Nietzsche was popularized by Deleuze in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*.

This history of decline, which is initiated with the births of Platonism and Christianity, two ideologies that locate value away from the reality of the body, culminates in the death of God, the event with which this decline ends in nihilism, the moment when the promise of a realm of human reality that is independent of the earthly body becomes unbelievable. Heidegger rightly emphasizes, however, that there is a sense in which nihilism was the fate of Western values from the beginning, for Nietzsche. Nietzsche says in his notes, “What does nihilism mean? – *That the highest values devalue themselves* [*Dass die obersten Werthe sich entwerthen*]. The goal is lacking; the answer to the ‘Why?’ is lacking.”⁶⁹ If, as Heidegger insists on remembering, Western values have devalued *themselves*, then the germ of this devaluation was there all along.⁷⁰ Platonism and Christianity had adopted the strategy of protecting the body by turning away from the body, renouncing the drives in favor of a rationality that would lead to the “true world” of the non-sensual Ideas or an asceticism that would lead to the “true world”⁷¹ of a post-fleshly existence.⁷² The maintenance of Christianity’s ideological stance taken against the body required a certain ruse; the fact that the renunciation of the body was in fact undertaken out of an instinct of self-preservation was incompatible with the ascetic ideology of Christianity itself, which demanded that the ascetic ethic be carried out for selfless reasons. The strategy of preservation-of-the-body-via-renunciation-of-the-body was doomed from the beginning inasmuch as it was built on a concealment of physiological reality, the reality of the will to power, which rules out entirely selfless motivations. This concealment becomes untenable in the course of Christianity’s “two-thousand-year-long

⁶⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht* §2 (Paderborn: Voltmedia 2007), 14.

⁷⁰ On the importance of the “*sich*” in “*sich entwerthen*,” see Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*. In *Gesamtausgabe* 6.1 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann 1996), 23-24. See also: Martin Heidegger, “Nietzsches Wort: «Gott ist tot»,” in *Holzwege*. 8th edition (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann 2003), 222-226.

⁷¹ See “How the ‘True World’ Finally Became a Fable” in *Twilight of the Idols*. KSA 6:80-81.

⁷² I am repeating what I take to be Nietzsche’s view here; whether it is so clear as Nietzsche thinks it is that Christianity renounces the body has been brought into question. See, for example, Emmanuel Falque, *The Metamorphosis of Finitude*, Chapter 4, “Resurrection and the Over-Resurrection of the Body,” trans. George Hughes. New York: Fordham University Press 2012, 47-61.

breeding of truth,”⁷³ which exposes lies, even Christianity’s own. The death of God thus represents the dawning awareness of the physiological foundations of the “true world,” and this awareness causes the collapse of the true world. The body’s coming to self-awareness and the demise of Christian religion thus catalyze each other, as the “breeding of truth” supplants and dissolves the “true world.”

We have so far been observing Nietzsche’s history from a bird’s eye view, articulating the shape of this history, and have not yet addressed the all-important topic of what the body *is*, for Nietzsche, yet already we can make some preliminary observations about how Nietzsche understands his physiological history as a response to Christian history (and the history of 18th-century idealists, whom Nietzsche regards as latter-day Christian theologians⁷⁴). While Marx claims to bring history from the domain of the ideal to the domain of the material, Nietzsche claims to rescue history from the domain of the spiritual and put it in the domain of the physiological. As by Marx, the move from a supersensuous realm of historical occurrence to a realm taken to be more earthly is associated with a willingness to look at hard truths, a certain mettle that is required to reject comforting fairy tales. “History [*die Geschichte*] can only be endured by strong characters; it extinguishes the weak ones completely,”⁷⁵ a very young Nietzsche says, in the 1873 “Uses and Abuses of History for Life”; “How much blood and horror lies at the bottom of all ‘good things’,”⁷⁶ he will say much later, in the 1886 *Genealogy*. Nietzsche presents his own willingness to read history through the body, then, as the hard-headed, clear-eyed stance of the courageous and intellectually honest post-death-of-God thinker.

⁷³ KSA 5:409.

⁷⁴ Nietzsche associates idealists and Christianity at many junctures, particularly in *Antichrist*, but the specific association of idealist *histories* with Christian *history* comes in the first two *Untimely Meditations*, “David Strauss the Confessor and Writer” and “On the Uses and Abuses of History for Life” (KSA 1:157-242 and KSA 1:243-334, respectively).

⁷⁵ KSA 1:283.

⁷⁶ KSA 5:297.

We can begin to sense how Augustine's *City of God* might complicate the juxtaposition Nietzsche invites between his own historical lens and that of Christianity with the following observation: the historical stance taken up by the believer at the birth of God's city is, on Augustine's telling, just as difficult, just as much a stance that "can only be endured by strong characters," as is the historical stance adopted by Nietzsche after the death of God. Furthermore, what makes that stance so hard is a certain dawning understanding of the body – what Nietzsche calls the asceticism of the religious. We will pause that discussion until later, however.

For now, the more pressing question is that of the identity of the Nietzschean body. To identify Nietzsche's history as physiological history tells us very little if we do not know what Nietzsche's "physiology" is, what "the body," "*der Leib*," means for Nietzsche. Indeed, it seems possible to separate out the most influential strains of Nietzsche commentary by beginning with an observation of their sense of the Nietzschean "body." Nietzsche says, "*der Leib philosophiert*,"⁷⁷ and nearly everybody emphasizes the importance of the body for Nietzsche, but this can mean many different things. Heidegger sees the Nietzschean body as the descendent of the Cartesian ego, a subject creating a world in representation.⁷⁸ Nietzsche's emphasis on the centrality of the body thus allows him to paint Nietzsche as the historical culmination of metaphysics, wherein the subject comes to ultimate domination as representation comes to be subsumed by the will.⁷⁹ On the other end of the spectrum, the Anglophone naturalist readings of Nietzsche of the last thirty years or so see Nietzsche's "physiology" as tending toward that of the

⁷⁷ KSA 10:226.

⁷⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Gesamtausgabe* 6.2, 165-168.

⁷⁹ See Bret W. Davis's rather neutral condensed summary of Nietzsche's role, for Heidegger, in this transition. Bret W. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit*, Chapter 6: "The Mature Critique of the Will" (Evanston: Northwestern University Press 2007), 146-184.

For a discussion that is, on the other hand, ultimately somewhat resistant to Heidegger's sense of Nietzsche's place in this history (despite being largely Heideggerian as regards the terms in which Nietzsche is discussed), see Didier Franck, *The Shadow of God*, especially the Introduction (3-40) and Part 2, "The Shadow of God" (79-126).

modern natural sciences, turning Nietzsche into someone more like Darwin than the experience of reading his work suggests, and making his “physiology” into a kind of biology.⁸⁰ An insistence on the pre-phenomenal status of Nietzschean “drives” can lead to a sense of Nietzschean physiology that shares much with Freudian psychology, as in the case of Eric Blondel, who sees Nietzsche trying to unearth a “body” of drives that is submerged from view like the Freudian id.⁸¹ Contrary to this emphasis on the aspect of the body that escapes visibility, Michel Foucault, appropriating Nietzschean genealogy in *Discipline and Punish*, sees a body that functions as the object of the inscriptions of social power, a body capable of being ostentatiously and intentionally visible.⁸² Nietzsche’s insistence on the body as the result of genetic inheritance made him ripe for National Socialist readings, which read the “strength” or “weakness” of noble or slavish bodies in racial terms.⁸³

⁸⁰ See Brian Leiter’s “Nietzsche’s Naturalism Revisited” for a discussion of some of the different ways in which Nietzsche interpretations have been “naturalist.” Brian Leiter, “Nietzsche’s Naturalism Reconsidered,” *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*, ed. John Richardson and Ken Gemes (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013), 576-598.

⁸¹ Eric Blondel, *Nietzsche: The Body and Culture*.

⁸² Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan. 2nd edition. Toronto and New York: Vintage 1995.

⁸³ Steven E. Aschheim, in his *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1890-1990*, emphasizes “decline” and “the body” as themes in his cataloging of Nazi appropriations of Nietzsche. “The envisaged Nietzschean social order also entailed a positive eugenic programme to create the suitable masterly type. Breeding and selection in the service of higher development, [Kurt] Kassler reminded his readers, permeated all of Nietzsche’s writings, and was linked to his deep concern with decadence, degeneration, and decline. To be sure, Nietzsche was wrong to believe that there were no original pure races – only races that had become pure. Yet he still led the struggle against the deterioration of European blood” (244).

And “[w]hoever like Nietzsche took the body as a guide, [Alfred] Bäumler proclaimed, could not be an individualist; nor could anyone who thought historically. One only had to consult the *Genealogy of Morals* to see that Nietzsche talked in historical categories such as species, races, nations, and classes” (249-250). Steven E. Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1890-1990*. See especially Chapter 8, “Nietzsche in the Third Reich” (232-271).

David Farrell Krell suggests that Heidegger, in formulating his influential reading of Nietzsche, accepts the framing of many questions of Nietzsche interpretation as posed by National Socialist readers such as Bäumler. Krell goes so far as to suggest that the “assertion that the concept of will to power is the systematic ‘creative center’ of Nietzsche’s thought” came to Heidegger from Bäumler (270). See David Farrell Krell, “Analysis,” *Nietzsche Volume III: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics* by Martin Heidegger, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper Collins 1991), 255-276.

This list is not complete;⁸⁴ the point is that “the body” that stars in Nietzsche’s history is not an entity whose exact identity is self-evident, and the way we decide to understand the body as it appears in Nietzsche’s work will have important consequences.

An exhaustive discussion of the merits and demerits of each of these readings of Nietzsche’s body, and a conclusive decision as to which is best, would be at least a book-length project, but we can at least briefly observe that Nietzsche’s physiological history as I have outlined it – if one does indeed accept that this history should be called physiological, as I argue – is more compatible with some ways of viewing Nietzschean physiology than it is with others. For example, one position on the Nietzschean body that does not work well with Nietzschean history is that of the basic naturalist position, for reasons I will briefly explain here. The physiological decline of Western history does not proceed without interruption for Nietzsche – we can note the Renaissance as a period of relative health. As a general rule, however, ancient Greeks and Romans are healthier than the Christians and modern humans who replace them, until finally the “last man” (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*) gives us a picture of the culmination of the historical process of enervation. Physiological configurations change, then, for Nietzsche, over the relatively short course of Western history, not over the far longer course of biological history as observed, for example, by Darwin. Moreover, localized Nietzschean narratives of physiological decline take place on far shorter time intervals (for example, the decline that takes place in Greece in the short period of

⁸⁴ We might, for instance, add the examples of the readings performed by theologians and others interested in Nietzsche’s confrontation with Christianity, and of the readings in gender studies. For readers like Didier Franck (*Nietzsche and the Shadow of God*) and Emmanuel Falque (*The Metamorphosis of Finitude*), Nietzsche’s heterogeneous body, resurrected into the same reality in the eternal return, is contrasted with the Christian body, unified by the concept of the soul, resurrected into a transfigured reality.

For some gender theorists like Judith Butler, the mutability and nonessentialism of Nietzsche’s physiology is attractive, since it opens the door to non-essentialism about gender (Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 2nd edition. Routledge: New York 1990, 28). (C.f. Jacques Derrida: “There is no such thing as a woman, as a truth in itself of woman in itself. That much, at least, Nietzsche has said.” [Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles*, trans. Barbara Harlow. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1979, 101.])

from Aeschulus [520s-450s B.C.E.] or even from Sophocles [490s-400s B.C.E] to Socrates [470-399 B.C.E.] is dramatic and is, for the mature Nietzsche (as evidenced in his later reflections on *The Birth of Tragedy* and on the meaning of Socrates¹), clearly “physiological;” the “powerful corporeality [*Leiblichkeit*], a thriving, rich, even overflowing health”⁸⁵ of the Roman aristocracy is overcome by Christian weakness over a longer, but still relatively short, period of time). To regard Nietzschean physiology as armchair human biology, as do some naturalist readers of Nietzsche, renders such narratives embarrassingly wrongheaded, as they are easily disproven by the biological observation that dramatic changes in the biological human body require periods of time far longer than the whole of recorded history. Either Nietzsche’s history of the body observes a body defined differently than the body that these naturalists see, or it is not worth taking seriously.

To get back to the matter at hand, however, our central concern is the body that is the guiding thread of Nietzsche’s history – and here I would like to point to the reading of the Nietzschean body that I think is best equipped to account for the history-body link. This reading is that of Eric Blondel, as put forward in his *Nietzsche: The Body and Culture*, originally published in French in 1986. Blondel’s focus is different than ours ultimately is here, and so I will briefly circumscribe the scope of Blondel’s project, so as not to seem to ascribe to him claims that are not his. Blondel does not demonstrate any sustained interest in the question of Nietzsche’s history, which is central to our concerns here. He deals only in a limited way with the diachronic Nietzsche, with Nietzsche’s specific historical claims, or with the general shape of Nietzschean history, dedicating his attention to questions of methodology (although he does initially frame his sense of Nietzsche’s task in historical terms, saying that Nietzsche is “contesting a culture, the

⁸⁵ KSA 5:266.

‘Christianity-Platonism’ that ends up as ‘modernity’” and that he “wishes to be the herald, beyond the death of God and nihilism, of a new culture”⁸⁶).

With Blondel, we can begin to see how the Nietzsche of the middle and late periods begins to addressing the second *Untimely Meditation*’s vexing silence on the status of “life.” For Blondel, the goal of Nietzschean genealogy is to understand the body, to “[make] the body speak.”⁸⁷ The body, however, understood as a hierarchy of “drives,” does not offer itself up to direct observation. Drives comprise the body as an entity that is always ecstatically, tragically⁸⁸ pursuing a satisfaction that is constitutively beyond reach. Blondel cites *Dawn*, in which Nietzsche tells us that “the world is desire.”⁸⁹ Built into Nietzschean “nature” is a “gap” between desire and its fulfillment, a gap we can read in the “zur” of “*Wille zur Macht*,” and which makes all existence “tragic.”⁹⁰ “Culture” is the doomed project of overcoming this gap; “a culture” would thus be a particular way of carrying out this project. “Western culture,” as Platonism and Christianity, we could say, carries out the project of overcoming the gap in nature via the ontological denigration of the drives, excluding them from the true world. We indirectly trace the movements of the body (the process of “genealogy”) by observing the text of culture (a task whereby Nietzsche broadens the domain of “philology”).⁹¹ Life, then, is the tragically constituted will to power, founded as body and expressed as the “text” of culture.

⁸⁶ Blondel 23.

⁸⁷ Blondel 74.

⁸⁸ Blondel 47.

⁸⁹ Blondel 45.

⁹⁰ Blondel 47.

⁹¹ Our observation of the drives must be indirect, and the narrative we develop about the evolution or reconfiguration of the drives through time must be based on such indirect observation: Freud suggests something similar in the later sections of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in which he offers a brief speculative history of life told in terms of the drives, but then admits of the death drive, which has been central to his story, that “direct evidence of it becomes very difficult” because of the psychic forces fighting for the cause of life. See Sigmund Freud, *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (Suavis 2017), 17-42, 42. Translation mine.

The word “text” here is crucial, for Blondel. “Text” indicates a plurality of meaning in the body’s manifestation in culture, a plurality reflected in the plurality of the body itself:

Text is here defined as something that differs from discourse, where discourse is understood as a signifying whole that tends to create a fixed, established and univocal link between the signifier and the signified... Nietzsche’s text creates a *movement* of pluralization in relation to discourse, a movement produced by a *labour* whose law is the unifying and pluralizing imaginary order of the metaphor.⁹²

This movement, however, is not an unrestrained one. Nietzsche’s task is to reinterpret humanity into “the terrible basic text of *Homo natura*,”⁹³ and there is indeed such a *basic* text, the body, although it manifests itself only as culture, which is already an interpretation of the body. “Culture” can never break free of the physiological drives of which it is an expression. The drive configuration of different groups (e.g. “women,” “Greeks,” or “Christians”) must result in different cultural (including “ideological”) expressions:

Germans, Christians, philosophers, Jews, the revolution, women, Greeks, the English, etc., are all cultural phenomena that are endlessly analysed and questioned by Nietzsche, proving that Nietzsche never stopped bringing his questioning to bear on a reality outside the text, outside discourse, on a given ‘world’ that is as much the reality of drives serving as a background to genealogy as a network of ideological relationships operating between idols. The attempt to efface this given, as the reality

⁹² Blondel 22.

⁹³ KSA 5:169.

to be discovered beneath the masks of the ideals, seems neo-idealist ... [the] reality [of the body, an individual, a being, an existence, in short, Life] is no doubt cut across by the ideal ... it none the less always remains the origin of all thought. Therefore, *reducing Nietzsche's thought to that of the play of signifiers, means forgetting that genealogy insistently reminds us of the bodily and vital ground from which all discourse speaks ... This is pure and simple idealism. [emphasis mine]*⁹⁴

In a later essay,⁹⁵ Blondel articulates the similarity he sees between Nietzsche and Freud, for both of whom the “reality of humanity as creatures of affects implies another ‘logic’ than that of reason.” Thus, Nietzsche “insist[s] ... on the theory of drives and psychology of the ‘body’ and ‘instincts’ (or on physiology),”⁹⁶ and seeks to recover the body by fighting through the “rhetorical illusions of morality and metaphysics,”⁹⁷ which are constructed in the realm of consciousness and seek to hide true knowledge of the drives. On this view, “physiology” and “psychology” overlap in Nietzsche, as the attempt to observe the body involves studying the “illusions” that shroud it, so that we can see through them to their bodily foundation.

If we go beyond Blondel's own scholarly project with Nietzsche and apply his observations to Nietzschean history, we can say the following: Western history since Socrates and Plato, on the one hand, and the birth of Christianity, on the other hand, turns out to be a history of repression, of a strategic forgetting of the body via ascetic reason or ascetic Christian morality. This is not to say, of course, that Platonic philosophy and Christianity reject the existence of the drives, but the

⁹⁴ Blondel, *The Body and Culture* 53.

⁹⁵ Eric Blondel, “Nietzsche and Freud, or: How to Be within Philosophy While Criticizing It from Without.” In *Nietzsche and Depth Psychology*. Ed. Jacob Golomb, Weaver Santaniello, and Ronald Lehrer. Albany, State University of New York Press 1999. 171-180.

⁹⁶ Blondel, “Nietzsche and Freud,” 176.

⁹⁷ Blondel, *Nietzsche: The Body and Culture* 136.

drives take on a derivative, fallen ontological status, expelled from the true world. They are a distraction from the truth. Platonism and Christianity initiate Western history as an epoch of bodily weakness and play out as the strategy on the part of the weak of making this weakness general by spreading an ideological rejection of the instincts.

Blondel's sense of the physiological allows us to understand what it means to say that, for Nietzsche, Western history is a period of physiological enervation.⁹⁸ It is a period of the "decline, exhaustion, sickness" of the drives (as Nietzsche says of the Athens of Socrates),⁹⁹ which then turn against themselves, forcing themselves underground, imagining a higher reality that is independent of them, forcing themselves into a mere shadow reality. Socratic dialectic and Christian religion are both developed as spiritualizations of open, physical combat.¹⁰⁰ Nietzsche says in "The Problem of Socrates" that "one chooses dialectic only when one has no other resource," adding that, like Socrates, "the Jews were therefore dialecticians."¹⁰¹ But "physical combat," if it names what is avoided in both cases, does not mean entirely the same thing in the two examples. The Jewish case is more straightforward: any revolt against the military domination of Rome has been shown to be hopeless, not only because of the extent of Roman power but also because the Jewish people is not the earlier warrior people admired by Nietzsche. Socrates, on the other hand, is a

⁹⁸ Blondel, to be clear, never makes such a claim, although I think that this assertion is entirely consistent with his stance on the Nietzschean body.

⁹⁹ KSA 1:12.

¹⁰⁰ Nietzsche says in the chapter "The Problem of Socrates" of *Twilight of the Idols* that "one chooses dialectic only when one has no other resource," adding that, like Socrates, "the Jews were therefore dialecticians" (KSA 6:70). But "physical combat," if it names what is avoided in both cases, does not mean entirely the same thing in the two examples. The Jewish case is more straightforward: any revolt against the military domination of Rome has been shown to be hopeless, not only because of the extent of Roman power but also because the Jewish people is not the earlier warrior people admired by Nietzsche. Socrates, on the other hand, is a wrestler and a great soldier, and so the physical mark of his degeneracy is not a lack of brute muscularity. Socrates was "ugly," and "ugliness is commonly enough the expression of a crossbred development, one stunted through crossbreeding. In the other case it appears as the *declining* development" (KSA 6:68). The physical combat to which Socrates is ill-fitted is erotic combat, as noble, healthy taste spurns this ugliness. Through dialectic, Socrates "fascinated" and "discovered a new kind of *agon*," an erotic *agon* based in verbal sparring. By changing the field of combat on which the erotic *agon* is fought, Socrates is erotically successful: "Socrates was ... a great *eroticist*" (KSA 6:71).

¹⁰¹ KSA 6:70.

wrestler and a great soldier, and so the physical mark of his degeneracy is not a lack of brute muscularity. Socrates was “ugly,” and “ugliness is commonly enough the expression of a crossbred development, one stunted through crossbreeding. In the other case it appears as the *declining* development.”¹⁰² The physical combat to which Socrates is ill-fitted is erotic combat, as noble, healthy taste spurns this ugliness. Through dialectic, Socrates “fascinated” and “discovered a new kind of *agon*,” an erotic *agon* based in verbal sparring. By changing the field of combat on which the erotic *agon* is fought, Socrates is erotically successful: “Socrates was ... a great *eroticist*.”¹⁰³ The open self-assertion of this drive to physical empowerment is no longer conducive to survival or to the satisfaction of the drives. In both cases, the open self-assertion of the quest for physical empowerment is no longer conducive to survival or to the satisfaction of the drives. The will to power must therefore make the historical decision to go underground, and to lie to others and, ultimately, itself, in order to legitimize the battlefield it has chosen, asserting the moral or the rational as the base of what is in fact physiological. The fleshly human being, suffering from her weakness, seeks to escape corporeal reality by “lying her way out” of it: “*Wer allein hat Gründe sich wegzulügen aus der Wirklichkeit? Wer an ihr leidet.*”¹⁰⁴ Western history is the epoch of a failed erotic orientation, in which the body’s desires are trained toward illusions (the Forms, the *Jenseits* of Christianity) that are its own negation and that can never be obtained, and which must ultimately be unmasked as an illusion. This epoch comes to an end in the death of God, when the illusion is seen as illusory, and can therefore no longer be desired, leaving behind the vacuum of values that Nietzsche calls nihilism.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² KSA 6:68.

¹⁰³ KSA 6:71.

¹⁰⁴ KSA 6:182. English: “Who alone has reasons to *lie their way* out of reality? Whoever suffers from it.”

¹⁰⁵ Robert Pippin says that for Nietzsche, “the problem of nihilism does not consist in a failure of knowledge or a failure of strength or will but a *failure of desire*, the flickering out of some erotic flame” (Robert Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, First Philosophy*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press 2010, 54).

Ascetic History: *Antichrist* and *The City of God*

Until now, we have been seeking to lay out the basic dynamics of Nietzsche's corporeal history, in which Christianity plays a role as one strategic physiological expression among others. How, though, does Nietzsche's way of reading the history of the body challenge Christianity's own way of reading history? Does Nietzsche succeed in offering us a mode of historical observation that has moved beyond the Christian paradigm? The answer, as we will see, is both yes and no.

In *Antichrist*, Nietzsche says that the above dynamic of flight from physiological reality is the path of *whoever* suffers from this reality, and that with this description he is giving us "the formula for *décadence*."¹⁰⁶ According to this logic, there is a sense in which Nietzsche is committed to the notion that all history since Plato and the advent of Christianity is decadent history, since this physiological-psychological reading is one that Nietzsche routinely applies to both Platonism and Christianity. I do not mean to suggest that this is the way he ordinarily uses the word "decadent," as there are many counterexamples, many individuals and whole eras between Plato and the death of God which are spoken of as *not* decadent.¹⁰⁷ But, insofar as Platonism and Christianity are movements of decadence, and insofar as they dominate Western thought up to the present, Western history is decadent.

The moral-metaphysical paradigm of Christianity gets cemented, in *Antichrist*, via a falsification, a misreading, of this physiological history. Just as the Christian notion of the soul

¹⁰⁶ KSA 6:182.

¹⁰⁷ Nietzsche does say, however, that the last two thousand years with "not a single new god" is the result of the "Décadence-Instinkt" which attracted people to Christianity in the first place. KSA 6:185.

allegedly denies the fundamentality of the body to the self, Judeo-Christian historiography is a long, active effort to spiritualize and moralize history, to misread the evidence of a certain configuration of the body's will to power as an indication of a "*Heils-Mechanismus*" governing history. The prime example of Christian misreading of physiological evidence is the person of Christ. For Nietzsche, Jesus was actually a Buddha-like figure, who taught us to turn the other cheek out of a kind of nihilistic physiological exhaustion, a refusal to judge. His teaching is indicative of enervation, for Nietzsche, but it also refuses to indulge in resentment. In Paul's hands, conversely, Christ gets turned into a figure who brings not peace but the sword, a vengeful sword of judgment that condemns the "powerful corporeality"¹⁰⁸ of aristocratic Rome by viewing it under the lens of ascetic morality. Christianity "teaches the misunderstanding of the body [and] does not want to break free of the superstition of the soul." Once it "convinces itself that one can carry around a perfect soul in a cadaver of a body," it becomes possible to read the "impoverished, enervated, and irredeemably deteriorated body" as a sign of "holiness [*Heiligkeit*]," and to locate "in health a kind of enemy, devil, temptation."¹⁰⁹ When it turns out that Christ will not perform the power inversion implied by this moralized reading of bodies within the near future, this interpretive strategy must become historical, deferring the Last Judgment so that it takes place at the end of history. It is Paul who retrospectively revises early Christian history to fit this narrative, performing the "great crime against history [*Historie*]," in which he "invented for himself a history [*Geschichte*] of the earliest Christianity."¹¹⁰ This falsification must go further back than Christ, however, so that the history of Israel up to Christ's birth predicts the morally motivated history of the New Testament: "he falsified the history [*Geschichte*] of Israel again, so that it appeared as the

¹⁰⁸ KSA 5:266.

¹⁰⁹ KSA 6:231.

¹¹⁰ KSA 6:216.

pre-history of *his* act: all prophets were to have spoken of *his* ‘Redeemer’.”¹¹¹ The course of history is thus thoroughly moralized by Christianity, rejecting the body’s will to power as the “primordial fact of all history.”

In this way, Christianity is, for the Nietzsche of *Antichrist*, a strategy of misreading – of misreading the body and of misreading history.¹¹² Far from being himself an anti-realist about historical representation,¹¹³ Nietzsche accuses Christianity of making the “text” of history “disappear under the interpretation”¹¹⁴ (to use the phrase that Nietzsche applies in *Beyond Good and Evil* to his century’s interpretations of the French Revolution), implying that the basic text could be, on a better interpretation, at least intimated, even if it cannot ultimately be revealed. Heidegger says that for Nietzsche, “*Das Leben lebt, indem es leibt* [Life lives inasmuch as it bodies].”¹¹⁵ For Nietzsche, the body is the “guiding thread [*Leitfaden*].”¹¹⁶ In obscuring the history of the body with a providential, moral history, Christianity decides to read history inaccurately, performing a reading of history whereby the evidence of the physiological weakness that gives rise to it is interpreted as spiritual holiness, effectively dislocating the body from its central historical role. Paul’s *decision* to read inaccurately ultimately turns into an *inability* to read accurately. Nietzsche tells us in *Antichrist* that a “sign of the theologian is his *incapacity for philology*. Philology should here be understood, in a very general sense, as the art of reading well

¹¹¹ KSA 6:216.

¹¹² This way of describing Christianity is in fact a recurring one in Nietzsche’s corpus. As early as *Dawn* in 1881, “Christianity’s philology” is described as an “*art of bad reading*” [emphasis in original] (KSA 3:79). Here, though, the textual falsification at issue is not executed by Paul, but by later readers of the Bible.

¹¹³ As opposed to the recent reading of Anthony Jensen, referenced above.

¹¹⁴ KSA 5:56. The fact that such a phrase would be used pejoratively supports Blondel’s warning (cited above) against “reducing Nietzsche’s thought to that of the play of signifiers” as Paul de Man does when he says that “philosophical rigor” is shown in Nietzsche to resemble “the endlessly repeated gesture of the artist ‘who does not learn from experience and always again falls into the same trap.’” *Allegories of Reading* by Paul de Man (New Haven & London: Yale University Press 1979), 118.

¹¹⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Gesamtausgabe* 6.1:509.

¹¹⁶ See Nietzsche, *Wille zur Macht* §532 and KSA 11:282.

– to be able to read [*ablesen*] facts without falsifying them through interpretation.”¹¹⁷ A pagan aptitude for reading deteriorates as our view gets transferred from the body to the “*ghetto-world* of the soul.” Greeks and Romans had possessed “the incomparable art of reading well ... the free view into reality ... the whole *rectitude* [*Rechtschaffenheit*] of knowledge – they were already there! And in addition, the good, fine tact and taste ... as body, as gesture, as instinct – as reality, in a word ... *all in vain!*”¹¹⁸ This strategy of misreading is the strategy of physiological weakness that seeks to avoid a confrontation with its own weakness.¹¹⁹

Antichrist’s ethic of “reading well” is reminiscent of the *Wahrhaftigkeit* [truthfulness] and *Redlichkeit* [honesty] demanded¹²⁰ of the free spirit and the philosopher of the future in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche’s imagined comrades in the post-death-of-God world. A deep internal contradiction lies at the heart of Christianity, whose culture is described as the “two-thousand-year-long breeding [*Zucht*] of truth,” the two-millennia-long nurturing of honesty, but whose entire historical worldview comes into being only with Paul’s total falsification of history, an act of radical dishonesty. This contradiction is laid bare when God dies: honest reading and Christianity are shown to be incompatible. Nietzsche’s “honest” and “truthful” reading of history as physiological history inherits the impetus of the “two-thousand-year-long breeding of truth” precisely by breaking away from Paul’s dishonest reading of history.

We have been trying to understand Nietzsche’s own argument regarding Christianity, history, and the condemnation of the body. Christianity, Nietzsche says, attempts to write the body, as a hierarchy of drives, out of history, which amounts to a total defacement of history itself.

¹¹⁷ KSA 6:233.

¹¹⁸ KSA 6:248.

¹¹⁹ For a secular rejection of Nietzsche’s reading of Paul’s historical stance as self-serving, see Heidegger’s *Phenomenology of Religious Life*. For Heidegger’s Paul, the Christian life is grounded in one’s “having-become” (95) and one’s “awaiting the Parousia” (*Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* 98). Within this temporally stretched existence, “experience is an absolute affliction (θλίψις), which belongs to the life of the Christian himself” (97).

¹²⁰ See KSA 5:14, 5:238, and, especially, 5:162.

We should not assume, however, that we are entitled to a wholesale acceptance of Nietzsche's own depiction of the relationship between history and the body in Christianity. Furthermore, as clear a rejection of the Christian historical worldview as Nietzsche's own view seems to be (and, indeed, is), Nietzsche's rhetoric obfuscates a point of similarity between his thought and Christian thought that may be more than just semantic: if Nietzschean history is a "history of the body," there is clearly a sense in which the Christian Biblical history of the world is also a kind of history of the body – a fact too obvious to mention outside the context of Nietzsche criticism, but important to mention within Nietzsche criticism, due, in part, to the influence of Heidegger. Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche, particularly the early lectures of the *Nietzsche* courses of the late 1930s, makes it easy to forget this fact, as he continuously invokes the sense in which Nietzsche is celebrating the "sensual [*das Sinnliche*]" at the expense of the "supersensual [*das Übersinnliche*]," and repeating unquestioningly Nietzsche's assertion that Christianity had been, without qualification, the champion of the supersensual. Of course, on the face of things, there is more to be said on the topic: humanity's creation, fall, redemption through Christ, and ultimate resurrection are all articulated in terms of the carnal, the flesh, the body. Obliquely, Nietzsche's own thought acknowledges this, insofar as he chose a new resurrection of the body, the eternal return, as the centerpiece of the mythology that replaces Christianity – an indication, perhaps, that he recognized that there was a sense in which defeating Christianity on its own turf meant not merely remembering a body that had been forgotten, but finding a new way to look at the body that would confront the Christian way of observing it.¹²¹

¹²¹ Gianni Vattimo aptly summarizes the centrality of the body in the late Nietzsche's confrontation with Christianity, asserting that "The 'guiding thread' of the body no longer possesses a merely methodological significance and has become a central element in the overturning of asceticism and of Platonic-Christian morality and metaphysics." – *Nietzsche: An Introduction* by Gianni Vattimo, trans. Nicholas Martin (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2001), 140.

In order to observe the extent to which Nietzsche confronts – and/or continues – the Christian relationship between the body and history, I would like to bring the picture of Nietzschean history that we have developed so far into dialogue with one particular Christian work of history, namely Augustine’s *City of God*. I am here taking just one work as my paradigmatic representative of “Christian history,” as that is what time allows. My train of thought depends on the notion that the historical stance taken by the inhabitants of Augustine’s city of God is in fact a legitimately Christian stance, a claim that I will not actively defend here.

In *The City of God*, two different modes of historicity characterize the earthly city, which is the city of men, founded by Cain, and the city of God, which is founded by Seth. These two modes of historicity stem from two different sorts of relationship to the flesh. The earthly city seeks the satisfaction of carnal desires. Thus, “the earthly city is dedicated in this world in which it is built, for in this world it finds the end toward which it aims and aspires.”¹²² The earthly city is characterized by a kind of contentment: as its ultimate end lies in the fleshly satisfaction available in the here-and-now, it does not need to look elsewhere for meaning: the city is “an earthly one, which was not from home in this world,” since “in this world it finds the end toward which it aims and aspires.”¹²³ As this description already indicates, this commitment to earthly, fleshly goods corresponds to a certain historical-temporal stance: Cain builds “a city in which *nothing more is hoped for* than can be seen in this world” [emphasis mine].¹²⁴ Hope does not characterize this city, which has no future. It has no future in the literal sense that the line of Cain is wiped out in the flood after only eight generations,¹²⁵ but it also has no reason to look to the

¹²² Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God.*, trans. Marcus Dods. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers 2009, 452.

¹²³ Augustine 453.

¹²⁴ Augustine 454.

¹²⁵ Augustine 456.

future, since it believes its satisfaction resides in the earthly present. Like Heidegger's animal,¹²⁶ which is captivated, *benommen*, by the objects of its drives,¹²⁷ the city of man falls completely into the present, as it is taken by its obsession with the things of the world, "liv[ing] after the flesh."¹²⁸ For Augustine, this stance is a kind of bad faith that rests on an illusion. As he makes memorably clear in his discussion of Lucretia (Book I),¹²⁹ the present is in fact ultimately worth nothing, and the hope of satisfying our carnal desires in an ultimate way in this life is constitutively impossible in a postlapsarian state,¹³⁰ but the city of men does not recognize these truths. So the earthly city's refusal to embrace a stance of temporal ek-stasis oriented toward the future, its insistence on living for the moment and its denial of any genuine historicity, is founded on a misunderstanding of the body, or a refusal to break out of a certain illusion about the body. Its historical stance, then, is actually an anti-historical one.

Seth, on the other hand, founds a city in which humanity inhabits its body as an alien form, and lives on Earth as on an alien landscape. The inhabitants of the city of God are born on earth into bodies designed for sexual procreation, but, unlike the "earthly city and community of men who live after the flesh,"¹³¹ they belong to a community that is not sustained by fleshly generation. Unlike Cain's city, which is at home in this world, Seth's city "sojourns in this world ... conducted by regeneration to the world to come,"¹³² living "like a captive and stranger"¹³³ here. Seth's city ek-sists, *unheimlich*, projecting itself towards an unseen future which forms the horizon of its

¹²⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik*. In *Gesamtausgabe* 29/30, 3rd ed. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann 2004, 274-388.

¹²⁷ The *Übermensch* of the *Nietzsche* lectures bears some similarity to both Cain's city of man and to the *Grundbegriffe*'s animal in this sense, as the *Übermensch* becomes totally ensnared by the world it conquers, forfeiting the world as *Welt* by dominating the "world" as the totality of beings.

¹²⁸ Augustine 456.

¹²⁹ Augustine 20-27.

¹³⁰ Augustine 418.

¹³¹ Augustine 456.

¹³² Augustine 456.

¹³³ Augustine 628.

reality, refusing to be captured by the temptations of the present. This is the stance of hope with which the inhabitants of the city of God enter history. Despite the clear sense in which there is, of course, an end of history for Augustine, he emphasizes throughout *The City of God* that this end is something we cannot fathom from the standpoint of the present, quoting Paul's letter to the Romans, "now hope which is seen is not hope,"¹³⁴ and reminding us that "so long as [man] is in this mortal body, he is a stranger to God, he walks by faith, not by sight."¹³⁵ The historical stance of faith is thus that of a kind of openness; on the other hand, the inhabitant of the city of man lives closed in upon himself and his present. The Christian steps into history by giving up on the dream of the city of men, that of a "ruinous self-sufficiency,"¹³⁶ giving up the self in the present in order to receive a new identity in a self-projection towards an unseen future.

Nietzsche, of course, would not endorse what he would view as the denigration of the mortal flesh, as it appears in the historical stance of the city of God. Yet there is a striking parallel between Augustine's historical stance and Nietzsche's that we must highlight. At the birth of the city of God, which is the birth of Augustine's faithful historicity, one becomes historical not by *forgetting* or *suppressing* some truth about the body, but by coming to an awareness of a basic reality about the body. To impart Nietzschean terms onto the Augustinian text, that awareness is that of the impossibility of the body satisfying its desires from the confines of the earthly present. A "stranger to God" whose being is founded by God, the believer's temporal orientation is thus forced to found itself on the future, on the moment when the earth is transfigured and the desperation of earthly desire is abolished in the Parousia.

¹³⁴ Augustine 615.

¹³⁵ Augustine 625.

¹³⁶ Augustine 710.

The point I would like to highlight, here, in connection to Nietzsche, is the relationship between Christian historicity and the impossibility of satisfying the desires of the postlapsarian body, in any significant or ultimate way: in Augustine's Christian history, the believer recognizes something like what Blondel called the Nietzschean "tragic gap," the breach, never fully bridgeable, between the drives and that which they pursue. The quest after fleshly satisfaction in the present (as embodied by the inhabitants of Cain's city) circumvents historicity, whereas the recognition of this quest as doomed to failure implies a historical mode of living. For Nietzsche, as, perhaps, the *Genealogy's* study of the origins of Christianity makes most clear, asceticism is not just a prescriptive stance but also the assertion of a certain reality about the human, the body, and history: for the fallen body, imbued with sin, there is a constitutive gap between fleshly desires and their ultimate satisfaction. The prospect of being made whole must be deferred, and this deferment corresponds to the historical mode of existence of the inhabitants of the city of God.

A certain asceticism remains, and is even radicalized, on Nietzsche's view of history, for reasons that are not entirely the same, but also not entirely different.¹³⁷ We observed already the "tragic gap" built into human reality for Nietzsche, the gap between the drives and their final satisfaction. This gap animates history, for Nietzsche. The will to power expresses itself in eternally reconfigured guises, but it never rests satisfied. Yet Nietzsche's refusal to dream of any illusory possibility of ultimate earthly satisfaction for the body is precisely the same refusal to indulge in fantasy that sets the ascetic stance of Augustine's city of God apart from the hedonistic stance of the city of men, and which awakens the Christian into history. In this sense, recognition of the "tragic gap" in (postlapsarian) nature, in addition to being what makes an authentic reading

¹³⁷ The ascetic remnants of Christianity in post-death-of-God philosophy has been recently been made the topic of a book-length study by Noreen Khawaja, *The Religion of Existence: Asceticism in Philosophy from Kierkegaard to Sartre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2016), although Khawaja devotes relatively attention to Nietzsche.

of history possible for Nietzsche, is also, already, what makes genuine historicity possible for the Christian inhabitant of the city of God. The birth of the city of God and the death of God thus correspond to historical awakenings that bear striking similarities.

The crucial difference between the two historical paradigms is the possibility (Augustine), or not (Nietzsche), of an apocalyptic end to the body's tragic striving. The death of God removes the final historical event, the Apocalypse, in which, Augustine says, "this world shall pass away by transmutation, not by absolute destruction,"¹³⁸ transfiguring, not destroying, the earthly body, removing the tragic gap – a gap which, for this reason, perhaps does not deserve to be called tragic, on the Augustinian point of view, since it was always destined to expire. Once this final event is removed, what expresses itself as "hope" for Augustine expresses itself as the "tragic" and as "fate" for Nietzsche. The perpetual reconfiguration and renewed striving of the body's will to power is the reason that there can be no "end" of history for Nietzsche, but only "middays" that are followed by afternoons and nights. The body, after the death of God, without hope for this event, finds no prospect of relief.

The resultant picture of history – Nietzsche's own picture of history – is thus "the greatest burden," a thought that would "transform and perhaps pulverize you," revealing us all to be mere "dust specks among dust."¹³⁹ This is the thought of the eternal return, a thought which rejects any end to the body's painful questing, and, thus, any end to history.¹⁴⁰ After the death of God, once

¹³⁸ Augustine 661.

¹³⁹ *The Gay Science* §341, KSA 3:570. With the repetition of "dust," Nietzsche probably wants to evoke the Old Testament verses that speak of emerging from dust and returning to dust (Genesis 2:7, Ecclesiastes 3:20). This is an interesting reference to make when introducing a new form of resurrection. It may be meant to emphasize that the resurrection envisioned by Nietzsche in the eternal return is immanent, bound to this world.

¹⁴⁰ Oswald Spengler identifies Nietzsche as an inspiration for his own reading of history, for reasons related to our discussion here, although his reading is superficial. For Spengler, there is no world history (and therefore, no end to history), but only the history of individual cultures, which are understood as "organic" "morphologies." When a people dies out, its story ends, and does not fundamentally contribute to the stories of later peoples, and "history" must effectively start over. This means that the "organic" as the motor of history implies the interminability of history – a statement which does strictly align him with Nietzsche, but not, I think, for very profound reasons (Oswald Spengler,

the awaited Apocalypse and transfiguration of the body is no longer viable, all history must be non-teleological and ultimately hopeless. In Nietzsche's eternal return, the ascetic picture of the body already present in Christianity is eternalized, as the body's unsatisfied striving continues not just until the Apocalypse, but without end; in a certain sense, then, Nietzsche is, on Nietzsche's own terms, *über-Christian*. Depending on how much of our old sense of "history" we would feel the need to retain in order to say it is history, we may ask whether Nietzsche's vision abolishes history: as Nietzsche frequently suggests with regard to the eternal return, a historical view that emphasizes the unending passing-away [*Vergehen*] of all the world's configurations ends up de-emphasizing any temporally localized narrative of development. At the very least, Nietzsche rejects a closed history, whose final event is known, for an open history, that may, from one epoch to another, always take a new shape and a new direction, as long as the will to power can configure itself in a new way.

If Nietzsche deems himself willing to face a history that "can only be endured by strong characters," an open history that, after the death of God, has no terminus and is seen in the vertiginous "horizon of the infinite"¹⁴¹ that faces the inhabitants of modernity, then it is implied that Christianity somehow made its own "history," its false, closed history, too easy. This is in keeping with a consistent line of thought in the later Nietzsche: often superficially severe, the worldviews of Athens and Jerusalem, the decadent streams of Western history, in fact covertly make the world easier by making it fundamentally graspable, understandable. Thus, in *Twilight of*

Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte. 14th edition. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag 1999.).

Spengler's sense of Nietzsche's appreciation for "the organic" or the body does not go much beyond his sense that Nietzsche turns the study of history away from "otherworldly ideals [*weltfremde Ideale*]" and orients it toward "hard action [*das harte Tun*]" (Spengler, Oswald. "Nietzsche und sein Jahrhundert." In: *Reden und Aufsätze*. 3rd edition. Munich: C.H. Beck 1951, 110-124, 124).

¹⁴¹ *The Gay Science* §124, KSA 3:480. This is from the title of the passage that directly precedes the madman's announcement of the death of God.

the Idols, Socrates's apparently strict, disciplined rational standards in fact serve to cover over the fact that he is simply excising from *his* world the parts of *the* world that threaten him, the parts not suitable to the dominion of reason.¹⁴² According to a similar logic, Christian asceticism causes the already pained body even more pain, but removes the senselessness of this pain with the promise of eternal bliss. In both these cases, threatened, weak bodies display the tendency to replace threatening, changeable reality with eternal truths, in part because they make the world more understandable at a very basic level. This is what Nietzsche calls the preference for Being over Becoming, and corresponds, I think, to what he calls metaphysics. The process of "falsification of history" recounted in *Antichrist* is just another example of this tendency to submit reality to a comprehensible and relatively static picture. The pain of the body is ultimately removed, for the Christian, as history comes to a predictable close in end times.

Yet we do not need to delve too deeply into *The City of God*, I think, to see that the Christian sense of history does not make things easier or clearer, for Augustine's believer.¹⁴³ The structure of the historical narrative given by *The City of God* does not simply mirror that given by the Old and New Testaments. Augustine begins *in media res*, in his own present, after the sacking of Rome by the Goths, with the memory of death and rape still very recent in the minds of his Christian audience. Immediately, the sorts of question that become relevant are ones like that "of the end of this life, whether it is material that it be long delayed."¹⁴⁴ Augustine famously falls quite quickly on the case of Lucretia, the Roman woman who committed suicide after being raped by the invading forces.¹⁴⁵ What is important to note is not simply the moralizing stance that rejects

¹⁴² KSA 6:67-74.

¹⁴³ Of course I do not mean to suggest, with this observation, that, for Nietzsche, the Christian always takes the easy road, a claim which could be refuted in more ways than are worth reciting here. The example of *The City of God* challenges Nietzsche's claims about the outlook of Jewish and Christian writers of history as described in *Antichrist* specifically, however.

¹⁴⁴ Augustine 15.

¹⁴⁵ Augustine 22-28.

suicide, but the terms of this rejection. Lucretia and others like her fail to recognize how empty the present is, and are thus slaves to its pain, in contrast to the “patient endurance” of the “Christian women who suffered as she did, and yet survive.”¹⁴⁶ Suicides fail to adopt the stance of Christian hope, the stance of Christian historicity, wherein “we do not as yet possess a present, but look for a future salvation.”¹⁴⁷ Augustine’s history begins, then, by asking whether the Christian community of the present will have the strength for historicity – but it does so in the context of a situation in which suicide may be easier and more tempting than this historical stance. The Christian ascetically denies herself the indulgence that is suicide, and instead chooses history and hope.

Part of what makes this orientation toward future salvation such a hard thing to achieve is that it is not given to the Christian in the present to see what exactly this future will look like – as opposed to the Nietzschean caricature in *Antichrist* of a fully mapped out history. The decision to begin in the present serves to highlight our limited historical line of sight, from the standpoint of the present. As indicated above, Augustine repeatedly emphasizes the opacity of hope, the fact that Christian hope awaits an event that, from the standpoint of the here and now, remains unseen. He repeatedly cites 1 Corinthians, where Paul says, “For now we see in a mirror, darkly, but then face to face,”¹⁴⁸ emphasizing the message of the first part of that sentence. In this sense, it would be a mistake to depict Augustine’s history as *simply* closed: history is ended by a Second Coming that can be predicted but whose exact shape we cannot ascertain from the standpoint of the present.

To some degree, then, in light of the example of Augustine, we might say that Nietzsche creates a strawman out of the ascetic Christian historical stance that he calls that of “*Geschichts-*

¹⁴⁶ Augustine 24.

¹⁴⁷ Augustine 615.

¹⁴⁸ 1 Cor 13:12. Cited e.g. at Augustine, *City of God*, 774.

Fälschung” – a strawman that surreptitiously serves to push Christian history away from his own history, until it stands as a stark foil, as an illusorily easy, closed, fully known history.¹⁴⁹

We must acknowledge, though, that Nietzsche is right to believe that the death of God and the instauration of his own physiological history necessitate a sea change in the way human beings experience history. The Christian stance whereby, as Augustine says, “we do not as yet possess a present,” under which the present is denigrated because it takes place in a fallen, insatiable body, depends on a future in which a transfigured body will no longer be constitutively doomed to pursue what it cannot have. Hope can only survive as long as belief in this future endures. Once it is established, in the death of God and the eternal return, that the drives will find no respite throughout eternity, the future is strictly hopeless. Either the former believer continues to live in her earthly body “like a captive and stranger” without any hope for transfiguration – a choice presumably not compatible with sustained human life – or she learns to love the body in its earthly state. This love could only be authentic if it were simultaneously the love of the body’s tragic fate in the eternal return, since the tragic, Sisyphean fate of the will to power is constitutive of the body in which the will to power coalesces. *Amor fati* is the task of realizing this love.

In articulating the believer’s historical stance, Augustine relies on Paul’s famous formulation, “now we see in a mirror, darkly, but then face to face.” It is exactly when Nietzsche is unveiling the eternal return, the vision of time that is to replace Christian linear history, that he

¹⁴⁹ It is worth noting that a later German death-of-God philosopher, Martin Heidegger, will try to recover some of the elements of Christian historicity that we have tried to briefly highlight here as suppressed by Nietzsche, albeit in a way that might be described as selective and self-serving. For the young Heidegger of the 1920-1921 lecture course *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, the Christian produces, or even *is*, historicity, as the afflicted awaiting that stands between the “having become [*Gewordensein*, γεννηθῆναι]” of conversion and the Parousia (*Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens*. See especially 92-94). Ryan Coyne has written a book-length study on Heidegger and Augustine, the central chapters of which trace the influence of Augustine’s sense of temporality on Heidegger’s own changing sense of temporality, eternity, and the history of being through the “turn” (*Heidegger’s Confessions: The Remains of Saint Augustine in Being and Time & Beyond*. Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2016).

has his Zarathustra ask, “Is seeing not itself – seeing abysses?”¹⁵⁰ The first expression, one of a provisionally darkened historical vision, articulates the stance of hope, whereas the second, under which the darkness permeating human vision is permanent, indicates the obliteration of hope. The present is no longer a stage on the path to completeness – it is not even completely itself, as the body from which it is experienced is always forced to look outside the present, desperately casting forward in its pursuit of power. In its futile and eternal attempt to coincide with the objects of desire that found it, the body can never ultimately find itself nor lose itself, as it is destined to chase after the unachievable forever, only to end up in the exact same spot.¹⁵¹ The gateway “Moment” of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*¹⁵² is hollow not only because it is a mere throughway to the future, but also because the present moment is only a copy of itself, a copy of the same stage in cosmic history, corresponding to a certain formation of the will to power, that has already occurred an abyssally infinite number of times.¹⁵³ Nietzsche replaces Christian linear, eschatological history with the myth of Sisyphus, expanded to the cosmic scale – and challenges us, with the phrase *amor fati*, to love this Sisyphean fate.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ From “On the Vision and the Riddle.” KSA 4:199.

¹⁵¹ This is also the condition – minus the recursiveness! – of Sartre’s post-death-of-God individual, who seeks with futility, as a “useless passion” (784), to “be God” (724), to be an “In-itself-for-itself” (588) (or rather, as for Nietzsche, it is the condition of any individual, and is visible in a philosophy that becomes possible after the death of God) (Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes. New York: Washington Square Press 1984).

¹⁵² KSA 4:200.

¹⁵³ Nietzsche’s hollow “Moment” can be instructively compared with Augustine’s assertion that believers “do not as yet possess a present.” In Augustine’s case, this is because the fallen body of the present must look forward to a future in which it is made whole. In Nietzsche’s case, that of which the body is a “fallen” image is itself an image of an image, *ad infinitum*.

¹⁵⁴ For Camus, too, Sisyphus’s happiness is associated with love of fate:

“Happiness and the absurd are two sons of the same earth. They are inseparable ... [T]he feeling of the absurd ... echoes in the wild and limited universe of man ... It drives out of this world a god who had come into it with dissatisfaction and a preference for futile sufferings. It makes of fate a human matter, which must be settled among men.

“All Sisyphus’s silent joy is contained therein. His fate belongs to him ... One must imagine Sisyphus happy” (Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O’Brien. New York: Vintage Books 1955, 90-91).

Thus, the removal of the Parousia, a removal which makes Nietzsche's historical vision utterly hopeless, is also, paradoxically, the only hope. The abolition of the judgment implied by the phrase "final judgment" opens the door for the "innocence" of Becoming, as the body finally acknowledges and embraces its tragic-ecstatic orientation and the impossibility of any final rest. Once the body knows itself in this way, it can love itself – or, at least, it can set itself the task of loving itself.¹⁵⁵ Since it is physiological history that opens up the possibility of this self-knowledge, there is finally an answer to the second *Untimely Meditation's* question regarding how "history" can serve "life." *Amor fati*, if it were achieved, would be the body's acceptance of itself, its remembering of itself after the repressive history of Christianity, its recollection of its own constitutively tragic fate.

¹⁵⁵ The death-of-God theologian Thomas Altizer points in the direction of the death of God as an epoch of the body's self-acceptance. In his chapter on Nietzsche in *Mircea Eliade and the Dialectic of the Sacred*, he says that Nietzsche's eternal return calls for a new "resurrection of the body" (178) after the death of the Christian God, and that this resurrection of the body instantiates "an ultimate *coincidentia oppositorum* of the sacred and the profane" (199) as sacrality falls to the body. Altizer says, apparently thinking of the early pages of "On the Uses and Abuses of History for Life" and, especially, the early discussion of *Schuld* in the *Genealogy*:

[C]ruelty plays a crucial role in [Nietzsche's] understanding of history, for the advent of history, of society, brings about a cooping up of man's animal nature, the natural outlet of his instincts (*Triebe*) is blocked, repression comes into existence, and with it guilt in response to these unreleased but now forbidden instincts. Now the "body" becomes guilty. (197) [Note that I have been using the word "drives" to refer to *Triebe* in this chapter, where Altizer uses "instincts."]

The Nietzschean resurrection of bodies in the Eternal Return removes this guilt and "shatters history" (196), which is the history of the blockage of the drives [*Triebe*]. It seems to me that Altizer is on the right track, to a degree, although he is perhaps importing too heavily an Eliade-imbued lens onto his reading of Nietzsche. I do not think that "the sacred," which for Eliade means a plenitude of Being in presence (see *The Sacred and the Profane*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. New York: Harcourt 1987), is an appropriate concept to apply to Nietzsche, for reasons that will be made explicit in chapter 5 while speaking of the divinity of Dionysus.

Chapter 2: The Body, Metaphysics, and Heidegger's Nietzsche¹

In the last chapter we explored how, for Nietzsche, history must be the history of the body, of the drives that constitute the Nietzschean body. We also indicated that what Blondel called the “tragic gap” in nature, the gap between the drives that constitute the body and their ultimate satisfaction, can be seen as a holdover – or even a deepening – of a certain Christian asceticism, or even of a certain Christian ascetic view of history, as represented by the view put forth in *The City of God*. Augustine's city of God recognizes the impossibility of ultimately satisfying the carnal drives of the fallen, pre-Apocalyptic body on earth; this results in a view of history whereby such satisfaction is put off until the end of history. As long as we are still within history, the tragic gap between drives and their satisfaction reigns. Nietzsche eternalizes the “tragic gap,” in effect doubling down on one of the bases of Augustine's ascetic stance toward the body.

Like Heidegger, then, the comparison made in chapter 1 suggests that there is an important way in which Nietzsche retains, perhaps unwittingly, an important element of Christianity. This will be true in Heidegger's eyes, too, as we will see, but for different reasons. For Heidegger, Nietzsche takes over from Christianity the task of Western metaphysics, which is the task of human empowerment over the earth and over Being. In order to complete this task, Nietzsche reconstrues the Cartesian subject as a “body” that, in the wake of God's death, can achieve utter dominance over the earth via the act of “incorporation” [*Einverleibung*], effectively swallowing up the cosmos in the thought of the Eternal Return (more on this below). The status of the body, on the one hand, and humanity's fate after the death of God, on the other hand, are inextricably linked, then, for Heidegger's Nietzsche, making his reading centrally relevant to our concerns here.

¹ A version of the latter half of this chapter is forthcoming in *Nietzsche-Studien* as “The Body and the Completion of Metaphysics: A Critical Analysis of Heidegger's Nietzsche.” Volume 51, No. 1, 2022.

In this chapter, I will first lay out the body's role in Heidegger's history. Then I will examine and challenge Heidegger's understanding of this "body," arguing that Heidegger is crucially right to see the dynamics of "incorporation" as central to any proper understanding of the body, but that he himself misunderstands these dynamics. I will then turn to an in-depth investigation of incorporation as it actually appears in Nietzsche's work, which will, I think, confirm in a different way the notion advanced at the end of the last chapter that there is something "ascetic" about the Nietzschean body. Once we understand what incorporation is, we will be ready, in the following chapter, to examine the Western crisis following the death of God in terms of Nietzschean physiology, as a crisis of the body and of its incorporating powers.

Of course, in order to engage Heidegger's reading of the Nietzschean body, we must first understand what that body is, and how functions within Heidegger's larger reading of Nietzsche. It is strangely common, in Nietzsche and Heidegger literature, to find objections to Heidegger's attempt to turn Nietzsche's thought into a metaphysical system, with little to no sustained consideration of the lynchpin of that alleged system, namely, the Nietzschean body, *der Leib*. This is especially true of the earliest influential French attempts to reclaim Nietzsche as a disrupter of the subject, of logocentrism, and of metaphysical thinking generally, in the work, for example, of Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida. This lack of attention to the *Leib* may at times have had something to do with the lenses through which these thinkers chose to read Nietzsche, but chronology may also have played an important role. The *Nietzsche* lectures, where the centrality of the body becomes clear in a way that it was not in other Heidegger works on Nietzsche, were not published in German until 1961, and appeared in French only ten years later, with Pierre Klossowski's translation. Whatever the reasons, this tendency seems to have stuck, and many scholars who refer to Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche do so without seriously

reflecting on the question I intend to pose here, namely, How should we evaluate the merits of Heidegger's understanding of "the body" in Nietzsche? In order to respond to Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche, we will have to reconstruct his reading of Nietzsche in such a way that the body is given the prominence it deserves. To that end, much of the first half or so of this chapter will take the form of a condensed summary of Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche. It is, however, an interpretively intentional summary, aiming to clarify the role of the body, sometimes underappreciated, in Heidegger's writing on Nietzsche.

Before we turn in earnest to Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche and the role of the Nietzschean body in that interpretation, I would like to make a few preliminary clarifications about the way the term "body," "*Leib*," will be used in this chapter when discussing Heidegger's Nietzsche. Nietzsche's corpus offers a diverse array of insights regarding the human body and the importance of considering its role when investigating human psychology or society. Corporal punishment² and orgiastic festival³ are spotlighted as crucial moments in local cultural development or general human development; the beginning of the Western philosophical tradition in Socrates is understood in physiological terms,⁴ as is Nietzsche's own thought, in *Ecce Homo*, when he reflects on his own intellectual development through frequent reference to diet and climate.⁵ If we survey twentieth century philosophy, social theory, and gender studies, we can see echoes of Nietzsche's *contextualized* body – distant ones, at least – in the fundamentally embodied consciousness of Husserl's *Ideen*,⁶ or in the power dynamics of the inscribed or surveilled body of

² *Genealogy of Morals* II, KSA 5:291-300.

³ *The Birth of Tragedy*, for instance at §2, KSA 1:30-34.

⁴ As I said in chapter 1, this is not always and everywhere the way Socrates is read, but he is read as a basically physiological event in the chapter on him in *Twilight of the Idols* and in *Ecce Homo*'s reflection on *The Birth of Tragedy*, both 1888 texts (KSA 6:67-73 and KSA 6:310-312).

⁵ KSA 6:295.

⁶ Christine Daigle reads Nietzsche and Husserl together in response to the Kantian subject, arguing that this subject becomes "embodied" in the two later thinkers, wherein "The anchoring of consciousness in the body is the foundation stone of the phenomenological understanding of the human being and his relationship to the world" ("The Intentional

Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*,⁷ or in the questioning of the essentiality of certain physiological configurations that takes place in Butler's *Gender Trouble*.⁸ If these twentieth-century meditations on the body are reflective of ways in which that century reads Nietzsche, then it must be said that they represent possibilities in Nietzsche's thought that Heidegger ignores.⁹ For Heidegger, the Nietzschean body is not so much an empirically existent, situated entity *found in* a social context – rather, it *founds* anything and everything that could ever be called a “context” of any kind. As the descendant of Descartes's *ego*, the body furnishes all beings in their being, representing them through its willing as will to power. The name for this process by which beings receive their being through the willing of the body is called “incorporation,” which is thus the key word of Heidegger's interpretation of the body in Nietzsche. After providing a narrative of the historical role of the Nietzschean body in the history of Western metaphysics, I will turn to focus in a sustained way on this word, incorporation, as it functions in Heidegger's reading, and then will provide an alternative interpretation of what this word means, for Nietzsche. This focus is not intended to be taken as a rejection of the afore-mentioned ways of reading Nietzsche's physiology, but is the result of the conviction, which I share with Heidegger, that the notion of incorporation,

Encounter with ‘The World,’” in *Nietzsche and Phenomenology*, ed. Élodie Boubilil and Christine Daigle, Bloomington 2013, 28-43, 36).

⁷ Foucault's description of his project recalls Nietzsche especially in the first chapter, in which he describes his task as a “genealogy” of the “modern ‘soul’” via a tracing of the history of punishment, where this soul is “produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power that that is exercised on those punished” (Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 29).

⁸ Butler gives a nod to Nietzsche's ability to dislodge previously “essential” components of the self as she introduces her project (Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 28).

⁹ It is especially when considering the body in Nietzsche's thought that the force of Andrea Orsucci's complaint can be felt, when he asserts that “Heidegger simply ignores the wealth of detailed historical studies which Nietzsche's texts provide, and expressly excludes both the ‘philosophy of culture’ and the ‘philosophy of history’ from his study of Nietzsche” (Andrea Orsucci, “Nietzsche's Cultural Criticism and his Historical Methodology.” In *Nietzsche on Time and History*, 31 [full citation given above in connection to a John Richardson article]).

while it does not *exhaust* Nietzsche's thinking regarding the body, is nevertheless its heart and soul.¹⁰

The word "incorporation," in turn, requires its own preliminary contextual definition, since its use in the Nietzsche corpus, though remarkably consistent, is also importantly distinct from other ways in which the word is sometimes used – in psychoanalysis, for instance. Incorporation, for Nietzsche, who uses the word more often than is appreciated, is the hierarchizing and marshalling of forces, their enlistment or impressment into the hierarchy that the body itself *is*. In Nietzsche studies, the word so emphasized by Heidegger has more recently returned to the fore in a diverse array of contexts. Robert Pippin¹¹ and Keith Ansell Pearson¹² have turned attention to the word in the context of Nietzsche's recurrent theme of "the incorporation of truth" or fully "embodied" knowledge. Vanessa Lemm offers a broader analysis of the uses of the word *Einverleibung* in the Nietzsche corpus, honing in on the ways in which incorporation can mean a simultaneous strengthening and weakening of the whole in different respects, a theme which I will explore here as well, although with more focus on the individual human body than on the social

¹⁰ Given Nietzsche's great variety of ways of speaking about the body, it is both inevitable and desirable that discourse in Nietzsche scholarship on the body and "embodiment" starts from diverse premises and works toward diverse goals. When speaking of "embodiment," though, it seems to me to be important to note the fact that Nietzsche himself very frequently uses a word, *Einverleibung*, that could be, and has been, translated as "embodiment," even if that translation is admittedly awkward.

This fact certainly does not disqualify discussions of "Nietzsche and embodiment" that do *not* start with or centrally concern themselves with Nietzsche's actual uses of the word *Einverleibung*. Phenomenologically oriented discussions of Nietzsche and the embodied self, such as we find with Christine Daigle ("Nietzsche's Notion of Embodied Self: Proto-Phenomenology at Work?" In *Nietzsche-Studien*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2011, 226-243) or Kristen Brown (*Nietzsche and Embodiment: Discerning Bodies and Non-dualism*. State University of New York Press: Albany 2006), are capable of concretizing the embodied consciousness's encounter with the world in a way that breathes new life into the vocabulary we use to talk about Nietzsche.

That said, to start from embodiment as Nietzsche explicitly and frequently reflects upon it in the word *Einverleibung* seems to me to be an approach that is able to address Nietzsche's thought on the body in a more fundamental and central way than is scholarship that distills a sense of "embodiment" in Nietzsche from passages in which the term *Einverleibung* is not actually used, due to the word's importance for Nietzsche, which I hope to show in this essay.

¹¹ Robert Pippin, "Gay Science and Corporeal Knowledge." In *Nietzsche-Studien*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2000, 136-152.

¹² Keith Ansell-Pearson, "The Incorporation of Truth: Towards the Overhuman." In *A Companion to Nietzsche*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, Oxford 2009, 230-249.

body, which is Lemm's main focus.¹³ French monographs dedicated to the body in Nietzsche, such as those by Didier Franck,¹⁴ to a certain degree, and then, to a greater degree, Barbara Stiegler, have shared Heidegger's view of the term's fundamental importance. Stiegler, though - against Heidegger, we might say - emphasizes the fundamentally limited nature of any given body's powers of incorporation (we will see how exactly this is an anti-Heideggerian stance).¹⁵ She is right in this regard, but in observing the body primarily as a unified "flesh," she grounds this limited power in a different way than I will in this chapter, as I scrutinize the well-recognized multiplicity of the body in Nietzsche's thought. I wish to emphasize two crucial points about the incorporating body's dynamics, which, as we shall see, are crucial to understanding *why* the body's power must be finite: first, that incorporation is a kind of *foundational* act of the body, an act through which the body becomes body; and, second, that incorporation is an *intra-relational* activity taking place among drives within the body, and not only an *inter-relational* species of confrontation between a body and an outside world. Nietzsche's concept of the body is relational.

The substantiation of these claims regarding the dynamics of incorporation is one of the goals of the remainder of this chapter. My other intention is to turn this analysis of incorporation in Nietzsche into a critical engagement with the focal point of Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche - namely, his own interpretation of the word *Einverleibung*.

¹³ Vanessa Lemm, "Nietzsche, *Einverleibung*, and the Politics of Immunity." In *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 2013, Vol. 21, No. 1, 3-19. See, for instance, Lemm's discussion of "weak and fragile" individuals who "may inflict a wound upon the whole, a wound which infects the whole of society." The incorporation of such individuals into society can be seen as a "contamination of the whole [which] reflects a process of inoculation and ennobling elevation of the whole" (9).

¹⁴ Didier Franck, *Nietzsche and the Shadow of God*.

¹⁵ - Barbara Stiegler, "On the Future of Our Incorporations: Nietzsche, Media, Events." Trans. Helen Elam. In *Discourse* 31.1/2, Winter & Spring 2009 124-139, 131.

- Barbara Stiegler, *Nietzsche et la critique de la chair*.

Heidegger: The Body, Nietzsche's Metaphysics, and the Loss of the Human

The following synopsis of Heidegger's position will serve to illuminate the centrality of the body in Heidegger's understanding of Nietzsche as the culmination of metaphysics, doing so by explaining the role played by the body, which Heidegger repeatedly acknowledges in his *Nietzsche* lectures as the "guiding thread [*Leitfaden*]" of Nietzsche's thought. The status of the body will also elucidate Nietzsche's relationship with Christianity, in Heidegger's eyes. For Heidegger, there is a certain sense in which Nietzsche exaggerates the degree to which Christianity is something new. Heidegger sees Christianity as merely participating in and advancing the onto-theological history of forgetfulness of Being [*Seinsvergessenheit*] whose inception precedes Christianity by centuries. This history is one in which humanity gradually seeks domination over beings at the expense of its remembering of Being. Nietzsche perpetuates this tendency and drives it to its outer limits, offering us, in his "will to power," something like an ideology of *Machenschaft*, the instrumental reason particular to our technological age that turns all beings into resources for humanity.

In evaluating Heidegger's placement of Nietzsche within the history of Being, I will confirm the importance of the Nietzschean body while calling into question Heidegger's characterization of it. The body does come into its own, in a certain sense, in modernity, for Nietzsche, but this body is not the descendent of Descartes's ego, and it cannot serve as the centerpiece of a subjectivist metaphysics. Still, the terms in which Heidegger understands Nietzsche's apparent celebration of the active or self-assertive "will" or "subject" as *Übermensch* (as opposed to the passivity of the *Da-sein* of the *Contributions*, which holds back from beings in order to commemorate Being) can be generative. How "active" is the Nietzschean body? What is

its relationship to beings? Ultimately we will see that the very terms Heidegger uses to place Nietzsche within the history of metaphysics are the same terms we can use to complicate his placement there.

For Heidegger, Western philosophical history begins with the inception of metaphysics, which always implies the forgetting of Being. There is not a stable Heideggerian answer as to when exactly this history commences. In the later *Nietzsche* lectures, Heidegger asserts that “It is with Plato’s interpretation of Being as *ιδέα* that *meta-physics* begins.”¹⁶ Yet in “Anaximander’s Saying [“*der Spruch des Anaximander*”],” published in 1946, the Western history of Being begins with Anaximander, and it seems that it is precisely in the moment that this history opens up that it is darkened by metaphysics and the forgetfulness of Being: “The history of Being begins with the forgetfulness of Being [*Seinsvergessenheit*] ... It is the event [*Ereignis*] of metaphysics.”¹⁷ In all of Heidegger’s work on Nietzsche, however, there is no ambiguity as to where the story of Western metaphysics finds its closure: “‘Life is will to power’: with this dictum [*Spruch*], Western metaphysics completes itself.”¹⁸

Heidegger articulates what exactly metaphysics is – and thus, what it means to belong to the Western history of thought - in his 1950s essay “The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics.” Although the essay is written after the *Nietzsche* lectures, I think we can use the picture of metaphysics outlined there to understand Nietzsche’s systematic metaphysics as laid out in the lectures. “The grounding feature of metaphysics,” he says in “Onto-theo-logical

¹⁶ GA 6.2:196.

¹⁷ From *Holzwege*. GA 5:365.

¹⁸ GA 6.1:492. The end of the this sentence suggests yet another possible starting point for metaphysics that does not coincide with either of the two already mentioned: “... at whose beginning the dark word stands: beings as a whole are φύσις”).

Constiution,” “is onto-theo-logy.”¹⁹ Perhaps thinking of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, in which Aristotle’s inquiry alternatively proceeds, at different times, through the most general being or the highest being, Heidegger defines onto-theology this way: “Metaphysics thinks the Being of beings ... in the fathoming [*ergründenden*] unity of the most general, in other words, of the indifferent [*des Gleich-Gültigen*], as well as in the grounding unity of the all, of the highest, above all.”²⁰ The supreme being (τὸ θεῖον) grounds the totality of beings (τὰ ὄντα [singular: τὸ ὄν]) as their source, and in turn the most general being (τὸ ὄν) grounds the supreme being by providing it with its beinghood as a being. In the essay, Heidegger offers us a chronological list of supreme beings, which, according to the logic of onto-theology, are understood as Being itself: “There is Being only in this or that historical stamping: φύσις, λόγος, Ἔν, Ἰδέα, Ἐνέργεια, substantiality, objectivity, subjectivity, will, will to power, will to will.”²¹ The Nietzschean “stamping,” “will to power,” is not placed last, because the “will to will” points beyond the philosophy of Nietzsche toward the worldview of the technological age, which views the totality of beings as standing reserve [*Bestand*] – but Heidegger tells us elsewhere that “will to power is ... will to will,”²² making clear that the forgetting of Being via onto-theology has already reached its terminal point in Nietzsche.

Heidegger often refers to Nietzsche’s place in this history without thematizing the body (e.g. “Nietzsche’s Word: God is dead,” “Anaximander’s Saying”), and it is only in the later parts

¹⁹ “Die onto-theo-logische Verfassung der Metaphysik.” In *Identität und Differenz. Gesamtausgabe* 11. Vittorio Klostermann: Frankfurt am Main 2006, 67.

²⁰ GA 11:66. The philosopher who is being addressed explicitly is not Aristotle but Hegel. In “Hegel’s Concept of Experience” in *Holzwege*, however, the explicit structuring of onto-theology is linked to Aristotle by name. GA 5 195.

²¹ GA 11:73.

²² GA 6.1:33.

of the Nietzsche lectures that the body's role in all this becomes clear.^{23,24} Nietzsche's *Leib* is the descendent of Descartes's *ego*, and is another name for the subject, the subject as it appears after its basic mode of furnishing beings in the world, representation, has been subsumed by willing. The process by which "willing" (explicitly named as such) swallows representation begins in German idealism and culminates in Nietzsche. Heidegger concludes that "*we must understand Nietzsche's philosophy as a metaphysics of subjectivity ... a metaphysics of the absolute subjectivity of the will to power.*"²⁵ The basic quantum of the will to power is the body; the will to power works as body: "For Nietzsche, subjectivity is absolute as subjectivity of the body [*des Leibes*], that is, of the drives and affects [*der Triebe und Affekte*], that is, of the will to power [*des Willens zur Macht*]."²⁶ The will to power, as "bodying" body,²⁷ is the divine entity in Nietzsche's onto-theological picture of being, τὸ θεῖον, furnishing the other beings of the world, τὰ ὄντα, as represented. Nietzsche's body is the centerpiece of the metaphysical system with which metaphysical history completes itself.

The ascension of the Nietzschean body-subject to the role of τὸ θεῖον necessarily coincides with the completion of Western thought's descent into nihilism (understood, by Heidegger, as the forgetting of Being) and with humanity's domination of the earth. Heidegger summarizes the historical moment Nietzsche represents in "Nietzsche's Word: God is Dead" as follows:

²³ This is not to say that the fleshly or the physiological, broadly construed, does not play an important role from the beginning of the lectures. The first set of *Nietzsche* lectures, "The Will to Power as Art," understands art as the expression of *Rausch* [intoxication], and Heidegger emphasizes Nietzsche's project of a "physiology of art" (GA 6.1 93-94). From the beginning, Heidegger depicts Nietzsche as seeking to overturn Plato's privileging of the "super-sensual" [*übersinnliche*] world as the true world, valorizing instead the sensual [*sinnlich*] world (Heidegger first employs this vocabulary in "*Die fünf Sätze über die Kunst*" [GA 6.1 70]).

²⁴ *Holzwege*, containing the "Nietzsche's Word" and "Anaximander" essays, was published in 1950, 11 years before the *Nietzsche* lectures. This means that, for a while, the main sources for anyone looking to understand Heidegger's sense of Nietzsche's place in Western philosophical history would have been texts that do not discuss the Nietzschean body.

²⁵ GA 6.2 177-178.

²⁶ GA 6.2:178.

²⁷ GA 6.1:509.

The uprising of humanity into subjectivity makes beings into objects. The objective, however, is that which is brought to standing [*zum Stehen*] through representation. The elimination of beings in themselves [*Die Beseitigung des an sich Seienden*], the killing of God, completes itself in the securing of the standing reserve [*Bestandsicherung*] through which humanity secures for itself material, bodily [*leiblichen*], psychic, and spiritual reserves [*Bestände*], but does so for the sake of its own security, which wills dominion over beings as that which can be objective [*als das mögliche Gegenständliche*], in order to correspond to the Being of beings, the will to power.²⁸

Many claims are made at once here – claims whose relationship to one another may not be immediately apparent. What is the relationship between subjectivism of the will, nihilism in the death of God, and humanity’s “dominion over beings”?

The answer to this question requires a historical view of Heidegger’s history of Being that spans beyond the modern age, focusing particularly on the changing dynamics of truth. The Nietzschean body-subject legislates truth as justice. While this sounds like a novel formulation of the essence of truth, for Heidegger it is in fact a further development in the same direction in which truth has been developing for a long time. Bret Davis explains nicely how, throughout Heidegger’s history of truth, the locus of truth’s occurrence is gradually transformed from an event occurring in the world in which we find ourselves to something that happens within the human being. Heidegger, Davis says, tracks

²⁸ GA 5:262.

the change of truth from the pre-metaphysical notion of *aletheia* (unconcealment) to *homoeisis* (correspondence), to *adequation* (correctness), and finally to ‘certainty’ (*Gewissheit*), intimately connected with the rise of the will. With this change in the essence of truth, knowing becomes a matter of representation (*Vorstellung*) where a world of objects is set over against a subject. ... Truth is no longer an event within which humans find themselves, but increasingly rather a matter of the correctness of their representations.²⁹

This process of truth’s internalization by humanity precedes Nietzsche, as Heidegger makes clear in the *Nietzsche* lectures: truth as ἀλήθεια was once the “light in which humanity experienced beings,” but truth as certitude is “transformed into a distinctive feature of the *intellectus* (*humanus, divinus*).”³⁰ Through this change in the essence of truth, Davis observes, “man moves to the center of the world.”³¹ This process is not begun, but rather merely completed, in Nietzsche’s “truth as justice,” as truth is made to be the ecstatic self-assertion of a subject now explicitly intent on subsuming the world of represented beings as it wills its own power. As humanity asserts itself as the source of truth, it loses its ability to be passively open to the happening of truth, gradually rendering itself more and more incapacitated for any engagement with Being. The human-as-bodying-will-to-power gains absolute dominion over the earth in its self-assertion over it as drives, and, precisely through this dominion, completes its fall into nihilism. For Heidegger, a statement like “Being is an empty fiction [*das Sein [ist] eine leere Fiktion*]”³² (from *Twilight of the Idols*)

²⁹ Davis, *Heidegger and the Will* 164.

³⁰ GA 6.2:384.

³¹ Davis, *Heidegger and the Will* 164.

³² KSA 6:75.

marks both the full maturation of Western nihilism and the possibility of an *Übermensch* who would subjugate the entirety of beings to a position of instrumentality in relation to his will.^{33,34}

In an important sense, then, Nietzsche brings clarity to the tradition more than he brings innovation.³⁵ The history of metaphysics as onto-theology already expresses, in a certain way, humanity's lust for domination over Being, long before this lust becomes overtly expressed as will to power. Heidegger says in the *Nietzsche* lectures that "*meta-physics* begins with Plato's interpretation of Being as *ιδέα*. This shapes the essence of Western philosophy thereafter."³⁶ He asserts that "Being as will to power has its origin in the essential determination of *ιδέα*."³⁷ As *ιδέα*, Being is made accessible to humanity as "rational being [*Vernunftwesen*];"³⁸ the onto-theological structure of metaphysics ensures that Being can always be grasped by the *λόγος* wielded by the human being as, in Aristotle's formulation, *ζῶον λόγον ἔχον*. Thus, metaphysics as a whole can be spoken of as a kind of "lordship [*Herrschaft*]"³⁹ that naturally culminates in Nietzsche's will to

³³ Heidegger's decision to inherit Nietzsche's word "nihilism" is potentially perplexing, given the distance between Nietzsche's nihilism of values and Heidegger's nihilism of Being. As Robert Pippin says, for Heidegger, "Nietzsche is captured by what he opposes" and falls himself into nihilism. "He sees that where there had been hoped for presence and ground – nature, natural hierarchy, the end of our life-form, God's will, our basic passions – there had turned out to be nothing stable, a chaotic void. *This void must be filled*. But, for Heidegger, attempting to fill it at all, especially by some human self-assertion is itself an expression of nihilism (a forgetting of our passivity with respect to, dependence on, what could matter, the meaning of Being)." Identifying the meaning of Being as "what could matter" serves to elucidate, I think, what could otherwise seem like a near-total disconnect between Heidegger's use of the word "nihilism" and Nietzsche's own. Robert Pippin, "Heidegger on Nietzsche on Nihilism." In Thomas L. Pangle / J. Harvey Lomax (eds.), *Political Philosophy Cross-Examined: Perennial Challenges to the Philosophic Life*, New York 2013, 173-187: 184.

³⁴ To be clear, Heidegger does not believe that Nietzsche is *wrong* to believe that, after the death of God, "being is an empty fiction" – he even passingly suggests in the *Black Notebooks* that Nietzsche should be seen as having "courage" for acknowledging this state of affairs ("Überlegungen IV." In *Überlegungen II-IV (Schwarze Hefte 1931-1938)*. *Gesamtausgabe* 94. Vittorio Klostermann: Frankfurt am Main 2015. 303). Nietzsche does not recognize the epochal significance of this statement, however.

³⁵ To be fair, this is not always Heidegger's tone when speaking of Nietzsche, but addressing all the ways in which Heidegger's Nietzsche is an innovator would take us off course. The first lecture course seems to appreciate Nietzsche's preference for art over truth as a potential challenge to logocentrism; later, Heidegger suggests that Nietzsche came close to breaking free of metaphysics during 1888, his last productive year; "Nietzsche's Word" seems to associate the madman of the *Gay Science* with Nietzsche himself, suggesting that the madman/Nietzsche approaches true "thinking" by breaking free of his time and place.

³⁶ GA 6.2:196.

³⁷ GA 6.2:214.

³⁸ GA 6.2:227.

³⁹ GA 11:78.

power and, then, in “the shape of modern technology,”⁴⁰ in which the totality of beings is viewed purely as resources, disposable for human power.⁴¹

Since Christianity’s thought is also characterized by onto-theology, it, too, is caught up in this history, with all of the thirst for control over the earth that this implies – to the extent that, when Heidegger names Nietzsche in *What is Called Thinking?* (1951-1952) as the first to recognize the current historical moment as the one in which “humanity prepares itself to take over lordship of the earth as a whole,” he immediately characterizes this lordship as the “fulfill[ment] of the word of an old Testament,”⁴² apparently referring to Genesis, in which God says to Adam and Eve, “Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, *and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth*” [emphases mine].⁴³

In modern Europe, however, there is a much more specific and intimate way in which Christianity (specifically, Luther’s Protestant Christianity) and Nietzsche make common cause, for Heidegger. In *Parmenides*, the lecture course from the winter semester of 1942/1943, Heidegger describes how the modern sense of truth has its origin in Martin Luther (the same historical argument can certainly be pieced together with remarks taken from the *Nietzsche* lectures, but not, I think, in a manner as condensed as in the following passage in *Parmenides*).

⁴⁰ GA 11:78.

⁴¹ Nietzsche as the final result of some seminal thought in antiquity is a recurring motif in Heidegger. The will to power is read as a descendent of both δύναμις and ἐνέργεια in Aristotle (GA 6.1:61-62). In “Anaximander’s Saying,” Western thought is flanked at its beginning and end by the forgetting of Being in the Anaximander fragment and in the full completion of this forgetting in Nietzsche’s statement that “the highest will to power” is “to stamp Becoming with the character of Being” – a statement which Heidegger names “the apex of the consummation of Western philosophy” (GA 5:332).

⁴² Martin Heidegger, *Was heisst Denken*. In *Gesamtausgabe* Volume 8. Ed. Paula Ludikvika Coriando. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann 2002. 61.

⁴³ Genesis 1:28 (I have cited the King James).

That which is Roman [*Das Römische*] in the form of the ecclesiastical dogmatics of Christian faith contributed in an essential way to the consolidation of the essence of truth in the sense of *rectitudo*. Out of this same area of Christian faith *the new transformation of the essence of truth introduces and prepares itself*. Luther poses the question of whether and how the human being can be certain and assured of eternal salvation, in other words, of “the truth” – of whether and how he might be a “true” Christian, i.e. a just man [*ein rechter*], one who is wrought for that which is just [*ein zum Rechten gefertigter*], one who is justified [*ein Gerechtfertigter*]. The question of Christian *veritas* becomes in this sense the question of *iustitia* and *iustificatio* ... *The essence of truth for modernity [Das neuzeitliche Wesen der Wahrheit] is determined on the basis of certitude [Gewißheit], correctness [Rechtheit⁴⁴], being just [Gerechtsein], and of justice [Gerechtigkeit].* [emphases mine]⁴⁵

“The beginning of modern metaphysics,” Heidegger goes on, “rests in the self-transformation of the essence of *veritas* to *certitudo*,”⁴⁶ implying that Luther, not Descartes, who is discussed immediately thereafter (and clearly as the *aftermath* of developments in Christianity), is the seminal figure for modern Western thought. The essence of truth, for Luther, is certitude – certitude of one’s being justified in the eyes of God, certitude of God’s justice. The standard of truth that guides Descartes’s radical doubt had already been prepared by Christianity in Luther, as Heidegger says in *Nietzsche*: “the transformation of reality to the self-certitude of the *ego cogito*

⁴⁴ My sense is that *Rechtheit* should be read as simultaneous referring to the sense of *recht* as “correct” and as “just” (and perhaps also as “right,” which falls in between). The word would thus link Luther’s sense of truth as justice to Descartes’s concern with the correct use of reason, discussed immediately after this passage.

⁴⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*. In *Gesamtausgabe* Volume 54. Ed. Manfred S. Frings. 2nd edition. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann 1992, 75-76.

⁴⁶ GA 52:76.

is determined directly through Christianity.”⁴⁷ Luther’s sense of truth comes into the open in Nietzsche’s articulation of truth as justice: “*Iustificatio* in the sense of the Reformation and Nietzsche’s concept of justice as truth are the same.”⁴⁸ In this way, Luther and Nietzsche serve, for Heidegger, as bookends of modern thought. In both its Lutheran and Nietzschean manifestations, truth as justice is a power-hungry model of truth. Nietzsche’s truth as justice is the “power-based [*machtmässige*],” “active,” “aggressive” configuration of truth⁴⁹ that corresponds to the task of dominion over the earth – yet this is already the case in Luther, in whose thought the quest for certitude as justification is the “grounding form of the will to will,”⁵⁰ where “the will to will” is how Heidegger elsewhere articulates the metaphysical configuration of the technological age, in which the beings of the world have been turned into mere resources for humanity. Nietzsche, then, far from enacting a demolition of Christianity, actually completes the work of Christianity with regard to the modern conception of truth. The task of dominion over the earth, as manifested in the *Übermensch* of the *Nietzsche* lectures, does ultimately require the death of God, but this insurrection against God takes places according to a logic covertly endorsed ahead of time by Christianity. Nietzsche’s thought is thus – more or less in its entirety – the disguised retention and amplification of a metaphysical stance already staked out by Christianity. To be sure, the idea that the death of God would have its origins in Christian thought itself has an antecedent in Nietzsche’s own thinking, but it seems that Heidegger’s Nietzsche, despite being the son of a Lutheran minister, is not in control of his role as a Protestant thinker, that he is not aware of his alliance with Luther.

⁴⁷ GA 6.2 430-431.

⁴⁸ Martin Heidegger, “Überwindung der Metaphysik.” In *Vorträge und Aufsätze*. In *Gesamtausgabe* 7. Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann 2000, 83.

⁴⁹ GA 6.2 175-176.

⁵⁰ GA 54:75.

The fact that Nietzsche's body is a unity of "drives" makes it a natural ultimate configuration of the subject that is the locus point of truth as justice. By calling his subject "*Leib*," Nietzsche allows the "active," "aggressive" assertion of truth as justice to finally be owned explicitly by a Western humanity whose sense of truth has been subtly enacting a quest for control of the earth for some time. In a sense, the Western tradition comes to terms with itself in Nietzsche, with the Nietzschean body acting as the focal point of the elucidation.

Yet this historical narrative also allows Heidegger to paint Nietzsche as a spokesman for the dehumanization of humanity,⁵¹ as he associates the body-as-subject with a brutal "animality." Humanity as *Dasein* is the being for whom Being is a concern, first as care and then as the "shepherd of Being," whereas for Nietzsche and his *Übermensch*, "Being is an empty fiction."⁵² "Animality is that which bodies [*der leibende*], i.e. the body whose impulses push it out of itself and over everything else," Heidegger says. "This name designates the specific unity of the domination-structure of all drives, impulses, and passions that want life itself. Insofar as animality lives as it lives, it does so in the manner of the will to power."⁵³ The rapaciousness of the Western

⁵¹ Here again, it is worth noting that Heidegger's conclusion, even if ultimately unfair, obviously resonates, at least superficially, with Nietzsche's own rhetoric. "Humanity is something that should be overcome," Zarathustra says (KSA 4:14), and the "human, all-too human" is the name of a kind of baseness. Even when speaking in calmer tones, Nietzsche positions himself as the methodological opponent of that which humanizes, as, for instance, when he occasionally makes radical claims about the extent to which our knowledge depends on falsifying "anthropomorphisms" that must be undone by "naturaliz[ing]" humanity (*Gay Science* §109 [KSA 3:468-469]).

It is assertions like the last one that lead Didier Franck to scrutinize "Dehumanization as a Method" in Nietzsche's thought (see the chapter "Dehumanization as a Method" in *Nietzsche and the Shadow of God*, 179-188).
⁵² *Being and Time*: "Dasein is the being, for whom that being is a concern" (§41, GA 2:191). "That being" is immediately the being of Dasein, but, both at the end of §41 and at the next invocation of this phrase at §44c, Heidegger makes it clear that this concern itself implies that "the ontological question must be advanced even further" to "the meaning of Being in general" (GA 2:196) and to "the ground of being of some other" – any other – "entity [*Seienden*]" (GA 2:228).

"The shepherd of Being": "The Letter of Humanism," 1946 (*Wegmarken*. In *Gesamtausgabe* Volume 9. Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann 2013, 342). Given the context of our discussion of Heidegger's Nietzsche, it bears mentioning that this designation of humanity comes on the heels of a rejection of the "metaphysical" notion that humanity should ultimately be understood as appropriately belonging to the "essential domain of *animalitas*" (GA 9:323), an assumption which Heidegger associates with the understanding of the human being as subject and as "lord of beings." "The human being is not the lord of beings. The human being is the shepherd of Being" (GA 9:342).

⁵³ GA 6.2:264-265.

will, pushing “out of itself and over everything else,” is finally unmasked as it is expressed in the animalistic subject-body. Here again, Nietzsche is depicted as the *necessary* end result of Western metaphysics: “In Hegel’s metaphysics, *rationalitas*, understood speculatively and dialectically, becomes determinate for subjectivity; in Nietzsche’s metaphysics, *animalitas* (*Tierheit*) becomes the guiding thread ... The unconditional essence of subjectivity unfurls ... *necessarily* as the *brutalitas* of *bestialitas*. At the end of metaphysics stands the sentence: *Homo est brutum bestiale*.”⁵⁴ The *Übermensch* is the outermost amplification of the animal and the brutal in humanity, the culmination of the internalization of truth, and “the impossibility of Being’s being questioned.”^{55,56}

For the Heidegger of “What is Metaphysics,” the questioning of Being can only take place when “the questioner – as such – is there in the question, in other words, when the questioner is put into question.”⁵⁷ The Nietzschean subject-body cannot ask the question of Being because, as

⁵⁴ GA 6.2:178.

⁵⁵ GA 6.2:16.

⁵⁶ Nietzsche’s status as the culminating figure of Western metaphysics may be thrown into doubt, for some readers, by the fact that Heidegger sometimes speaks of Hegel in similar terms. This point of potential confusion is especially pertinent when using the rubric of “onto-theology” to discuss metaphysics, since Hegel is the figure most often referenced in “The Onto-theological Constitution of Metaphysics.” Indeed, Paul Catanu has suggested that “In the end... [Heidegger implements] a strategy of reduction of Nietzsche to Hegel, in order to make room for his own overcoming of both thinkers” (Paul Catanu, *Heidegger’s Nietzsche: Being and Becoming*, Montreal 2010, 292).

My own sense, though, is that the *Leib* as will to power represents a further stage of empowerment of the subject, over the rationality of *Geist* in Hegel, for Heidegger. Whereas a (Hegelian) rational subject’s relationship to truth is still constrained by reason, the (Nietzschean) subject constituted in embodied willing is not so constrained, and can thus legislate truth as justice (more on this later in the essay). In this way, truth now emanates entirely from the subject. While I will challenge Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche in this essay, I do take his identification of Nietzsche as the culminating figure of metaphysics – where metaphysics is understood in Heidegger’s sense – to be coherent and consistent.

José Daniel Parra has articulated well the difference in what we might call the “metaphysical situation” of Hegel’s *Geist* and Nietzsche’s *Leib* on Heidegger’s account. *Geist* must sublimate “untruth”; only then does *Geist* become “absolute.” “For Nietzsche, Heidegger argues, subjectivity is also absolute,” but it is absolute in the first instance, as it holds sway over “[b]oth ‘truth’ and ‘untruth,’” or, rather, over truth-as-untruth as justice legislated by the subject. In this way, the claim of the subject is advanced to its outer limit in Nietzsche, even further than it had been in Hegel (José Daniel Parra, *Heidegger’s Nietzsche: European Modernity and the Philosophy of the Future*, London 2019, 111-113).

⁵⁷ Martin Heidegger, “Was ist Metaphysik?” In *Wegmarken, Gesamtausgabe* 9. 3rd edition. Vittorio Klostermann: Frankfurt am Main 2013, 103. Heidegger is making a statement about a condition for the possibility of “metaphysics,” at a time when he still regards true metaphysics as capable of asking the question of Being.

the source of truth, the subject is itself entirely put out of question.⁵⁸ Paving the way for his interpretation of Nietzsche's body as the descendent of Descartes's *ego*, Heidegger speaks of the body as the source of givenness [*Gegebenheit*]. Truth as justice retains the absolute certainty of Descartes's *ego*, but the foundation of this certainty is now the body. In arguing for the body as the source of the "givenness of life," Heidegger cites Nietzsche's notes in the *Will to Power*: "The belief [*Glaube*] in the body is more fundamental than the belief in the soul," and "What is essential: to proceed from the body and to use it as the guiding thread. It is the much richer phenomenon, which allows for clearer observation. The belief in the body is better established than the belief in the spirit."⁵⁹ Nietzsche's central emphasis, especially in his middle and later periods, on the body as a multiplicity of largely unknowable or untraceable drives is more or less absent on Heidegger's reading; while he does occasionally nod at the plurality of the Nietzschean body,⁶⁰ the body is more fundamentally the unifying nexus point at which these drives come together in order to furnish beings in willing representation – through which not only the disparate drives, but all the beings of the earth, are gathered together, unified in the subject that represents, dominates, and incorporates [*einverleibt*] them.

According to the picture of Nietzsche that we have been discussing, the Nietzschean body as the new name of the subject marks the historical transition that takes place with the death of God, whereby humanity empowers itself by designating itself the locus of truth and the source of the beingness of beings. Nietzsche remains theological inasmuch as the *Nietzsche* lectures present an onto-theological system that is ultimately an idolatry built around a body-subject that has the potential to be all-powerful. The continuity from Christianity to Nietzsche is indicated by the

⁵⁸ This is what Heidegger says about the "I" of all modern metaphysics more generally, beginning with Descartes's *ego*, the forerunner to Nietzsche's subject-body, in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (GA 29/30:83-84).

⁵⁹ GA 6.1:140. Heidegger is here quoting *The Will to Power* §491 and §532.

⁶⁰ E.g. GA 6.1:215,216 ("Die neue Auslegung der Sinnlichkeit" in *Der Wille zur Macht als Kunst*).

suggestion that Nietzsche is the one who sees a new humanity “fulfilling the word of an old Testament.” In the context of this Nietzsche study, we cannot fully address the peculiarity of Heidegger’s premise that Christianity is ultimately revealed to be complicit in a power-hungry quest for dominance over beings, but recall that the “word of an old Testament” to which Heidegger is here referring calls upon humanity to “subdue” the earth and to establish its own “dominion” over it.⁶¹

Through Nietzsche, we can read more precisely the catastrophe of the present historical moment, in which the radical empowerment of humanity corresponds to a less obvious enslavement of humanity. In “The Question Concerning Technology” (1953), Heidegger writes of “*the danger*,” the “highest danger,” in the age of modern technology, which

bears witness to itself in two ways. As soon as the unconcealed concerns the human being no longer even as object, but as standing reserve [*Bestand*], and the human is only the orderer [*Besteller*] of this standing reserve within objectlessness, the human comes to the brink of a collapse, where he will only be able to be taken, from that point on, as standing reserve. Meanwhile the human being, *precisely as the one threatened in this way*, extends himself into the figure [*in die Gestalt*] of the lord of the earth.⁶² In this way an illusion spreads – the illusion that everything that the human being encounters exists only insofar as it is something that was made by humanity. This

⁶¹ Didier Franck, in the introduction to his *Nietzsche and the Shadow of God*, presses Heidegger on this historical compartmentalization of Christianity, accusing him of conflating Christianity with “Rome” when convenient (1-19).

⁶² This dynamic of enslavement-in-apparent-rulership is made concisely, and in a way that links Nietzsche’s “will to power” with the paradigm of the technological age, in a passage in the *Black Notebooks*, where Heidegger says that “*Wissenschaft*” (scholarship, science) and “the will to power” appeared as a kind of “domination over nature” in earlier modernity, but that “now” it is clear that they are the “inverse” of what would truly count as the “‘freeing’ awakening of ... historical *Dasein*.” GA 94:140.

illusion produces one last delusion, according to which it appears as if humanity everywhere encounters only itself. [emphasis mine]⁶³

Precisely in its successful domination of the earth, whereby it subjugates all beings to a position of instrumentality in relation to the human will, humanity loses itself as the being open to the happening of truth, falling into the position of standing reserve and of instrumentality along with the beings it has overpowered. Like Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, the human being of the age of technology loses its humanity – loses itself as the being for whom Being is a concern, becoming the being for whom “Being is an empty fiction” – and descends into nihilism through its self-empowerment, sacrificing its human status as it becomes *Bestand*.⁶⁴ In Nietzsche, this modern collapse of the human *qua* human is marked by the reading of humanity through the lens of *animalitas*, *Tierheit*. Heidegger's notion that Nietzsche interprets humanity this way is based on Nietzsche's understanding of the human subject as a body [*Leib*] of drives [*Triebe*]. The deterioration or regression of the human into mere animality follows the logic of the metaphysical worldview by which the human is understood as *Leib*, as *Triebe*.⁶⁵ Nietzsche's thought thus embodies “the danger,” “the supreme danger,” for modern humanity after the death of God.

As Nietzsche's alleged metaphysical system is, for Heidegger, the inevitable culminating form of Western metaphysics, we might even suggest that, in the *Nietzsche* lectures, metaphysics

⁶³ GA 7:27-28.

⁶⁴ Nietzsche, though, is at least aware that we are living in a catastrophic historical moment – a moment that sees the “diminution of everything essential [*Verkleinerung von allem Wesentlichen*]” (GA 94:376). My sense is that this separates him, for Heidegger, from the average inhabitant of the age of technology.

⁶⁵ The only Heidegger text of which I am aware in which Heidegger routinely invokes the word *Triebe* without reference to Nietzsche is *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, when he describes the “world-poor [*weltarm*]” structure of animality. The animal, the being whose being is determined by drives, lives in a state of “captivation [*Benommenheit*].” It does not rule the totality of beings like the *Übermensch*, or the human being in the age of technology, but, like those beings, it is captured by its enthrallment with the beings amongst which it finds itself. We might take this text as an early indication that, for Heidegger, understanding the human through (or as) drives means understanding it as less than human. See *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik*, 274-294.

itself, as the basic intellectual tendency of the West, implies an impulse toward a dehumanization of the human being. This stands in contrast to the position of 1929, as asserted in “What is Metaphysics?”, before metaphysics is defined by the onto-theological structure: at that time, Heidegger had asserted that metaphysics is always happening as long as there are human beings,⁶⁶ thereby linking the metaphysical with the human definitionally. As the being who utterly realizes the dream of lordship over the earth, a dream that animates metaphysics, the *Übermensch* is to be read, in fact, as the emblem of the collapse of humanity, rather than its overcoming.

In this way, the Nietzschean body is a kind of apex figure in the violence done to Being by metaphysics. This allows Heidegger to identify Nietzsche’s thought as the terminal point in this history of violence and brutality – a history which does not include Heidegger himself, who, in the *Contributions*, envisions a passivity with respect to Being that would overcome this violence in the “other beginning.” In the *Nietzsche* lectures, delivered as the early phases of the Holocaust were being carried out by the political movement he had supported, Heidegger condemns a brutality that is endemic to Western thought, poisoning the thinking of every philosopher up to, but excluding, himself. This brutality reaches its zenith in the Nietzschean body.

Einverleibung in the Nietzsche Corpus

How viable is Heidegger’s understanding of the Nietzschean *Leib*, upon which his whole reading appears to depend?

⁶⁶ Heidegger’s actual statement is “If the human being exists, then, in a certain sense, philosophy occurs [*Sofern der Mensch existiert, geschieht in gewisser Weise das Philosophieren*]” (GA 9:122). This is his rough paraphrase of Plato’s “ὃ φίλε, ἔνεστί τις φιλοσοφία τῆ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς διανοία,” quoted from Phaedrus 279a (GA 9:122). This only becomes a statement that is unambiguously about metaphysics when Heidegger goes on, in the next sentence, to describe philosophy as the “putting-into-operation [*In-Gang-bringen*] of metaphysics” (GA 9:122).

This question can be addressed by scrutinizing Heidegger's use of the word *Einverleibung*,⁶⁷ incorporation, in the *Nietzsche* lectures. By comparing Heidegger's sense of the Nietzschean body's process of "incorporation" with the way the notion of incorporation actually appears in Nietzsche's texts, I will argue, in this chapter and the next, we can identify in Nietzsche an emphasis on human finitude that takes on a special meaning in modernity, after the death of God. In some ways, a correction of Heidegger's understanding of Nietzsche's body pushes Nietzsche closer to Heidegger.

Heidegger correctly identifies that the body as *Einverleibung* is a kind of process. That the body can be said to be the divine entity in an onto-theology does not mean, for him, thinks that this body is a static one. The *Leib*, the Nietzschean subject, has an ecstatic configuration, although its *ekstasis* is not that of Dasein. "The bodying of life [*Das Leiben des Lebens*] is not some entity existing separately for itself, encapsulated into the object in space [*Körper*]⁶⁸ that the body [*Leib*] can appear as;" to the contrary, Heidegger says, the body is "*Durchlaß und Durchgang zugleich*,"⁶⁹ both in-road and out-road, primordially in engagement with other beings. This transcendence is at the heart of the "physiological," for Nietzsche. "The 'physiological, the sensual-bodily [*das Sinnlich-Leibliche*]," is characterized by a movement of "*Über-sich-hinaus*,"⁷⁰ which we might clumsily translate as "over-and-out-of-itself." Always seeking mastery, the body confronts other forces that it seeks to dominate – but this domination is not always possible, depending on the strength of the body: "The living is open to other forces, but in such a way that, as it struggles

⁶⁷ Here I am to refer to all of Heidegger's uses of the verb *einverleiben*, not only the nominalization "*Einverleibung*" itself. A PDF search of the word does not easily yield all of the relevant usages, given the way Heidegger switches back and forth between the noun and the verb and the way he occasionally breaks up the word internally with hyphenation.

⁶⁸ It is not strictly accurate, here, to translate *Körper* as "object in space," but it seems as if a repetition of the word "body" might be even more confusing in this context.

⁶⁹ GA 6.1:509.

⁷⁰ GA 6.1:214.

against them, it fixes them according to form and rhythm, in order to appraise them for possible incorporation [*Einverleibung*] or exclusion [*Ausschaltung*].”⁷¹ Over the course of the lectures, it becomes clear that, between *Einverleibung* and *Ausschaltung*, *Einverleibung* is the far more conceptually important word, as it corresponds to success in the body’s quest for domination, to the physiological empowerment so valorized by Nietzsche. Incorporation, though, is not mere conquest, but is rather the act of taking on that which was previously external to the body, making it a part of the body. The ecstatic *Über-sich-hinaus* of Nietzsche’s body, then, is not at all like the ecstatic configuration of *Dasein*’s thrown finitude: in the ideal scenario (the one named by the word *Einverleibung*), the body projects itself outside of itself only to bring that which is outside of itself into itself.

It is worth pausing, for a moment, to reflect on the strangeness of Heidegger’s position here: how is it that “the body” can be said to seek mastery? For Heidegger, at the center of Nietzsche’s voluntarist metaphysics lies the body as subject, constituted in and as will to power exclusively. Nietzsche puts forth the body-as-subject as a proposed correction to the allegedly transcendental *ego* of Descartes that, on Nietzsche’s understanding, is supposed to exist prior to any engagement with the world.⁷² Nietzsche, against Descartes, insists that no “doer” can be assumed behind the “deed” and seeks to establish the body-subject as always already underway in

⁷¹ GA 6.1:214.

⁷² Nietzsche’s most well-known articulation of his opposition to Descartes occurs at *Beyond Good and Evil* §54, although *Will to Power* §485 is also often read as a key attack on Descartes, despite not mentioning him by name (*Nachlass* 1887 10[19], KSA 12:465). There, Nietzsche attacks the concept of the subject, calling it a fiction and the origin of the derivative concept of substance: the ego’s thought (deed) is the evidence for its alleged substantiality (doer).

Jean-Luc Marion’s *On Descartes’ Metaphysics Prism: The Constitution and the Limits of Onto-theology in Cartesian Thought* bears mentioning here, as both Nietzsche and Heidegger, as readers of Descartes, are frequently invoked opponents and are influential in Marion’s framing of his reading. (Trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky. University of Chicago Press: London 1999). To Nietzsche’s line of attack regarding the assumed doer behind the deed, Marion responds, “The ego does not merely accede to existence *by* thought, but above all *as* thought, and nothing else” (148). This same claim turns out to be key to Marion’s response to Heidegger’s reading of Descartes (see especially 168).

its relationship to beings, established in transcendence.⁷³ But, for Heidegger, Nietzsche's alleged metaphysics limits the character of this *Über-sich-hinaus* that is the very self-realization of the subject, such that it can only take the form of the will to power.⁷⁴ Thus, the body is in every instance a will to power seeking mastery via incorporation.

There is no necessary limit, in the *Nietzsche* lectures, to how far mastery-via-incorporation can extend itself. One might argue, in fact, that one way of defining the *Übermensch*, as the being who fully embraces the Eternal Return, is as the being whose powers of *Einverleibung* extend over the entirety of beings. When addressing Nietzsche's "sketch" of the Eternal Return in the *Will to Power* notes, Heidegger, says, rather surprisingly, that "The key word of the sketch is in fact 'incorporation' [*die Einverleibung*]." ⁷⁵ Admittedly, the first three steps of the five-step sketch do begin with "*die Einverleibung*" (1. *Die Einverleibung der Grundirrtümer*; 2. *Die Einverleibung der Leidenschaften*; 3. *Die Einverleibung des Wissens und des verzichtenden Wissens*⁷⁶), but one could easily interpret this use of "*Einverleibung*" to mean "incorporation" in the colloquial sense in which we use the word in English, which need not have to do in any literal way with a body, a *Leib*. Heidegger himself, to the contrary, associates *Einverleibung* with "'eating,' ingestion, and digestion" in this context, saying that "[t]he incorporated [*Das Einverleibte*] is that which makes the body – the bodying [*den Leib – das Leiben*] – fixed and standing and certain; at the same time, it is that with which we have become complete and that which determines us in the future, the juice from which we draw our powers." While the body *draws* its power from that which it incorporates, it also *asserts* its power in the same act of incorporation, and, in the "incorporation" of the thought

⁷³ Regarding the "doer" and the "deed," see *Genealogy* I.13, KSA 5:278-281.

⁷⁴ See the lectures from the 1940 *European Nihilism* course from GA 6.2:130-171, but especially "*Nietzsche's Stellungnahme zu Descartes*" and "*Der innere Zusammenhang der Grundstellungen von Descartes und Nietzsche*," GA 6.2 154-171.

⁷⁵ GA 6.1:295.

⁷⁶ In English: "1. The incorporation of the foundation errors; 2. The incorporation of the passions; 3. The incorporation of knowledge and of relinquishing knowledge." Quoted by Heidegger at GA 6.1:294.

of the Eternal Return, this power is power over beings as a whole, as the human subject-body grants them beinghood in permanence. “Incorporation of the thought [of the Eternal Return] means here: to carry out the thinking of the thought in such a way that it becomes in advance the fundamental stance toward beings as a whole and, as such, rules every single thought beforehand.”⁷⁷ One word that Heidegger uses in order to indicate this permanence is *Bestand*, which will later (e.g. “The Question Concerning Technology”) come to be explicitly linked to the human attempt to dominate all beings, through technology.

Heidegger’s sense of the Nietzschean body, however, relies on an understanding of incorporation that is under-nuanced in important ways, and it is my sense that, when we confront Heidegger with a more sober reading of incorporation as it appears in Nietzsche’s work, the “body,” as it appears in the *Nietzsche* lectures, begins to unravel.

Heidegger is right, I think, to see incorporation as integral to Nietzsche’s body, but he holds this opinion for the wrong reasons. In the *Nietzsche* lectures, the body tends to appear as a single unified given, which engages with beings outside itself via the process of incorporation. As we have come to recognize since Heidegger, however, Nietzsche’s body is importantly a multiplicity – and incorporation, while indeed fundamental to the body’s way of being, is not only something that occurs between the body and that which is initially external to it, but is also a process that is constantly happening within the body itself, as an interaction between its various members. The *Leib* becomes *Leib* in *Ein-verleibung*.

Before proceeding to the latter claim, it is important to specify exactly what we mean when we say that the body is a multiplicity for Nietzsche. Nietzsche rejects the unity of the Schopenhauerian body, but he does not replace this unity with raging anarchy. While Heidegger

⁷⁷ GA 6.1:295.

constantly refers to the body as the “guiding thread” of Nietzsche’s thought, he never, throughout the lectures, cites the 1884 note that is arguably the most important instance of this characterization in Nietzsche’s own work⁷⁸: “With the guiding thread of the body, we recognize the human as a multiplicity of living beings, which, partly struggling against one another, partly integrating and subordinating each other, unintentionally affirm the whole in the affirmation of their individual beings.” The “struggle and victory [*Kampf und Sieg*]” of these beings against and over each other gives rise to the “totality of the human being.”⁷⁹ The body is a hierarchy, then, which harbors potential dissidents, but which holds together as long as some dominant entities assert “victory” over them. Accordingly, Zarathustra calls the body “a multiplicity with one meaning, a war and a peace, a herd and a shepherd.”⁸⁰ These “beings” that stand in conflict, submission, or rulership in relation to one another, Nietzsche suggests elsewhere, are “drives”: “The most general picture of our constitution [*unseres Wesens*] is a *socialization of drives* [*Vergesellschaftung von Trieben*], with constant rivalry and individual alliances amongst themselves.”⁸¹

This constitution through “struggle and victory” or “war and peace” can be understood, I argue, as a kind of constant process of incorporation, that itself constitutes the body and is at the heart of Nietzsche’s understanding of the physiological. In a later note, Nietzsche counsels us to understand “the individual himself as a struggle [*Kampf*] between the parts (for nourishment, space, etc.): his development linked to the *conquering* [*Siegen*], the *dominance* of some parts, to the *atrophy* of other parts, to their ‘becoming-organ.’”⁸² *Kampf* here does not name a struggle that ended, in the past, with a conquering [*Siegen*] that also lies in the (more recent) past; rather, the

⁷⁸ Instead, Heidegger repeatedly refers to the passage, cited above, that calls the body the guiding thread because it is a “richer” phenomenon than the spirit or the soul (e.g. GA 6.1:140, GA 6.2:166, GA 6.2:270).

⁷⁹ KSA 11:282.

⁸⁰ KSA 4:39.

⁸¹ KSA 10:274.

⁸² KSA 12:304.

passage articulates an ongoing subjugation of weaker entities to the more powerful ones, so that these weaker entities are constantly *becoming* organs of the body apparatus precisely in this process of subjugation, in the establishment of their relation to the whole through their relation to the higher entities. We should not, in other words, imagine that *Kampf* names a point in time that was then succeeded by the event called *Siegen*; rather, the two occur simultaneously and constantly. The lower organs of the body are continually being made into organs as they struggle and are conquered, and this process, which forms the body, is the process of incorporation, *Einverleibung*. The body “bodies,” to borrow Heidegger’s wording, insofar as it constantly incorporates its own members; only then is the “individual himself” possible. If this is right, then it may be that we should take Nietzsche’s memorable line from *Beyond Good and Evil* not as hyperbole, but as his literal position: “Life itself is *essentially* appropriation [*Aneignung*], injury, overpowering of the alien and the weaker, oppression, harshness, imposition of one’s own form, *incorporation*” [emphasis mine].⁸³

Nietzsche’s discussions of incorporation are accompanied by three key terms: *Aneignung*, *Assimilieren*,⁸⁴ and *Mitleid* – appropriation, assimilation, and sympathy. Once we understand the dynamics that exist between *Einverleibung* and these three other terms, we will see that the Nietzschean body is a body that is constantly dogged by the limits of its own powers, that must decide whether to attempt to incorporate or exclude⁸⁵ a foreign entity based on the condition of its own finitude. As I suggested above, this will yield a picture of the Nietzschean body that is very different from that of Heidegger, on whose account Nietzsche holds out hope for the subject-body’s incorporation of all beings.

⁸³ KSA 5:207.

⁸⁴ Nietzsche uses the older spelling, “Assimiliren.”

⁸⁵ See Heidegger, GA 6.1:214, referenced above.

In a note from 1881, in which he is speaking of simple organisms (such as amoebas), Nietzsche claims that incorporation occurs due to the “drive to appropriation [*Aneignungstriebe*].”⁸⁶ “Such a being [a simple organism] assimilates to itself that which is nearest to it [*das Nächste*] and transforms it into its own property [*Eigenthum*] (property is, first and foremost, nourishment and the storage of nourishment); it seeks to incorporate as much as possible, not only to *compensate* for the loss – it is *rapacious* [*habsüchtig*].”⁸⁷ The word “appropriation [*Aneignung*]” can fairly be associated with a (desired) expansion of one’s own domain: “This drive brings [the organism] to the exploitation of the weaker party, and into contention with similarly strong ones.”⁸⁸ The passage, however, suggests a tradeoff – a “loss” – that is a part of this exchange, for the victorious party, as well as a “fear” that it feels.⁸⁹ Recognizing the suggestion of an economic tradeoff involved in the takeover of the alien entity, Didier Franck proposes that we locate this tradeoff specifically in Nietzsche’s notion of “assimilation.”⁹⁰ Franck points out that “assimilation” is not a top-down measure imposed on the conquering entity on that which is conquered, but is actually a two-way engagement whereby, as the subjugated entity is forced to undergo a change in order to be assimilated, the conqueror also adjusts its own way of being in order to take on that which it is incorporating. Franck points us to a note in which Nietzsche tells us that “the drive to assimilation, that fundamental organic function upon which all growth rests, also adapts itself to that which it appropriates in its proximity.”⁹¹ “If the drive to assimilation is cruel,” Franck argues, “then it must also exert this cruelty and this tyranny upon itself. To assimilate is consequently to reduce the distance inherent to commanding by weakening the power

⁸⁶ *Nachlass* 1881, 11[134], KSA 9:491.

⁸⁷ *Nachlass* 1881, 11[134], KSA 9:490

⁸⁸ *Nachlass* 1881, 11[134], KSA 9:491.

⁸⁹ *Nachlass* 1881, 11[134], KSA 9:491.

⁹⁰ Franck, *Nietzsche and the Shadow of God*, 197-198.

⁹¹ *Nachlass* 1885, 40[7], KSA 11:631

that exerts it and by turning the will to power back against itself: to decline.”⁹² In this way, both the incorporating and the incorporated entity *adapt* to each other. Referring to the famous section of the *Genealogy of Morals* in which Nietzsche differentiates between “active” and “reactive” forces, Franck reminds us that “adaptation” is, for Nietzsche, only ever “an activity of the second rank, a mere reactivity.”^{93,94}

All of this suggests that incorporation necessitates a lowering and weakening of the incorporating being. It is not just that there are some acts of incorporation for which this or that body might not be strong enough; rather, the actual performance of any incorporation involves a kind of self-compromise. We can see a similar dynamic if we trace Nietzsche’s observations on communication between the parts of the body, and between the incorporating and incorporated entities.

To see why communication between parts of the body requires a self-compromise on the part of the higher, stronger forces of the body, we must first briefly recall a far more general principle of Nietzsche’s thought. As Nietzsche often makes clear throughout his work, human beings are not physiologically equipped to face the unvarnished reality of the “sovereign Becoming”⁹⁵ that is, for him, the ultimate reality underlying our world. Manuel Dries has helpfully summed up this human inability, critiqued on many levels in Nietzsche’s work, as “staticism,” and has characterized Nietzsche as attempting to “unlearn the natural staticist standpoint.”⁹⁶ There will always be something paradoxical about this philosophical project, since “language *cannot* express

⁹² Franck, *Nietzsche and the Shadow of God*, 198.

⁹³ KSA 5:316.

⁹⁴ Discussed by Franck, *Nietzsche and the Shadow of God*, 198.

⁹⁵ From “On the Uses and Abuses of History for Life.” The young Nietzsche refers to “the teachings of sovereign becoming [*souverainen Werden*], the fluidity of all concepts, types, and species ... teachings that I hold as true, but as deadly” (KSA 1:319).

⁹⁶ Dries, “Nietzsche’s Critique of Staticism,” *Nietzsche on Time and History*, 1-22, 8.

becoming”⁹⁷ and “the staticist picture ... though false, cannot be abandoned.”⁹⁸ The necessity of a falsification of the reality of flux does not emerge only among conscious human beings, however; to the contrary, it permeates all life. Nietzsche believes that all life, for instance, depends on the fiction of identical cases: in order to prepare for any danger, a living thing, or any part of a living thing, must base this preparation on past threats, which were never exactly the same as the threats that might come in the future. The organic, Nietzsche says in 1881, simply cannot process the reality of becoming: “the ultimate truth [*die letzte Wahrheit*] of the flow of things does not tolerate *incorporation*; our *organs* (in order to live) are configured for error.”⁹⁹ This sentiment is echoed in §110 of *The Gay Science*, where, in one of his more extreme articulations of “staticism,” Nietzsche counts among the foundational human errors the beliefs “that there are enduring things, that there are identical things; that there are things, material, extended bodies [*Körper*];¹⁰⁰ that a thing is that which it appears as.”¹⁰¹ Nietzsche’s conclusion here is less categorical than in the 1881 note, but there is still a limit to the extent to our powers of “incorporation,” as regards “the truth”: “To what extent does truth tolerate incorporation [*Einverleibung*]? – that is the

⁹⁷ Dries, “Towards Adualism,” *Nietzsche on Time and History*, 113-145, 129.

⁹⁸ Dries, “Nietzsche’s Critique of Staticism,” *Nietzsche on Time and History*, 8.

⁹⁹ KSA 9:504.

¹⁰⁰ As above, *Körper* presents a translation difficulty as it is usually translated as “body” but does not indicate the fleshly body, the *Leib*, that has been our topic here, but rather a *res extensa*, a “body” in space.

¹⁰¹ KSA 3:469.

question.”^{102,103} It is not surprising, then to read that “simplification is the primary requirement of the organic”¹⁰⁴ – the organic confronts the multiple as unitary, the different as similar, etc.

As Nietzsche presses this case, however, it becomes clear that this concern for simplification has to do not only with how a body engages the external world of Becoming, but also with how varying members of the struggling unity that make up the body communicate, internally, amongst themselves. All living entities falsify reality, but it is not a given that every member of a living collective will do so in exactly the same manner. Since Nietzsche believes that falsification of the real takes place under the influence of the perceived self-interest of the falsifier, differently positioned members of the organic collective called the body will develop different false ways of understanding the world they encounter. In a note from 1885, Nietzsche emphasizes the difficulty of holding together a being as variegated as the human body, saying:

In the human being, there are as many “consciousnesses” as there are beings [*Wesen*] – in every moment of his existence – that constitute his body. Following the guiding thread of the body¹⁰⁵ ... we learn that our life is only possible through an interaction

¹⁰² KSA 3:471.

¹⁰³ One may want to ask, as I did of Heidegger regarding the “sketch” of the Eternal Return, whether “*Einverleibung*” may have a meaning here that is not really physiological, but the paragraph as a whole consistently pushes the topic of the opposition between the “truth” of becoming and humanity’s preference for the falsehood of being into the realm of the physiological. The Eleatics, who had some partial success in coming to know the reality of becoming, did so by viewing *themselves* through a “staticist” lens, in order to view the project of facing becoming as an enduring affair. Nietzsche opposes this self-understanding of the Eleatics, saying that their project should be understood physiologically, as a manifestation of “primordial drives” (KSA 3:470) that have self-interestedly developed a *degree* of ability to confront the flux of becoming as a “principle of *life* [emphasis in original]” (KSA 3:470). In this context, I do not think that the concluding question regarding “incorporation [*Einverleibung*]” can be divorced from the literal body [*Leib*].

¹⁰⁴ KSA 9:563.

¹⁰⁵ This is yet another instance of the phrase that Heidegger makes so much of (“guiding thread of the body”) that he never addresses, which would have forced him to reconsider the body that he presents to us in the *Nietzsche* lectures.

between many intelligences that are highly unequal in value, and thus only through a permanent thousandfold obeying and commanding [*Gehorchen und Befehlen*].¹⁰⁶

The goal of the task of finding a means to communication, for a higher, more dominant “intelligence” in the body, as it communicates with a “lower,” subjugated “intelligence,” is the continued imposition of command [*Befehlen*].

Originally, all *communication* [*Mittheilen*] is really a wanting-to-take-on, a *grasping* and (mechanically) a willing-to-appropriate [*Aneignen-wollen*]. To incorporate the other [*Den Anderen sich einverleiben*] – later, to incorporate the *will* of the other – to appropriate it, is a matter of the *conquest of the other*. *To communicate oneself* is thus, originally, *to extend one’s sway over the other*: at the foundations of this drive lie an old sign language – *the sign* is the (often *painful*) *stamping of one will onto another will*.¹⁰⁷

Yet for this command to be successful, intelligibility must be mutual; because they are weak, the lower members, once incorporated, must be able to communicate distress, and the higher members must be able to hear such a distress cry for what it is. In this sense, the higher members must develop *sympathy*, *Mitleid*, for those below them: “*To understand quickly, easily* becomes ...very advisable (to receive as few blows as possible). The fastest mutual understanding is the *least painful relationship to one another*: for this reason it is striven for. *Negative sympathy*

¹⁰⁶ KSA 11:577-578.

¹⁰⁷ KSA 10:298.

[*Mitleid*].”¹⁰⁸ Similarly, Nietzsche asks “whether, in the human organism, there is ‘sympathy’ between the different organs? Certainly, in the highest degree. A certain lingering and escalation of pain: a promulgation of *pain*, although not of the *same* pain.”¹⁰⁹ The feudal relationship between the higher and lower elements in the body involves not only the presumption of command at the top; it also involves the demand, by the lower members of the hierarchy, of a unified response to pain, whenever the need arises. For this, a common language of distress signals is needed, and this language necessitates sympathy. For Nietzsche, as is well known, once we are talking about sympathy, we are talking about enervation.¹¹⁰ Nietzsche thus links 1) sympathy, 2) the ability to communicate, and 3) a kind of a leveling effect that arises from the sympathetic connection that establishes the mutual ability to communicate.

For Nietzsche, as is well known, once we are talking about sympathy, we are talking about enervation. In *Dawn*, he deconstructs the word *Mitleid* and comes to the conclusion that it is a misnomer,¹¹¹ because the one who offers sympathy does not share pain [*Leid*] with [*mit*] the sufferer at all,¹¹² as already implied by the note I quoted above (“not of the *same* pain”). To the contrary, “*Mitleid*”¹¹³ brings new pain into the world, for the sympathetic party. When a stronger being offers sympathy to a weaker being, the pain of the suffering weaker being remains, but the stronger being is brought down, to a degree, losing some of its power. Nietzsche thus links 1)

¹⁰⁸ *Nachlass* 1883, 7[173], KSA 10:298.

¹⁰⁹ *Nachlass* 1884, 25[431], KSA 11:126.

¹¹⁰ In *Dawn*, he deconstructs the word *Mitleid* and comes to the conclusion that it is a misnomer (D 133, KSA 3:125-127), because the one who offers sympathy does not share pain [*Leid*] with [*mit*] the sufferer at all,¹¹⁰ as already implied by the note I quoted above (“not of the *same* pain”). To the contrary, “*Mitleid*”¹¹⁰ brings new pain into the world, for the sympathetic party. When a stronger being offers sympathy to a weaker being, the pain of the suffering weaker being remains, but the stronger being is brought down to a degree, losing some of its power.

¹¹¹ KSA 3:125-127.

¹¹² “It is misleading to name the pain that is done to us by such a sight [of pain] ‘sym-pathy’ [*Mit-Leid*], since, under all circumstances, it is a pain from which the [suffering] one before us is *free*: it is our own, just as his suffering is his own” (KSA 3:126).

¹¹³ By the end of the paragraph (§133), Nietzsche does seem to indicate that he will continue using the word (as, of course, he in fact will) despite its deceptiveness.

sympathy, 2) the ability to communicate, and 3) a kind of a leveling effect that arises from the sympathetic connection that establishes the mutual ability to communicate.

This is reflective of a more general tendency in Nietzsche's thought: apart from the question of the body, this connection between sympathy, communication, and leveling is made by Nietzsche in §268 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, in which Nietzsche scrutinizes the German word "gemein," which means both "common" (to all) and "base." "Was ist zuletzt die Gemeinheit?" Nietzsche asks, as the title of the paragraph. Judith Norman translates this question as, "What, in the end, is base?"¹¹⁴ whereas Walter Kaufmann gives us "What, in the end, is common?"¹¹⁵ Nietzsche seems to like the word because it associates togetherness with lowness – as, we might say, Nietzsche himself often does. He rather depressingly emphasizes shared weakness in the formation of "a single people [*Eines Volkes*]"¹¹⁶: individuals tend to come together out of fear, in the face of a shared danger. The origins of human togetherness are thus base origins. This coming-together only fulfills its purpose with the development of successful communication:

The greater the danger, the greater the need to quickly and easily come to an understanding with regard to what is needed; not to misunderstanding each other while in danger is the thing that human beings absolutely cannot do without, if they are to associate with one another. Assuming, now, that distress has only ever brought together such people as are able to indicate similar needs with similar signs, it is made clear, on the whole, that the easy *communicability* of distress – in other words, the

¹¹⁴ *Beyond Good and Evil* by Friedrich Nietzsche. Ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman. Trans. Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002. 163.

¹¹⁵ In *Basic Writings of Nietzsche* by Friedrich Nietzsche. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House 2000. 406.

¹¹⁶ KSA 5:221.

experiencing of only average and base [*gemeinen*] experience – must have been the most powerful of all forces that have directed humanity up till now. The more similar, the more ordinary people were, and are, always at an advantage; the more select, finer, stranger, the *harder to understand* easily remain alone ... One must call upon enormous powers of resistance in order to cross this natural, all too natural *progressus in simile*, the continual training of humanity toward the similar, the ordinary, the average, the herd-like – the *base* [*Gemeine*]¹¹⁷

Togetherness requires communication, but this communication will always develop as the language of the weak, since it emerges in order to allow the collective to face threats that individuals are not strong enough to face alone. Nietzsche suggests that the “more select” individuals tend to be “harder to understand,” and that this is a problem that threatens their ability to join the collective; they must either become more *gemein*, more base or common, in order to join it, or “remain alone.” Coalescence, in summary, requires sympathetic communication and the narrowing of the “rank order [*Rangordnung*]” – to use a Nietzschean phrase – that exists between individuals. This is necessary for human life to the degree that communication is necessary, but it is regrettable, for Nietzsche, as he makes clear in his well-known passage from the *Genealogy*: “the higher *should not* denigrate themselves to become the instrument of the lower; the pathos of distance *should* for all eternity keep their functions separate, as well!”¹¹⁸ He warns against the “plague” of “sympathy [*Mitleid*] with humanity,”¹¹⁹ which works to close the distance between high and low, bringing them together in baseness.

¹¹⁷ KSA 5:221-222.

¹¹⁸ KSA 5:371.

¹¹⁹ KSA 5:371-372.

I have been suggesting that what is true for the coming-together of the social body holds for the coming-together of the human body as well. In the process of incorporation, whereby the body continually makes itself a body, a certain dissipation of power is necessary. Incorporation [*Einverleibung*] begins in the attempt at appropriation [*Aneignung*], but this appropriation can only be successful if the dominant forces in the body lower themselves in two-way assimilation [*Assimilieren*]. The establishment of an ongoing relationship between higher and lower members (“organs”) requires an established mode of communication that must be based in sympathy [*Mitleid*], which requires a lowering of the body’s elite forces, as they seek to make themselves open to the communications (e.g. of pain) of the subjugated forces. It is precisely the movement of empowerment, incorporation, that is also inevitably a movement of enervation, as “pathos of distance” and “rank order” deteriorate in this process. The constitution of the body as will to power is therefore tragic, working against itself in every moment that it struggles for itself. Didier Franck, whose work has guided me here, has already recognized that there is, on the one hand, a necessary, built-in tradeoff between the command that stabilizes the body’s hierarchy, and, on the other hand, a certain loss of power that flattens this hierarchy – ironically, we might say – in the act of the assertion of hierarchy, as this very assertion lowers the entities of “rank,” reducing “distance.” The mutual understanding that must be accomplished between higher and lower entities in the body “implies,” he says, “an equalization and leveling of the intellects or forces that arrive at this understanding.”¹²⁰ He goes on to say that the “perfecting of communication between the multiple wills of the body, a perfection that is but a form of pity [we have been using “*sympathy*” as our English word for “*Mitleid*”], has the same consequence as the death of God: the weakening, even the dispersion, of the body and the individual.”¹²¹ I have not excised the part of Franck’s assertion

¹²⁰ Franck, *Nietzsche and the Shadow of God*, 193.

¹²¹ Franck, *Nietzsche and the Shadow of God*, 194.

that is about the death of God, although it is potentially cryptic for the reader at the moment, because it serves as a kind of preview for the next chapter, where, on our analysis as well, the death of God will be closely associated with the “dispersion” and weakening of the body. The main point for now, however, is the tradeoff involved, for the stronger “wills,” in becoming similar enough to the weaker, conquered parties within the body that they can communicate together. What I wish to emphasize, in addition to Franck’s insight, is that the dynamics of this tradeoff are the dynamics of *Einverleibung*, incorporation.

This picture of the organic, it should be clear, is incompatible with Heidegger’s picture. The dream that Heidegger ascribes to Nietzsche, the dream of a body that would rule over the cosmos, swallowing it up in incorporation, is not viable. To sum up the difference between the reality of the Nietzsche text and the Heidegger interpretation, we can say that the disparity is between an all-powerful body that can consume without regret, in the case of the Heidegger reading, and a body whose very foundational self-expression always diminishes that body as it empowers it, making a limitless outward expansion of power impossible.

The *Nietzsche* Lectures, Truth, and the End of Metaphysics

The fact that the body cannot be all-powerful, however, is, first and foremost, an observation about the organic, whereas, in an assessment of Heidegger’s history of metaphysics and of Nietzsche’s role as the culminating figure of that history, what ultimately matters is the status of truth, and not the status of the body. The body becomes important, in Heidegger’s history of the West, only because, in Nietzsche’s thought, it is the final name of the subject, and the subject is the representative of a certain fallen or deteriorated relationship with truth. Our above analysis

of the body, on Heidegger's reading and in Nietzsche's actual thought, has paved the way for an explanation as to why it is that Nietzsche cannot stand as the culminating figure in the history of metaphysics as onto-theology, as Heidegger wishes him to.

In *The Will to Power as Knowledge*, the third installment in Heidegger's lecture courses on Nietzsche at Freiburg, delivered in the summer semester of 1939, Heidegger claims that the body is the source, master, and beneficiary of "truth," in Nietzsche's thinking. The unity and singularity of the body as τὸ θεῖον in Heidegger's onto-theological framework corresponds to its status as the producer and the lynchpin of univocal truth that can furnish the All of Being, which is to say, in the oblivion of ontological difference, all beings. This structure is what metaphysics is, for Heidegger – a structure wherein Being emanates from *a being*. The body, for Heidegger's Nietzsche, legislates truth and thereby gives beings their being. In asserting this understanding of Nietzsche's sense of truth, Heidegger relies upon well-known proclamations of Nietzsche's, such as his assertion in *The Will to Power* that "Truth is the kind of error without which a certain sort of living being could not live. The value for life decides, in the end."¹²² Whereas most readers simply read "a certain sort of living being" as "the human being," for Heidegger, "living being" and "life" importantly refer specifically to the organic, to the body. The Darwinist rhetoric of another *Will to Power* passage he cites in the same context illustrates his point: "The *valuation* 'I believe that this or that is such and such' as the *essence* of 'truth.' In the valuation *conditions of preservation* and *growth* express themselves."¹²³ Nietzsche, Heidegger tells us, provides a "biological" interpretation of knowledge and of truth. With breathtaking speed, Heidegger places

¹²² *Nachlass* 1885, 34[253], KSA 11:506.

This passage is cited for the first time in *The Will to Power as Knowledge* course at GA 6.1:457. The passage is §493 of *The Will to Power*.

¹²³ *Nachlass* 1887, 9[38], KSA 12:352. Cited at GA 6.1:492. The passage comes from §507 of *The Will to Power*. Emphases in original.

metaphysical history from Aristotle to Nietzsche on a single, linear, easily summarized continuum. He claims that “Western ‘metaphysics’ is ‘logic,’”¹²⁴ a “logic” whose foundation is Aristotle’s law of non-contradiction. In Nietzsche’s truth as justice, the law of non-contradiction is not rejected, but is instead asserted to be *biologically* necessary. The “command” or “imperative”¹²⁵ implied by Aristotle’s law becomes the command of the legislating body, the body that disallows contradiction for the sake of its own empowerment. Nietzsche’s sense of truth thus succeeds in the Western task of submitting Being to thought by making the truth of Being subservient to and dependent upon a subject whose name is “body.”

There is a strange moment in the *Will to Power as Knowledge* course in which Heidegger seems, for a moment, to open up precisely the line of thinking about Nietzschean truth that would complicate his interpretation as articulated above. Having described Nietzsche’s “truth” as a valuation emanating entirely from the subject-body, Heidegger acknowledges that Nietzsche sometimes talks of the realm of Becoming as the domain of truth. He observes, with italics and an exclamation point that perhaps indicate amused irony, that for Nietzsche “The world is – *in truth!* – a becoming world.”¹²⁶ On Heidegger’s reading, it is truth as justice that “stamps Becoming with the character of Being.”¹²⁷ In other words, once there is “truth,” Becoming has been ossified into Being. The acknowledgment of a “true becoming world” would violate the Heideggerian reading, according to which “truth” is precisely the coercion of Becoming into static beinghood. Heidegger almost immediately defuses the danger of his own observation by asserting that, in speaking of a world that is “in truth” a becoming world, Nietzsche “clearly sets one value against the other,”¹²⁸

¹²⁴ GA 6.1 :477.

¹²⁵ GA 6.1:541.

¹²⁶ GA 6.1:493.

¹²⁷ Nachlass 1886/1887 7[54], KSA 12:312, *Will to Power* §617.

¹²⁸ GA 6.1:494.

namely, the value of Becoming over the value of Being. In other words, the extent to which Nietzsche calls the becoming world “true” is just the extent to which he values it more highly than the world of Being. This allows Heidegger to continue maintaining that valuation, ultimately grounded in physiology, is the self-conscious basis of Nietzsche’s assertion of Becoming as the “truth.” Truth still emanates from, and is governed by, the body – a higher body, Heidegger seems to think, one that is capable of valuing Becoming over Being.¹²⁹

The problem with this reading is that Nietzsche unambiguously asserts an “*ultimate truth*” that outstrips the power of the body: “the ultimate truth of the flow of things does not tolerate incorporation; our organs (in order to live) are configured for error.” We observed how, in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche makes clear that there is a limit to the degree to which “truth [can] tolerate incorporation” – indicating beyond doubt that there is, for him, a sense of truth that is exterior to the body’s sovereignty. These passages very directly refute Heidegger’s claim that the Nietzschean subject-body controls and legislates truth as the all-powerful onto-theological θεῖον. It is not the case that, through the Nietzschean sense of truth, Being is finally and conclusively submitted to the onto-theological thought that emanates from a dominant subject, as Heidegger maintains. There are passages that allow Heidegger to maintain such a stance, if he quotes selectively. I am not certain that “truth as error” and “ultimate truth” as it appears in the passage above can be

¹²⁹ Offering a more sympathetic reading of Heidegger’s interpretation of the *Leib* in Nietzsche than I am putting forth here, William McNeill emphasizes the extent to which the *Nietzsche* lectures speak of the body as *of* Becoming, emanating *from* Becoming, even as it constantly engages in acts of individuation in which it bodies forth *from* Becoming. Some middle lectures of *The Will to Power as Knowledge*, lecture sessions 11-13, might be most germane to his point (GA 6.1:496-519). McNeill speaks, with justification, of the body as a process of “individuation arising out of the very midst of chaos” (William McNeill, “A Wave in the Stream of Chaos: Life Beyond the Body in Heidegger’s *Nietzsche*.” In *Philosophy Today* 50, Supplement, 156-161 [2006], 159). One way of putting McNeill’s position, I think, would be that, in those sections of the *Nietzsche* lectures, the body is not a dam set against Becoming, but the border region of the interplay of Being and Becoming in transcendence.

This insightful reading admittedly highlights moments in the lectures that might resist the lectures’ more persistent picture of the domineering body – but it does not ultimately change the fact that, in the *Nietzsche* lectures, the body dominates, furnishes, and possesses truth.

absolutely reconciled in Nietzsche. But the presence of the latter in the Nietzsche text indicates that, far from being the site of humanity's utter control over truth, the specifically Nietzschean body is the site at which humanity's *limited, finite* ability to grasp the truth – in a higher, “ultimate” sense – is exposed.¹³⁰

In short, the unitary, all-powerful *Leib* of Heidegger's *Nietzsche* lectures makes possible an interpretation of Nietzsche under which humanity's power to legislate truth marks the final victory of metaphysical thought. The reality of the Nietzsche text, however, resists this interpretation.

The Ascetic Body

If Heidegger's sense of incorporation and the understanding of the body that develops out of it are so contrary to the textual reality of Nietzsche's work, why does Heidegger push the Nietzschean body in the direction he does? To answer this question exhaustively would pull us too far away from Nietzsche, but we can mention here that it has been argued many times (of Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche in general, not necessarily of his take on the Nietzschean body) that Heidegger forces Nietzsche into metaphysics in order to save for himself the distinction of being the one to overcome metaphysics.¹³¹ The configuration of the body in such a way as to

¹³⁰ If I am right to take the “ultimate truth” to which Nietzsche refers as the reality of Becoming, then the epithet the later Nietzsche ascribes to this “ultimate truth” is “Dionysus.” Dionysus, we learn in the *Dionysus-Dithyrambs*, is the “Unknown One [*Unbekannter*]” and “Unnamable One [*Unnennbarer*]” (“Ariadne's Complaint,” KSA 6:398, 399), the one who cannot be submitted to the word, to the *λόγος*. “Dionysus” indicates a reality that cannot be depicted by metaphysics.

¹³¹ E.g. Jacques Derrida in *Spurs* (Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, Paris 1978. See especially 73-89 and 111-123), Gayatri Spivak in her introduction to Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (Gayatri Spivak, “Introduction.” In Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*), and Sarah Kofman (see the section “Nietzsche as the Thinker of the Consummation of Metaphysics” on pages 66-69 in “Explosions I: Of Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*.” In *Diacritics* [24.4] 1994, 50-70).

make it a viable centerpiece for Nietzsche's alleged subjectivist metaphysics could be seen as serving this purpose.

The Nietzschean *Leib*, then, may be acting as a strategic foil for the orientation of *Dasein* that would successfully break free of metaphysical thinking. Since we cannot here take a deep textual dive into Heidegger, I will take the more efficient route of referring to some distillations of Heidegger's stance in relation to Nietzsche (or Nietzschean concepts) in recent Heidegger scholarship. Taken together, these articulations of Heidegger through the "turn" can give us an indication as to why the *Leib* of Nietzsche's work ends up looking the way it does, for Heidegger.

Metaphysics appears as a kind of human hubris in the middle and late work of Heidegger: Western humanity, thinking metaphysically, asserts its claim to rule against and over Being. In Nietzsche, the culminating figure of this tradition of hubris, the self-imposition of metaphysical thought reaches its hyperbolic outer limit as "bestial" "brutality": "in Nietzsche's metaphysics, *animalitas* (*Tierheit*) becomes the guiding thread ... The unconditional essence of subjectivity unfurls [...] necessarily as the *brutalitas* of *bestialitas*. At the end of metaphysics stands the sentence: *Homo est brutum bestiale*."^{132,133} Ryan Coyne traces how Heidegger, renouncing the overweening self-assertion of Western humanity in metaphysics, opposes it with a "self-renouncing" stance to be taken up by *Dasein*: Heidegger "characterize[s] Being as 'that which retracts' from beings, and ... rethink[s] *Dasein* in the form of a self-renunciation that mirrors this

¹³² GA 6.2:178.

¹³³ It seems dubious to reduce animality, as considered by Nietzsche, to brutality. Vanessa Lemm's book on animality in Nietzsche offers an exploration of how "animality engenders culture, of how animal life becomes the source of creativity" for Nietzsche (Vanessa Lemm, *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy*, 154).

It is possible that, despite Heidegger's attempts to save Nietzsche from the crude "biologistic" readings of Nazis like Alfred Bäumler, the brutality of Nietzschean animality on his own reading may nonetheless reflect the influence of such interpretations. The ways the role of the body in pre-Nazi- and Nazi-era scholarship may have influenced Heidegger is discussed by David Krell in his "Analysis" of what appears in the English translations as volume III of the lectures (In Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche Volume III: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics*, San Francisco 1991, 255-276). See also Aschheim's *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1890-1990* (Chapter 8: "Nietzsche in the Third Reich, especially 245-251).

self-withholding.”¹³⁴ Coyne explains how Nietzsche’s power-valorizing position, allegedly championing “the ‘over-reaching’ of subjectivity, the volitional will of the subject that secures its own self-certitude by means of a fiat,” becomes a natural foil for this project.^{135,136} Not speaking of the Nietzsche-Heidegger relationship, but invoking the key Nietzsche word “asceticism,” Noreen Khawaja ascribes to Heidegger a “new form of asceticism,”¹³⁷ a claim in which we might find some affinity with Coyne’s “self-renouncing” *Dasein*. The ascetic philosophical task is now an unending “transformative labor” that involves seeking to turn toward the “enowning” of Being, by which we are “encompassed ... as an island is by the sea.”¹³⁸ This ascetic labor, we might say (although Khawaja does not speak of Nietzsche in this context), reverses the dynamics of acquisition and ownership of the Nietzschean body that conquers in incorporation.

The notion of incorporation as we have followed it here, though, implies a body that is more “self-renouncing,” and perhaps even more “ascetic,” than Heidegger wants to acknowledge. The body is always simultaneously passive as it is active, is always undergoing or suffering the action of another upon itself as it itself acts.¹³⁹ If by “asceticism” we mean, to speak with Khawaja,

¹³⁴ Ryan Coyne, *Heidegger’s Confessions*, 195.

¹³⁵ Ryan Coyne, *Heidegger’s Confessions*, 206.

¹³⁶ Resonating with Coyne’s notion of the “over-reaching” Nietzschean subject, Duane Armitage articulates the Nietzsche-Heidegger relationship in similar terms, observing how, in a certain sense, “the will to power *is* violence,” (Duane Armitage, *Philosophy’s Violent Sacred: Heidegger and Nietzsche Through Mimetic Theory*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press 2021, 37), as is all onto-theology, and how, after the mid-1930s, Heidegger frames his own position as one that speaks against this violence done against Being (see especially Armitage 79-88).

Again along somewhat similar lines, Louis Blond tells of how Heidegger’s proposed path out of metaphysics rejects a Nietzschean “activity” that seeks “mastery over beings” in favor of a “radical passivity” that gives the initiative to Being in en-owning (*Ereignis*) (Louis Blond, *Heidegger and Nietzsche: Overcoming Metaphysics*, London 2010, 168).

¹³⁷ Noreen Khawaja, *The Religion of Existence: Asceticism in Philosophy from Kierkegaard to Sartre*. Chicago & London 2016, 63.

¹³⁸ Khawaja, *The Religion of Existence*, 150.

¹³⁹ We might also parenthetically observe that this fact also complicates the picture of Nietzsche famously given to us by Deleuze, whereby Nietzsche dreams of a conversion to purely “active” force. Deleuze himself appears to imply the impossibility of this pure activity when he observes that “the becoming of forces appears as a becoming-reactive. Are there no other ways of becoming? The fact remains that we do not feel, experience, or know any becoming but becoming-reactive. We are not merely noting the existence of reactive forces, we are noting the fact that everywhere they are triumphant.” That this might make the aspirational conversion to “active force” impossible is not explored in the Deleuze text, however (Deleuze, *Nietzsche & Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, New York 1983, 64).

a “transformative labor,”¹⁴⁰ that is constitutively unending and is necessitated by “the idea of humanity as fallen,”¹⁴¹ that involves sacrifice for the sake of a higher self, then it may be that “ascetic” is a word properly applied to the Nietzschean body. Admittedly, this suggestion depends upon our agreement with Khawaja’s definition of asceticism, and we cannot engage in an extended scrutiny of that definition here. In lieu of that discussion, we can briefly highlight that one common way of speaking about asceticism is as the pursuit of a cessation of desire, or at least the pursuit of a cessation of attempts to satisfy desires – so, asceticism as passive – whereas my framing here, following Khawaja, thinks of asceticism in a decidedly active way, as the “right” kind of relentless striving, performed endlessly by a finite individual constantly reflecting on her own finitude. There is an important precedent for this sense of asceticism in Weber, for whom the asceticism of the Protestant ethic in the secularized world of Europe is not a cessation of worldly, self-interested striving, but is, to the contrary, the imperative to worldly, self-interested striving in such a way that it resists the temptation to stop striving in “the security of possession.”¹⁴² The broader point is that a kind of self-renunciation can be read into that body as we have analyzed it here, as the *Leib* constituted in perpetual *Einverleibung*. This self-renunciation is indeed continually transformative, in that it is the “labor” that perpetually brings the body into existence. The holding-together of the body in incorporation depends on the constant self-renunciation of each of its members, high or low, as they give themselves up in adaptation, which is required of both the subjugated and dominant forces in the process of incorporation. Self-constitution in incorporation and self-renunciation in adaptation [*Anpassung*] name different aspects of the same dynamic; wherever there is one, there is the other, as well. The body of drives is configured as a paradox, or an

¹⁴⁰ Khawaja, *The Religion of Existence* 24.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid* 22.

¹⁴² See especially the *Protestant Ethic*’s chapter “Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism” (Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Trans. Talcott Parsons. Routledge: London 1992, 102-125).

“impossible task.”¹⁴³ Heideggerian “self-renunciation” or “asceticism,” to use the terms of the scholars above, finds a false foil in Nietzschean “over-reaching” and radically active willing. We might, then, against the Heideggerian reading, borrow Peter Sloterdijk’s phrase for his own work in *You Must Change Your Life*, and identify a “general ascetology” in Nietzsche’s thought: all life is in some sense ascetic.¹⁴⁴ Nietzsche offers us a picture of human finitude, where this word does not imply, as it does by Heidegger, an invitation to consider our mortality, but rather emphasizes the constitutively delimited magnitude of human power.

In conclusion, the body’s forces are always losing as they are gaining, always falling into adaptation as they rise into the ostensible position of power called incorporation, for Nietzsche. Like Nietzsche’s post-Christian history as we explored it in chapter 1, this points to a constitutively, eternally unsatisfied body and to the rejection of any hope of an ultimate, utter empowerment that would finally terminate the outward propulsion of the questing drives.

¹⁴³ Strictly speaking when Eric Blondel uses this phrase, he is describing culture as understood by Nietzsche, not the singular body, but he says this about culture precisely because culture is comprised of embodied individuals and is thus itself rooted in the physiological (Eric Blondel, *Nietzsche: The Body and Culture* 47).

¹⁴⁴ See Peter Sloterdijk, *Du mußt dein Leben ändern*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2009.

Chapter 3: The Modern Body Overwhelmed

The madman of Nietzsche's *Gay Science*¹ memorably depicts the world after the death of God as a situation of unprecedented, unsustainable chaos. Yet Nietzsche, as he limns the social world which the madman seeks to interrupt, shows clearly that it cannot, in fact, be called "chaotic," according to any common understanding of that word. The "bright"² world entered by the madman is full of quiet people who do not care about the madman's message enough even to argue with him; they simply lead him out of town,³ so that they can get back to their quiet, well-ordered lives. Are we to believe the madman, who speaks of modern catastrophe, or the narrator of the passage, who implies a modern lethargy? Is the crisis of modernity after the death of God a crisis of chaos, or of a sleepy, bourgeois security? While all of the characters involved in the scene are fictional, we could point to ample textual evidence of Nietzsche speaking in his own voice in order to defend either the one view of modernity or the other.

I will seek to show, in this chapter, how these two ways of looking at the world that succeeds the death of God do not in fact contradict each other, for Nietzsche. The madman tells us that we have "wipe[d] away the entire horizon," and asks, "What did we do, when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is it moving to now? In what direction are we taking ourselves? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging perpetually? And backwards, sideways, forwards, toward all sides?"⁴ This disorientation is invisible to the townspeople not because it is an illusory chaos that does not in fact exist, but because modernity is defined, as we will see, by its ability to blind itself to its own inner chaos.

¹ KSA 3:480-482 (*The Gay Science* §125).

² KSA 3:480.

³ KSA 3:482.

⁴ KSA 3:481.

“Chaos” is a word whose valence can vacillate to an extreme degree in the Nietzsche text, although the subtly varying senses in which it is used are not unrelated. At times, it can appear to refer to the celebrated Dionysian Becoming, such as when Zarathustra says that “one must still have chaos within to give birth to a dancing star.”⁵ At other times, it seems still synonymous to what Nietzsche means when he uses the word “Becoming,” but is referred to more dispassionately as the noise out of which a world emerges: “Not ‘to know,’ but to schematize – to impose as much regularity and form on chaos as to satisfy our practical needs.”⁶ Finally, there is chaos as the decadent disorganization that characterizes modernity, as when Nietzsche condemns the nineteenth century for failing to live up to the example of Goethe, in *Twilight of the Idols*, describing the Europe of that century as “a chaos, a nihilistic sigh ... an instinct of exhaustion.”⁷

There is no vast gap between the meanings of the celebrated “chaoses” and the condemned “chaoses.” Chaos or Becoming is a concept that can be scaled: Nietzsche sometimes invokes one word or the other in an absolute sense, as the flux which we can never witness directly, but in *Twilight*’s “‘Reason’ in Philosophy,” philosophers’ condemnation of Becoming is linked to their condemnation of the senses,⁸ making clear that Becoming can be, to some degree, discernible. The biggest difference between the various usages, though – the difference between the divine, Dionysian Becoming and the anarchic, decadent chaos – seems to be the relative strength of the body that is exposed to Becoming/chaos. Dionysus is a god of suffering, and living in the midst of chaos can be a Dionysian experience if the body in question is strong enough for such an experience. If the body is not so strong, as is the case in the Nietzschean modernity we are about to look at, then chaos appears as a mere “anarchy” that threatens to become deadly.

⁵ KSA 4:19.

⁶ *Nachlass* KSA 13:333, 1888 14[152] (*Wille zur Macht* §515).

⁷ KSA 6:152.

⁸ KSA 6:74-75.

In the previous chapter, I sought to make clear that, for Nietzsche, human finitude is founded in our embodiedness, in the body's finite capacities of incorporation. Incorporation founds and *is* the body. The finite power of the human body also implies a finite capacity for suffering. In this chapter, I will argue that our finite capacity for suffering leads, after the death of God, to defense mechanisms against suffering which threaten to end our relationship with Becoming altogether. Such defense mechanisms are precisely what are named by the word "idol," for Nietzsche, as we will see. I seek to show that an idol – or, at least, an idol of decadence – is a strategy for limiting and regulating our engagement with reality, a mechanism that limits our exposure to that reality – and thus our exposure to Becoming, and thus to suffering. The modern idols of decadence defend a physiologically exhausted humanity from suffering.

Nietzsche often characterizes modern humanity as humanity that has lost the capacity for suffering. We will explore, in this chapter, how the capacity for suffering is always, for him, the capacity to *hold together* in the face of suffering. The crisis of modernity is thus a crisis of coherence. The idols of decadence seek to make the world visible in a way that mutes suffering by filtering out the chaos that threatens us and causes us pain after the death of God. I will first use the Socrates of *Twilight of the Idols* as an example of decadent idolatry, before turning to modern philosophy, whose idol, like that of Socrates, is reason. Then I will address the modern *Wissenschaftler* (scholar or scientist),⁹ whose idol is truth as fact, and then Wagner, who practices "demolatry," an idolatry of the *demos*. My investigation of these idols will be animated by the question, Which idol leads to the last man, who seems to be the culmination of humanity's self-

⁹ I will leave "*Wissenschaftler*" and "*Wissenschaft*" in German for the duration of this chapter. My reason for doing so is not that the word is so complex in meaning that it can't be satisfactorily translated into English – I do not take that to be the case in the texts in question. I do think, however, that, in *Genealogy* III, discussed at length below, one loses some of Nietzsche's meaning if one is not thinking continuously of both "scientists" and "scholars." Since repeating "scientists and scholars" and "science and scholarship" would be clunky, I will stick with the German word in the Nietzsche text.

severing from Dionysian Becoming – and how does this take place? I will close with an extended engagement with Jean-Luc Marion’s assertion that “Nietzsche remains an idolater.”

The Problem of Coherence and Suffering

Although he condemns the senseless suffering inflicted upon humanity by Christianity, Nietzsche very often celebrates suffering in other contexts. He stresses the value of suffering toward certain social or developmental ends,¹⁰ a theme perhaps most prevalent in *Beyond Good and Evil* and the *Genealogy of Morals*. More important to him, I think, is his association of the greatest insight with pain. Here we can think of the Dionysian experience of *The Birth of Tragedy* and the terrifying thought of the eternal return in *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. For Nietzsche, we cannot extricate *Leid* (pain) from *Leidenschaft* (passion), and a confrontation with the primordial Dionysian unity or with sovereign Becoming must involve both.

However, the anti-Enlightenment flare of many of Nietzsche’s passages celebrating suffering is consistently regulated by an important qualifier that Nietzsche’s hyperbolic delivery may sometimes obscure: Nietzsche repeatedly reminds us that our capacity for pain is finite, that the value of suffering only goes so far. Beyond a certain point, pain kills. The magnitude of pain that can be withstood depends on who one is. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche expresses “nobility” in terms of suffering: “What determines ... the place in the hierarchy is the profundity with which one can withstand suffering ... Deep suffering makes one noble, it sets one apart.”¹¹ He advances the same logic using another one of his favorite hierarchy-related words, *Vorrang*, in a note from 1883, where he speaks of “the value of *pain*, of injury,” arguing that “the ability to

¹⁰ As just one example in a sea of possible examples, but perhaps the most sustained and explicit one, see *The Genealogy of Morals* II.2-4 (KSA 5:293-298).

¹¹ KSA 5:225.

withstand [*Widerstandsfähigkeit*] pressure imparts priority [*Vorrang*].”¹² The ignoble, those who lack priority, would meet their demise if subjected to the same suffering that “sets apart” the noble. Even when famously asserting the value of pain for himself, in his “What doesn’t kill me makes me stronger”¹³ from *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche assigns a limit to the logic of his claim: suffering “makes me stronger” up to, but not exceeding, the point at which it kills me. Alongside the bravado of passages like these, there is the warning that humanity’s relationship with suffering ought to be a careful balancing act. The body, the site of pain, is finite, and can only take so much.

Nietzsche sometimes speaks of the deepening of humanity’s capacity for suffering – the ennobling of humanity, according to the train of thought we have just outlined – as a historical project for the future. To bring humanity to a higher plane, he suggests in a *Will to Power* note, would mean the achievement of a world in which life could be full of suffering: “I assess the *power* of a *will* according to the resistance [*Widerstand*], pain, torture it endures and knows how to convert to its own advantage; I do not hold the evil and painful character of existence up for reproach, but am of the hope that it will one day be more evil and painful than ever before.”¹⁴ Speaking of “my disciples,” of whom he has none in the present and who are a new kind of philosopher meant to open up a new kind of future, he says, “To those human beings which matter to me at all, I wish suffering, desolation, sickness, abuse, debasement ... I have no pity for them, because I wish them the only thing that can prove today whether one has any *worth*: that one endures [*dass er Stand hält*].”¹⁵ We can think of the Eternal Return in similarly futural terms: Zarathustra himself is nearly undone, “shattered,” by the thought, and, unable to bring himself to utter the name of the Eternal Return, presents himself as a John the Baptist figure, paving the way

¹² KSA 10:272, 1883 7[86]

¹³ KSA 6:60.

¹⁴ *Nachlass* KSA 12:524, 1887 10[17] (*Wille zur Macht* §382).

¹⁵ *Nachlass* KSA 12:513, 1887 10[103] (*Wille zur Macht* §910).

for the futural one who will have the strength to endure the thought, but who never arrives in the present of the book: “[a voice] spoke to me again without voice: “Of what concern are you, Zarathustra! Speak your word, and shatter! And I answered, ‘Alas, is it *my* word? Who am I? I await the one more worthy than I; I am not worthy even to shatter against him.’”¹⁶ Zarathustra, who is a prophet of a future to which he never quite belongs, is unable, in the present, to withstand the thought that causes the greatest suffering, and hopes for a future being who might be able to do so.

Nietzsche does not say, however, that modern society is actually on the way to this more painful, noble future – in fact, he often indicates the opposite. The anaesthetized “last man” of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is perhaps the most well-known example of the association between modernity and a dystopian pain-free human life,¹⁷ although we can cite other examples, as well. *Beyond Good and Evil* speaks of a modern “*objective spirit*,” who pursues the “unselfing [*Entselbstung*] and depersonalization of the spirit” that is “being celebrated nowadays as if it were itself the goal, redemption, and transfiguration.”¹⁸ The “unselfing” to which he commits himself in viewing himself as merely one exemplar of humanity among many allows him to forget his own “distress” and his bad health.¹⁹ III.17-18 of the *Genealogy* trace the transition of the power of the “*alleviation* of suffering” from the pre-modern Christian priest to the modern “blessing of work [*Segen der Arbeit*]”²⁰ (perhaps distantly evoking Max Weber, for today’s reader). Although the theme of modernity as an epoch of insulation from suffering becomes more explicit in these works of the 1880s, we might say that it is already presaged, at least, in 1872, in the late chapters of *The*

¹⁶ KSA 4:188.

¹⁷ KSA 4:19-21.

¹⁸ KSA 5:134-135.

¹⁹ KSA 5:135.

²⁰ KSA 5:382.

Birth of Tragedy. In §18-20, Nietzsche names Socrates as the avatar of our modern “Alexandrian” culture.²¹ Today’s theoretical Socratic culture, indulging in a delusional belief in the unlimited power of *Wissenschaft* to control the world,²² hides from itself the fact that it is, like Socrates himself, no longer able to withstand the tragic view into Dionysian suffering.^{23,24}

We can understand this modern incapacity for suffering better if we observe that, for Nietzsche, holding out in the face of suffering means holding *together* in the face of suffering.²⁵ Nietzsche always understands the human being physiologically, and the body is a finite hierarchy of drives. The hierarchy is routinely renegotiated or recalibrated, but if it falls apart completely, failing to cohere, the body perishes. The “standing” indicated in the “*Stand*” of “*Widerstand*” in the passages above thus indicates a standing *together*, a holding firm that is the maintenance of at least a provisional unity. Heidegger deserves credit for being remarkably attentive, in the middle lectures of *The Will to Power as Knowledge*²⁶ that deal with the relationship between the body and “chaos,” to the fact that coherence is a basic and unending task for the Nietzschean body. In the

²¹ KSA 1:116.

²² KSA 1:117.

²³ In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche does strike an optimistic note about the *possibility* of a “coming generation” with “intrepidity of vision” (KSA 1:118), but this is a task for the future, not a reality in the present, in keeping with the later passages cited above.

²⁴ Another early declaration of modern humanity’s limited capacity for suffering comes in Nietzsche’s first two *Untimely Meditations*, where modern progressivist, scholarly history is depicted as being somehow too easy. “History [*die Geschichte*]” in a truer, presumably more Nietzschean sense “can only be endured by strong characters; it extinguishes the weak ones completely” (KSA 1:283).

²⁵ I initially came to understand the problem of capacity for suffering in this way by thinking through Gilles Deleuze’s Nietzsche. It seems to me that this is precisely what Deleuze misses in Nietzsche. In celebrating active force which “affirms its difference” (Deleuze, *Nietzsche & Philosophy*, 9) and “rejects the nostalgia for lost unity” (17), Deleuze largely ignores the extent to which “lost unity” is a prime characteristic of weakness and decadence, for Nietzsche, especially when speaking specifically of modern humanity. I hope to have made clear last chapter that I find it critically correct to assert, as Deleuze does, that, “being composed of a plurality of irreducible forces[,] the body is a multiple phenomenon” (40). Nevertheless, this “plurality of irreducible forces” must endure subjugation to a hegemonic power structure if it is to survive. There are plenty of instances in Nietzsche in which unchecked “plurality” is condemned as decadent “anarchy,” as we will see in this chapter. To speak in broad terms, a lack of attention to such places in the Nietzsche corpus seems to me to be an enduring problem in early French deconstructionist readings of Nietzsche.

²⁶ I am thinking here of lectures 11 through 13, “Knowledge as the Schematizing of a Chaos According to Practical Necessity,” “The Concept of ‘Chaos,’” and “Practical Necessity as the Necessity of a Schema; Formation of a Horizon and Perspective” (GA 6.1:496-519).

context of Heidegger's reading, the coherence in question is a coherence of meaning, which requires a coherence in valuation. He appropriately leans on the word *Stand/Stehen* to articulate this point, describing the body as a "*Stehen im Fortriß*," a "standing in the torrent."²⁷ The body is a body only insofar as it continually holds together in the stream of chaos. He defines "praxis as the enactment of life" as "*Bestandsicherung*," the securing of perdurance.²⁸ The demise of the body must thus be understood as a failure of this standing together, since "*Nur was steht, kann fallen*" – "Only what stands can fall."²⁹ William McNeill, commenting on these lectures, speaks of the body as a process of "individuation arising out of the very midst of chaos."³⁰ If the individuation, the coalescing of perdurance, fails, there is no body.

While Heidegger's view, here, is basically right, an addendum is needed: the coherence in meaning at issue here is founded in a basic harmonization of the drives, which are, of course, not in every instance involved in conscious meaning-making. The fragmentation threatening the unity of the human being, then, is not in the first instance about worldviews or attitudes, but about the hierarchy of drives that found the body. At a certain level of discord, as we will see, Nietzsche believes that the human being resorts to false coherences that involve a kind of self-alienation.

Especially in Nietzsche's last three productive years, warnings that modernity faces a crisis of physiological cohesion abound. In *Twilight of the Idols*, "decadence," the drive configuration of modernity, is defined as the discord of the "instincts."³¹ "Within the instincts, anarchy is threatening," asserts *Beyond Good and Evil*.³² The "*race of masters*" is "succumbing physiologically" to a "modern anarchism" of the "intellectual and social instincts," affirms the

²⁷ GA 6.1:515.

²⁸ GA 6.1:515.

²⁹ GA 6.1:514.

³⁰ William McNeill, "A Wave in the Stream of Chaos," 159.

³¹ See "The Problem of Socrates," where Socrates is identified as a "decadent" in a decadent society (KSA 6:67). Nietzsche goes on to articulate this decadence as that of "the instincts in anarchy" (KSA 6:71).

³² KSA 5:206.

Genealogy.³³ The “style of [modern] decadence,” says *The Case of Wagner*, is “anarchy of the atoms, disaggregation of the will.”³⁴ The task of *Stehen im Fortriß*, then, of holding together within the torrent, is one at which modern humanity is failing. Modernity is a movement of scattering.

Overwhelming Modernity

Heidegger’s phrase “*Stehen im Fortriß*” names not one, but two elements. If modern humanity is failing to hold together in “the torrent,” this development may be observed in terms of a problem internal to the modern body – a “physiological succumbing” to a “modern anarchism” of the “instincts” that threatens our ability to “stand” – or it may be observed beginning with the “torrent” itself. Early and late, Nietzsche identifies modernity as an epoch of excess, an era in which the human being is bombarded with an overwhelming amount of information or stimuli.

Yet there is important development, over Nietzsche’s career, regarding the nature of this modern excess. We can observe this development by considering three passages, two of them addressing history, our topic in chapter 1.

In “On the Uses and Abuses of History for Life” in 1874, Nietzsche articulates a specifically modern life, that of the academic historian, as a state of being overwhelmed by undigestible data. “[T]he modern human being ultimately carries around with himself an immense quantity of undigestible stones of knowledge,”³⁵ Nietzsche had said at the time.

This is still a concern in Nietzsche’s last few productive years, but it is expressed in importantly different ways. In a posthumous note from 1887, Nietzsche writes the following:

³³ KSA 5:264.

³⁴ KSA 6:27.

³⁵ KSA 1:272.

“Modernity” under the allegory of nourishment and digestion.

The sensibility unspeakably more excitable ... the abundance of disparate impressions greater than ever before – the *cosmopolitanism* of cuisines, of literatures, newspapers, forms, tastes, even landscapes, etc.

[T]he *tempo* of this influx as a *prestissimo*; the impressions wipe each other out [*wischen sich aus*]; one protects oneself instinctively from taking anything in, from accepting it *deeply*, from “*digesting*” anything

- *Weakening* of the power of digestion is the result of this. A kind of *adaptation* to this inundation of impressions emerges: the human being unlearns how to *act*; he *now only reacts* to stimuli coming from outside. *He expends his power* partly in *adaptation*, partly in *defense*, partly in *riposte* [*Entgegnung*].

Deep weakening of spontaneity: the historian, the critic, the analyst, the interpreter, the observer, the gatherer, the reader – all *reactive* talents: *all Wissenschaft!*³⁶

One difference between these two passages is their scope. The 1874 assertion about “the modern human being” does make a claim that extends beyond academia, to include all of modern humanity, but the torrent of undigestible data in question is limited to “knowledge.” The overwhelming data in question in the 1887 note, by contrast, now include the “disparate impressions” made by “cuisines,” “tastes,” and “landscapes” – not just “data points,” but “sense data” as well. The “undigestible” tsunami of stimuli has grown more variegated.

³⁶ KSA 12:464, 1887 10[18].

Another difference between the overwhelming modernity of 1874 and that of the late 1880s is, I think, more important. The younger Nietzsche who had associated the “historical sense” with copious scholarly fact-gathering had also associated it with a teleological view of historical progress. Even if the “immense quantity of undigestible stones of knowledge” couldn’t be *fully* digested, these “stones” were at least being *superficially* synthesized into an intellectually lazy but coherent progressivist worldview, bestowing upon them a shallow unity. The rhetoric has become more extreme in 1887, though, where there is no indication even of such a superficial assimilation of data toward coherence: “the impressions wipe each other out.” The recipient of these “disparate impressions” does not attempt even a slapdash, post hoc harmonization. His response seems more desperate: “one protects oneself instinctively from taking *anything* in.”

A third difference – and perhaps the most important one – between the kind of overwhelming going on in 1874 and that of the late 1880s is more visible in *Beyond Good and Evil*’s treatment of the “historical sense,” returning to the phrase Nietzsche had used in “Uses and Abuses.”³⁷ In the 1874 essay, the historical sense had been articulated as a certain pattern of responses to a kind of chaotic pluralism in external historical facts. The problem arose, as the language of “digestion” indicates, from attempting to internalize the disparate array of facts “out there” in world history. In 1886, crucially, the modern cacophony associated with the historical sense has been internalized, and has become who we are: “The past of every form and way of life, from cultures that previously lay right next to one another or over one another, now streams ...

³⁷ In the first chapter I noted that, in 1888’s *Twilight of the Idols* (KSA 6:74), “historical sense” seems to receive a wholly positive connotation, as it denotes the difference between a Nietzschean philosophy of Becoming and previous philosophies of Being. While the phrase perhaps receives its most negative connotation in “Uses and Abuses” and its most positive meaning in Nietzsche’s last productive year, it would not be right to speak, here, of linear progressive development towards a more positive meaning. For example, *Human, All Too Human*, published in 1878, describes a lack of a historical sense as the “hereditary defect [*Erbfehler*]” of all philosophers (KSA 2:24). In that passage, there is no indication of the criticisms of the “historical sense” that will appear in the passage under consideration here, in 1887’s *Beyond Good and Evil*.

into us ‘modern souls’; *our instincts now run backwards every which way, we ourselves are a kind of chaos*” [emphasis mine].³⁸ The drives themselves are now running “every which way”; the human being as a hierarchy is threatened. What began as an outside threat has made its way inside. What is under threat is not the dominance of this or that organ in a material sense, but a dominant program of incorporation – a regulative itinerary for engaging the world with which the body is confronted. Incorporation, after all, is not simply the act of putting inside what once was outside, but is, rather, “digestion.” If what is internalized is not digested but simply taken in, the body will be overrun, resulting in a fragmentation, not of the self as material flesh, but of the self as a hierarchy of drives regulated by such a program of incorporation.

The “instincts” are in a state of “chaos,” and this is the crisis of the “modern soul.” Before we investigate how exactly this qualifies as a crisis, we should be careful to note what this passage does *not* say: the word “chaos” is not simply and always the pejorative name for some kind of fallen physiological state. Indeed, it is images of ossification – of the suppression of chaos – that describe the enervation of the body at the hands of Christianity. The religion that Nietzsche accuses of preaching hatred for the body denigrated the body ontologically with the imposition of the static “true world,”³⁹ whereas Nietzsche seeks to oppose this worldview with the “innocence of Becoming,”⁴⁰ articulating the body as a multiplicity of drives, which, in aggregate and as expressions of the will to power, never arrive at their destination, and are constitutively and radically dynamic. The multiple, dynamic body is, as McNeill observes, always itself *of chaos*, despite the fact that it must steady chaos in order to survive – a fact that is reflected in the choice of the word “*Einverleibung*,” the nominalization of a verb and the name of a process of unification,

³⁸ KSA 5:158.

³⁹ KSA 6:80-81.

⁴⁰ KSA 6:96.

to identify the basic configuration of the body. The body sustains itself by “stamping Becoming with the character of Being,”⁴¹ not by somehow eradicating Becoming. Zarathustra describes the impending anti-epoch of the last man as the age in which humanity no longer has chaos within itself, adding that “one must still have chaos within to give birth to a dancing star.”⁴² Heidegger, for the length of the few brief lectures mentioned above, compellingly articulates the paradoxical nature of the body’s relationship to chaos. Life, which manifests itself as body, is, he says, “the name for *Being*, and Being means: presencing, withstanding [*standhalten*] disappearance and diminution, perdurance [*Beständigkeit*],” but life is also, and at the same time, “chaotic bodying forth [*Leiben*] and overwhelming self-overpowering [*Sichüberdrängen*].”⁴³ The task of life, as a coherent body united by a program of incorporation, is “not to succumb to the rush” of the chaotically pulsing drives, “but to *stand* in it.”⁴⁴

All of this suggests, therefore, that the mere presence of the word “chaos,” therefore, does not by itself identify the modern state described by Nietzsche in these passages as one of sickness and decline. The problem, rather, is the failure (in Heidegger’s terms and Nietzsche’s own) of *Stehen* and *Widerstehen*, of the modern individual’s ability to hold together within and amid the chaos of the drives. In the death of God, the deterioration of Christianity’s campaign to breed the drives into a certain defensive formation against chaos leaves the body vulnerable to the modern “torrent” within and without.

⁴¹ *Nachlass* KSA 12:312, 1886/1887 7[54] (*Will to Power* §617).

⁴² KSA 4:19.

⁴³ GA 6.1:514.

⁴⁴ GA 6.1:514.

The Christian Evasion of the “Torrent” and its Undoing in the Death of God

The death of God exposes the embodied self to an unraveling at the hands of chaos: in order for this claim to have any substance, we must first understand how Christianity once protected the body from chaos, and to do so we must return to the topic of suffering. Christianity’s own strategy for enabling the weak Christian individual to “stand in the torrent” of chaos was to advance a strategy of denying that chaos metaphysically. The notion of a single (free) will suppressed the reality of the dynamic and multiple body of drives,⁴⁵ which, in Christianity’s mature form, allowed the Christian to ascribe her suffering to her own sinful and freely chosen actions. Nietzsche takes this stance to be anesthetic,⁴⁶ as suffering that is justified is easier to bear. The Christian relationship to the body, though, is not *simply* one of self-condemnation. Articulation of the Christian ascetic structure as one of “life *against* life” is a “physiological absurdity” not because ascetic “life” does not in fact struggle against “life,”⁴⁷ but because this articulation misses an important detail about what “life” means in the first and the second case: enfeebled, sick life must kill the active, aggressive, vital instincts that once counted as the healthiest instincts, because these latter instincts will lead to battles that the organism as a whole can no longer win. It is not “life” itself and all its instincts that must be renounced; the organism in aggregate must turn against the selfish, acquisitive, or concupiscent instincts that stake a claim the organism as a whole is no longer fitted out to defend. Of course, the *Genealogy* tells the story of how this ascetic stance gets promulgated even onto healthy organisms (the “nobles”) who did not need to give up their acquisitive claims. But in either case, it is not *all life as such* that is renounced; what gets rejected

⁴⁵ See, for example, *Beyond Good and Evil* §19 (KSA 5:31-34).

⁴⁶ KSA 5:372-375 (*Genealogy* III.15)

⁴⁷ KSA 5:365.

are the body's most overt drives to material or sexual empowerment. This is ideologically represented as the replacement of "my will" with "God's will," on Nietzsche's telling – the vacating of one will for another will. As Didier Franck points out, the Christian life gains coherence as a project by endorsing the occupation of the fallen will of one's own sinful flesh with God's will, such that, on Nietzschean terms, the pursuit of self-denial is quite literally the pursuit of self-annihilation – the annihilation of the self as *self-possessed* will.⁴⁸ The resurrection, which raises the body in holiness, which is to say, in this self-denial perfected, thus purifies the self-annihilation.⁴⁹ After the resurrection, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."⁵⁰ Referring to this passage from Galatians, Emmanuel Falque (before opposing Nietzschean's attacks on the Christian understanding of the body) succinctly sums up what Nietzsche rejects here:

To affirm this with [Paul] will thus be the same as incorporating the "self of the believer" in "another than himself," in the form of a unity of "equal members." It will be to lose oneself in a single will of *equalization* and *uniformity*, although they are what, in the affirmative power of *constructed hierarchies* and *intensification*, make up what is singularly human in each body: racial difference (Jew-Greek), political difference (slave-freeman), sexual difference (man-woman).⁵¹

⁴⁸ See, for example, Franck, *The Shadow of God*, 11.

⁴⁹ Ibid 337.

⁵⁰ Galatians 3:28 (King James).

⁵¹ Falque, *The Metamorphosis of Finite*, 52.

The strategy of anesthetizing the suffering of the specific, individual body (racial, historico-political, sexed) thus proceeds by trivializing it ontologically: this suffering takes place in a world that is not the “true world,” in a body that is, in some sense, not the true body.

One might raise doubts as to whether all this ideological rejection of the individual body of drives and its suffering necessarily does anything to actually reduce this suffering – but it is clear that, for the Nietzsche of the late sections of the *Genealogy* (see GM III.16-18), the ideological machinations of Christianity do actually result in a physiology that is deadened to pain. It is important to recognize that Nietzsche’s description of the *Leidlosigkeit*, the absence of suffering,⁵² that is hereby achieved actually speaks of *Leiden*, suffering, in both a more restricted sense and a less restricted sense. Like the English verb “to suffer,” *Leiden* primarily refers to the experiencing of pain, but can also mean simply to undergo or to experience.⁵³ The goal of the “alleviation of suffering”⁵⁴ in the narrower sense of pain is achieved via the deadening of the ability to “suffer” in the broader sense: the body effectively mutes or dampens its ability to be reached or affected by the changing world. A general “*feeling of physiological inhibition [physiologisches Hemmungsgefühl]*” rules the Christian body,⁵⁵ which lowers its “feeling of life in general to the lowest level,”⁵⁶ until it is in a permanent state of “hibernation.”⁵⁷ Christianity, in other words, solves the problem of suffering in the narrower sense (pain) by making the body less susceptible to suffering in the broader sense (experience, undergoing, being-affected-by taken broadly). It

⁵² KSA 5:382.

⁵³ The fact that the Nietzsche text sometimes vacillates between these two meanings of the word *Leiden*, or leans on their conflation, was brought to my attention by Barbara Stiegler, although the context of her observation is the Dionysian experience of *The Birth of Tragedy* (Stiegler, *Nietzsche et la critique de la chair*, 78 and 121). The suffering of Schopenhauer’s will and Nietzsche’s Dionysus is not only “pain [*souffrance*]” but is at times also, more broadly, “that which is experienced in passivity (*leiden, πάθος*)” (78).

⁵⁴ KSA 5:377.

⁵⁵ KSA 5:378.

⁵⁶ KSA 5:379.

⁵⁷ KSA 5:379.

takes the whole world and all engagements with it as painful, and assumes the task of “standing in the torrent” by seeking to reduce the degree of engagement with the “torrent” in the first place.

The Christian assertion of an eternal Kingdom of eternal, depersonalized bodies, then, successfully results in a physiological configuration whereby the body shields itself from the becoming world that would cause it pain, effectively thinning the stream of Becoming, easing the chaos of the drives into “hibernation.” When God dies, this protective formation dies too, exposing the body in a new way to chaos within and without. As Leo Strauss succinctly and accurately puts it, “The true consequence of the death of God is this: man is radically unprotected or exposed. Suffering remains.”⁵⁸

Thus, the madman of *The Gay Science*, with his vision of cosmic disorientation that features “this earth unchained from the sun,”⁵⁹ is not stricken with a sort of madness that should be casually dismissed on account of his madness, or his non-identity with Nietzsche. When he asks, rhetorically, whether “there is still any up or down,”⁶⁰ this apparently histrionic way of describing the modern predicament is not entirely unmatched by what Nietzsche tells us in his own voice: our very bodies are in discord. We are indeed living in the midst of chaos, *as* chaos. Indeed, in the *Beyond Good and Evil* passage we cited above, Nietzsche not only endorses the madman’s diagnosis when he says that “we ourselves are a kind of chaos” – he even uses the madman’s rhetorical strategies to do so, describing the modern human being in terms of directional chaos: “*our instincts now run backwards every which way.*”

One does not *need* to respond to the death of God the way the madman does, however, as is evidenced by the townspeople who refuse to take him seriously (as well as Zarathustra’s far

⁵⁸ Leo Strauss, *On Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 33.

⁵⁹ KSA 3:481 (*Gay Science* §125).

⁶⁰ KSA 3:481.

more flippant initial response to the death of God⁶¹). This textual observation alone would be enough to prevent us from accepting Christoph Türcke's rather astonishing assertion that one and the same madness is "the fate" of Nietzsche, of the madman, and, potentially in the very near future, "of a whole epoch," presumably the modern epoch.⁶² It is not just that Nietzsche offers us a picture, in the very passage in question, of modern individuals who do not show any signs of succumbing to madness anytime soon. In the last man, he shows us not only an individual not characterized by madness and chaos, but an individual who is condemned precisely for being the absence of all chaos. When the madman asserts that "from now on, whoever is born after us belongs, because of this deed, in a higher history [*Geschichte*] than all history hitherto!"⁶³ he is envisioning a history that is incompatible with the last man, who would circumvent this history, if he became the dominant kind of human being. Alongside the "higher history," then, is the possibility of a history that is decidedly lower than what came before.

The townspeople of the madman passage, the people of the Motley Cow in *Zarathustra*, and Zarathustra's last man are all evidence that the world that follows the death of God is not adequately described by the word "chaos" alone. "We ourselves are a kind of chaos," living amidst an "abundance of disparate impressions greater than ever before," but somehow, "the impressions wipe each other out" – somehow, the chaotic Becoming to which the death of God exposed us anew has already been circumvented or screened. Here again, Strauss offers a brief but apt articulation of this predicament, when he encapsulates the state of the last man with the almost-paradoxical phrase "anarchistic self-complacency," a state that corresponds to "the abolition of

⁶¹ KSA 4:14.

⁶² Christoph Türcke, *Der tolle Mensch: Nietzsche und der Wahnsinn der Vernunft*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer 1991, 7.

⁶³ KSA 3:481.

suffering.”⁶⁴ This countermovement to the threat of chaos as the discord of the drives – and not this discord itself – is, I will argue, the deepest threat of modernity, for Nietzsche.

Glaring Modernity

Barbara Stiegler, in her *Nietzsche et la critique de la chair*, argues compellingly that the problem of modernity is that of the “generalized disembodiment [*désincarnation générale*] of all flesh [*chair*].”⁶⁵ The “sick flesh of modern humanity”⁶⁶ is the flesh that can no longer confront Dionysian flux. Modernity is the age that turns the general human necessity to mediate and limit its encounter with the event of Becoming into a complete circumvention of the encounter in the first place. Socrates is an emblem, for her, of modernity, and the first “modernity” articulated by Nietzsche is that instantiated in the transition from Apollo to Socrates in *The Birth of Tragedy*.⁶⁷

Stiegler provides a tremendously helpful model by reading the Nietzsche corpus in a way that acknowledges that Nietzsche always thinks humanity physiologically, narrating Nietzsche’s entire philosophical career through the lens of the guiding question of the flesh’s limited ability to engage Becoming, symbolized, in the mature Nietzsche’s work, by Dionysus. She correctly identifies the stakes of the modern crisis through her analyses of the figures of Socrates and the last man, whom she seems to see as linked. The “flesh of Socrates no longer feels; it anesthetizes itself and, finally, disembodies itself [*se désincarner*]” (more on Socrates as an anesthetizing force below).⁶⁸ The result is “the reign of what Nietzsche calls ‘the last man,’ that is, a human flesh for

⁶⁴ Strauss, *On Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 33.

⁶⁵ Barbara Stiegler, *Nietzsche et la critique de la chair*, 119. Stiegler is here directly referring to Socrates, but Socrates represents, for her, “the sick flesh of modern humanity” (117).

⁶⁶ Barbara Stiegler, *Nietzsche et la critique de la chair* 117.

⁶⁷ Barbara Stiegler, “On the Future of Our Incorporations: Nietzsche, Media, Events,” 131.

⁶⁸ Barbara Stiegler, *Nietzsche et la critique de la chair*, 119.

whom and through whom nothing happens.”⁶⁹ Stiegler lucidly illustrates the defensive posture of decadent bodies, as they respond to a modern world in which “the impressions wipe each other out,” and “one protects oneself instinctively from taking anything in.”

Nevertheless, I would like to push back against Stiegler on one point, a point which might at first seem quibbling and merely rhetorical. The following excursus regarding a certain repeated trope in the work of another scholar may at first seem tedious, but I wish to emphasize what I think is an important aspect of Nietzsche’s own descriptions decadent modernity that might be elided by Stiegler’s way of talking about them. Stiegler repeatedly leans on a language that refers to the relative “openness” and “closedness” of strong, tragic flesh and weak, modern flesh, respectively. Admittedly, Nietzsche himself occasionally uses such language, such as in the above description of modern humanity refusing to “take anything in,” and perhaps Stiegler is following passages like this. She says, for example, “If there is a Dionysian danger – to which one must always expose oneself, but into which there is never any question of diving in without an (Apollonian) measure of protection – there is also an Apollonian danger. The one (tragic) [danger is incurred] by too much exposure to the excess; the other (Socratic) by an excess of protection against the excess.”⁷⁰ While it does not seem to me to be ultimately *wrong* to speak of the tragic Nietzschean stance toward Becoming as an open one, the metaphor of closedness seems perhaps not to falsify, but at least to paper over, the dynamics whereby weak, decadent modern humanity arrives at a point at which “nothing happens.” One problem with this metaphor is that it seems to suggest that the threatening chaos is entirely outside the body, which, as we have indicated, is not in line with some important passages in the Nietzschean text. Stiegler’s tendency to think of the body as founded in its unified interactions with an outside world, instead of being first and foremost the internal

⁶⁹ Barbara Stiegler, “On the Future of Our Incorporations,” 133.

⁷⁰ Barbara Stiegler, *Nietzsche et la critique de la chair*, 119.

interactions of its various member drives (as, we saw in the previous chapter, it must be), may have to do with her selection of the word *chair*, flesh, as her name for the body, a word which evokes the tradition of phenomenology. While Stiegler takes care to specify that her usage of *chair* should not be taken to indicate “the immediate given of a certain phenomenology,”⁷¹ a passive receptivity to phenomena seems quite often to determine her sense of the Nietzschean *Leib*.

Interaction with the outside world *is* of course part of what the body does – however, if we follow Stiegler in viewing Socrates as a fundamentally modern physiological type (as I think we should, given, especially, the explicit invitation to do so in *Ecce Homo*, not to mention his central role in a book on the modern “twilight of the idols”), then we have to confront the fact that her metaphors for Socrates’s stance toward the world clash with Nietzsche’s own in a potentially important way. The rhetoric of closure runs contrary to the vocabulary used to narrate the rise to power of the Socrates of *Twilight of the Idols* (the relevant chapter is called “The Problem of Socrates”).⁷² In order to rescue decadent Greek humanity, Socrates does not simply shut his eyes to the world. To the contrary, his eyes are wide open, in a new and perversely extreme kind of way, and he sees the world in a light that he himself casts. The guiding image for Socrates is a beam of light that bursts into a darkness in which previously “everywhere the instincts were in anarchy.”⁷³ Socrates’s position is that “The drives want to play the tyrant; one must find a counter-tyrant who is stronger,”⁷⁴ and this counter-tyrant is reason. “[A]gainst the dark desires” reason asserts “a *daylight* permanently.”⁷⁵ The new imperative is that “one must be clever, clear, *bright*

⁷¹ Stiegler, *Nietzsche et la critique de la chair*, 31.

⁷² KSA 6:67-73.

⁷³ KSA 6:71.

⁷⁴ KSA 6:71.

⁷⁵ KSA 6:72.

[hell] at any price” [emphasis mine].⁷⁶ “Rationality,” making life “bright, cold, careful, conscious ... in opposition to instincts,” is “*das grellste Tageslicht*,” “the most glaring daylight.”⁷⁷

I do not think that Stiegler is ultimately wrong about Socrates: indeed, it seems entirely right – and very important – to say, as she does, that “the flesh of Socrates no longer feels; it anesthetizes itself and, finally, disembodies itself.” My point here is that this Socratic goal of non-feeling is by no means achieved via some kind of decision not to engage the world, by a simple refusal to show up for engagement with the world, as Stiegler’s formulations related to closure, protection, and shielding may make us suppose. Socrates does not somehow negate the basic character of the will to power as a movement of *Über-sich-hinaus*, to once again refer to Heidegger’s phrase. To the contrary, Socrates aggressively attacks the world of “dark desires” by bathing it in “the most glaring daylight.” “We ourselves are a kind of chaos” of “dark desires,” living in a decadent world in which “everywhere the instincts are in anarchy.” This decadent world is not just the world of chaos, however: it is also the world of counter-movements to chaos like that of Socrates, who defends himself against chaos with rationality. To sum up my concern with Stiegler’s talk of open and closed-off flesh, I want to insist that Socrates *imposes* this rationality upon the world.

It is through consideration of this self-assertiveness of Socrates that we can understand how the same man can be viewed as the historical suppressor of “dark drives” and, at the same time, as a “great *eroticist*.” Socrates’s idolatry of reason is not a private matter, but a publicly performed ideology, “a new form of agon” that gets practiced in full view of the city, including against the nobility of Athens.⁷⁸ Socrates is alluring to the specific physiology he encounters in Athens,

⁷⁶ KSA 6:73.

⁷⁷ KSA 6:73.

⁷⁸ KSA 6:71.

because he appeals to their aggression by offering a new “variation in the wrestling match between young men and youths”⁷⁹ but also offers a well-needed form of respite to bodies in “degeneration” that was “preparing itself everywhere” (at least) in Athens.⁸⁰ “Rationality was discerned by [his] time as a *savior*.”⁸¹ Socrates erotically “fascinates,” then, by offering the bodies around him exactly what they desperately need.⁸²

There is much to suggest that the rational vision of Socrates is not only a kind of perception, but also a kind of blindness. “*Permanent daylight*” must be disorienting, and one does not see best in light that is glaring, *grell*. Many passages in Nietzsche invite us to be suspicious of the powers of a philosopher associated with “the most glaring daylight,” as the kind of seeing proper to the kind of philosopher whom Nietzsche endorses is very often not that of sharply delineated, well-lit objects. The Nietzschean philosopher roots around underground, like a mole, since he “has the eyes” for the “deep” truths found there,⁸³ or he explores caves with the knowledge that “behind every cave lies another cave ... an abyss behind every ground.”⁸⁴ Before presenting Nietzsche’s “thought of thoughts,” Zarathustra stands on a moonlit mountain and asks, rhetorically, “Is seeing not itself – seeing abysses?”⁸⁵

With this question in mind, we can take stock of what is won and what is lost in the rationality of Socrates. In enthroning rationality as the lodestar of human life, Socrates solves the crisis of coherence, at least in a superficial way, as he decides to suppress the “dark drives” that do not resonate with rational thought. That seeing is itself seeing abysses implies, though, that

⁷⁹ KSA 6:71.

⁸⁰ KSA 6:71.

⁸¹ KSA 6:72.

⁸² KSA 6:71.

⁸³ From the opening section of *Dawn*. KSA 3:11.

⁸⁴ *Beyond Good and Evil*. KSA 5:234.

⁸⁵ From “On the Vision and the Riddle.” KSA 4:199.

seeing in the shadowless light cast by Socrates is not really seeing.⁸⁶ Seeing is seeing abysses for Zarathustra because, in “On the Vision and the Riddle,” he is starting to open himself up to a view of reality as emerging from and disappearing from an unending flux that radically outstrips his own vision. The brightness of Socrates does not represent enlightenment but a refusal to see the abyssal ground of the world, which includes the chaos of his own drives. Rather than acknowledge them, he cuts off his exposure to the stimuli which give them life, declaring “the world” to be composed only of that which can stand in the blinding daylight of reason. In order to survive, then, Socrates casts off parts of his own embodied self, and shrinks the appearing world, preventing parts of it from coming to appearance, stifling the torrent of the becoming world. As by Heidegger, then, Athenian philosophy is accused of making a historical turn away from the essential in favor of a mode of thought that offers humanity great power over reality via reason.

In “The Problem of Socrates,” in summary, the modern predicament is depicted as twofold. The drives are in anarchy (just as we “modern souls” are “ourselves are a kind of chaos”). This is the “problem” that Socrates solves. The problem that Socrates subsequently *is*, however, which is the germ of a historically fateful malaise, is the problem of a rationality that responds to the first problem by “wiping out” much of the world, threatening to close off humanity’s relationship with Becoming entirely – threatening a period, as Stiegler says, in which “nothing happens,” when reality is reduced to the static and always previously discovered world of Socratic daylight. As an avatar of modernity, Socrates thus embodies two distinct moments of modernity: first, a self that is coming apart at the seams, threatening dispersion, losing coherence, and, then, a self that survives by retaining only the parts of itself that can be numbed to the effects of the threat, namely,

⁸⁶ The light of Apollonian vision in *The Birth of Tragedy*, on the other hand, is neither glaring [*grell*] nor permanent, but serves a seeing that is in the service of “seeing abysses.”

the Dionysian flux of Becoming – a self that seeks to be comprised only of whatever elements can be forced into its newfound coherence.

The prominence of the glaring light of Socrates, as the central image of the first chapter of *Twilight* that is not a collection of aphorisms, is paradoxical for two reasons. We have already indicated the first manner in which it is paradoxical: the title and preface abundantly indicate that the work is dedicated to an investigation of modernity, and the first figure discussed at length comes from the ancient world. The second paradox is that Nietzsche seems, with “The Problem of Socrates,” to have immediately inverted his visual scheme for the epoch in question: modernity is named, at the outset, as a period of darkening, of “twilight.” Yet as the “idols” darken in modernity, the avatar of modernity is a beacon of an unfortunate, artificial light.

“The Problem of Socrates” comes after a preface and the collection of aphorisms called “Sayings and Arrows,” and is immediately followed by “‘Reason’ in Philosophy.” If we observe what is said in the sections surround the Socrates chapter, these apparent paradoxes become less strange. In the preface, Nietzsche claims he will “sound out” not just “idols of the times” in the coming work, but “*eternal idols*.”⁸⁷ The “idolatry” of philosophy in decadent periods, the idolatry of reason, is repeated, as we can see by comparing the “The Problem of Socrates” to “‘Reason’ in Philosophy,” from one epoch to another: the dynamics of the “decadence” of Socrates return in important ways in modern philosophy. Nietzsche’s emphasis is once more on philosophers’ tendency to delimit and shrink the domain that is allowed to be acknowledged as belonging to the “true world” – and again “the body”⁸⁸ is denigrated, along with “the apparent world,” which Christianity and Kant disenfranchise.⁸⁹ But this exclusionary attitude is not purely negative in its

⁸⁷ KSA 6:58.

⁸⁸ KSA 6:75.

⁸⁹ KSA 6:79.

intent: it is in the service of a new kind of “perception” available only to the philosopher: “to perceive that which has being [*das Seiende*],”⁹⁰ one must adopt the mode of perception of the “idolaters of concepts [*Begriffs-Götzendiener*]”⁹¹ who enforce “monotono-theism [*Monotono-Theismus*].”⁹² This entire approach, called “Reason,” in quotation marks, “is only a suggestion of *décadence*, a symptom of *declining* life.”⁹³ Socrates, a representative of a decadent era like our own, finds himself in a “twilight” of dark drives in anarchy, but responds, as does modern philosophy, by living in a new kind of light, a light which redefines “that which has being.” Everything seen in this self-certain light – everything which, from now on, has being – excludes the Dionysian, to which belongs, Nietzsche says in the last sentence of “‘Reason’ in Philosophy,” “everything questionable and terrible [*allem Fragwürdigen und Furchtbaren*].”⁹⁴ As Nietzsche had said of the anti-tragic Socrates who was the “anti-Dionysian spirit” of *The Birth of Tragedy*, the Socrates of 1888 performs a “correction of the world” that is a constriction of the world in favor of a certain coherence, constraining “the individual human being to the most limited circle of solvable problems.”⁹⁵ Like the Christian body of the *Genealogy*, Socrates limits suffering in the narrower sense of pain by limiting suffering in the broader sense, blinding himself to the Dionysian so as to deaden its painful impact. The repetition of this same tendency in Socrates, Christianity, and modern philosophy suggests that the age of the twilight (darkness) of some idols needs to be the age of the dawning (light) of new idols: when decadent bodies lose an old structure of protection from the Dionysian, a new structure is required. In this sense, we might take the word *Dämmerung*, twilight, in the title *Götzen-Dämmerung*, to be ambivalent, referring primarily to

⁹⁰ KSA 6:74.

⁹¹ KSA 6:74.

⁹² KSA 6:75.

⁹³ KSA 6:79.

⁹⁴ KSA 6:79.

⁹⁵ KSA 1:115.

twilight as the ensuring darkness of evening, but also, secondarily, to twilight as the approaching light of morning. Equally intentional is the first part of the hyphenated title, *Götzen*, idols. If Nietzsche had merely meant to indicate his discussion of modernity as the epoch of the flight of the divine, he could have imported the title of the last part of Wagner's Ring cycle, *Götterdämmerung*, without alteration. The fact that Nietzsche chooses the word *Götzen* indicates that it is not only religious forms of life that will be discussed, but specifically *idols*, overtly religious or otherwise.

Modern Idols of Decadence

The early chapters of *Twilight of the Idols* suggest, then, that the idols of decadents make reality more bearable by filtering it. The idol is a way of regulating vision, a limiting mechanism, a harness against "the torrent" that makes its own specific coherence possible. Nietzsche's use of visual metaphors follows the etymology of "idol," whose origin in "εἶδωλον" links it to vision – and subtly opposes the idols in question to Dionysus, associated with sound, specifically music (perhaps this is why the "last disciple and initiate of the god Dionysus" will "*sound out*" idols).

The regulating work of the idol offers coherence to the decadent individual threatening to lose herself to chaos, and the precise light in which the world subsequently appears will depend on what the individual can stand to see, as in the case of Socrates. Something similar to this way of understanding the idol is spelled out in the work of Jean-Luc Marion, who in *In Excess* articulates the operation of the idol as follows:

Sight captivated becomes an assigned look. In this way the *idol* is accomplished: the first visible that sight cannot pierce and abandon, because it saturates for the first time and hoards up all admiration in it ... Name your idol, and you will know who you are. The first visible [i.e., the idol] is thus also equivalent to an invisible mirror ... My idol defines what I can bear of phenomenality – the maximum of intuitive intensity that I can endure while keeping my look on a distinctly visible spectacle, all in transforming an intuition into a distinct and constituted visible, without weakening into confusion or blindness. In this way my idol exposes the span of all my aims – what I set my heart on seeing, and thus also want to see and do. In short, it denudes my desires and my hope. What I look at that is visible decides who I am. I am what I can look at.⁹⁶

This way of understanding the idol informs the more historical implementation of the term in the early *God Without Being*, in which “conceptual idols” are associated with “the figures of onto-theo-logy” in the Heideggerian sense.^{97,98} Conceptual idols, then, act as wellsprings of Being, where Being is understood metaphysically. Referring to Nietzsche, Marion argues for the mortality of all idols. The “idol offers the gaze its earth – the first earth upon which to rest,”⁹⁹ but only “as long as the gods have not fled.”¹⁰⁰ The perdurance of the idol requires that “the aim of the gaze” remains fixed and stable. Since the aim of the gaze is destined to change from one epoch to another,

⁹⁶ Jean-Luc Marion. *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*. Trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud. New York: Fordham University Press 2002, 60-61.

⁹⁷ Jean-Luc Marion. *God Without Being*, 16.

⁹⁸ Heidegger himself, too, briefly associates metaphysical thinking (which will eventually be understood as onto-theological thinking) with an emphasis on vision, saying in the *Nietzsche* lectures that the Greeks were *Augenmenschen* because they understood the Being of beings in terms of presence and perdurance (the relevant aspect of vision here being, I think, that seen beings have more staying power than e.g. smelled or heard beings) (GA 6.2:224).

⁹⁹ *Ibid* 13.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid* 15.

“it belongs constitutively to the idol to prepare its twilight.”¹⁰¹ As long as it is still divine, the idol, like an onto-theological system on Heidegger’s telling, determines “that which has being” in a way that is exclusionary insofar as it “forgets” either Being¹⁰² (Heidegger) or Dionysus (Nietzsche). In bringing “the earth” into unity, it offers coherence, submitting Being to thinking (Heidegger), or submitting Becoming to the comprehensible (Nietzsche).

For the moment I do not wish to engage the ways in which Marion is speaking against Nietzsche, in *God Without Being* and also in *The Idol and Distance*, in which he says that Nietzsche, despite revealing to us how idolatry works and how a certain idolatry dies in the death of God, is “still idolatrous.”¹⁰³ We will return to this topic at the end of the chapter. The aspects of Marion’s articulation of idolatry that I would like to emphasize for now are the following: the idol and the idolator mirror one another; the idol illuminates “the” world as a coherent world according to what the idolater “can bear” (can *suffer - leiden*), limiting vision via the light it casts; in the idol, the visible world coheres.

If we can speak in such general terms about how idols work, then we must address the fact that different post-death-of-God idols appear very differently from each other in the Nietzsche text. Is Wagner, the decadent idol of the stage, really functioning in a way that shares any similarity with the “truth” that is called the idol of the modern *Wissenschaftler* of the third book of the *Genealogy of Morals*? Yet another wrinkle is added by the fact that the last man, who represents the final, decadent enervation of modernity, is not an idolator at all. Idols seem to require “aims,” or “desires,” or “hope,” as Marion says, or “tension in the bow,”¹⁰⁴ as Nietzsche says. The last man is emblematic of the time when “the human being no longer hurls the arrow of its desire

¹⁰¹ Ibid 16.

¹⁰² Onto-theology forgets *Being* in order to posit “Being”-as-a-being.

¹⁰³ Marion, Jean-Luc. *The Idol and Distance*, 68.

¹⁰⁴ KSA 5:12-13.

[*Sehnsucht*] beyond humanity, and the string [*Sehne*] of his bow has unlearned how to wirr,” when humanity no longer “has chaos within itself.”¹⁰⁵ The last man, in other words, seems incapable of idols.

In what follows, we will address these three modern individuals in the Nietzsche text: the *Genealogy*'s truth-idolizing scholar, Wagner, and the last man. The guiding question will be: if decadent idols act as protection against Becoming and suffering, what is the path to the last man, who, unlike idols destined to expire, seems to threaten a modern malaise that would have no escape? I am following convention in referring to “*der letzte Mensch*” as “the last man,” but a more strictly accurate translation of the phrase would be “the last human being.”¹⁰⁶ After the last man, the name suggests, the human being develops no further: “His race [*Geschlecht*] is ineradicable, like the flea beetle; the last man lives the longest.”¹⁰⁷ As Stiegler says of this culminating figure of nihilism “for whom and through whom nothing happens,” the last man threatens to inaugurate an “era of nihilism” in which “[t]he temporalization that prevails ... destroys at once the past, systematically forgotten, and the future, systematically prevented from

¹⁰⁵ KSA 4:19.

¹⁰⁶ Good reasons for translating the phrase this way would not be limited to the attempt to avoid sexism imposed by translation: the limits, inception, expiration, and surpassing of the human being are recurring themes in Nietzsche that should be grouped together with the terminology continuity that mark them out in the original German. In 1878, Nietzsche had written a long book on the *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, the human, all-too human, and in the very first pages of 1883's *Zarathustra* Book I, Zarathustra speaks in quick succession of the *Mensch* (the human) who must be overcome (KSA 4:16-18), the *Übermensch* (KSA 4:14), and *der letzte Mensch* (KSA 19-20). To translate these different manifestations of the word for “human being” as, variously, “human” and “man” breaks up a rhetorical marker of thematic unity. This concern makes itself known rather early in the history of anglophone Nietzsche scholarship, as Kaufmann feels compelled to note, in the translator's notes to his 1954 translation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, that *Mensch* means “human” in the context of both the *Übermensch* and *der letzte Mensch* – despite then translating *Mensch* as “man” in both instances (Translator's Notes to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* by Friedrich Nietzsche. Ed. Walter Kaufmann. Reprinted edition. Penguin Books: New York 1978, 3-9, 3-4). Although he momentarily registers this concern regarding the translation of *Mensch*, Kaufmann, in his more extended analysis of the word *Übermensch*, is far more concerned with problematizing the prefix *über-* than with how to render the word *Mensch* (*Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*. Meridian: Cleveland 1956, 266-268).

Thankfully, Graham Parks departs from Kaufmann's precedent in his now-authoritative 2005 translation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* by translating *der letzte Mensch* as “the last human,” the *Übermensch* as “the Overhuman,” and *der Mensch* as “the human” (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Trans. and ed. Graham Parkes. Oxford: New York 2005, 11 and 15).

¹⁰⁷ KSA 4:19.

arriving.”¹⁰⁸ The question, then, is whether there might be an idol of modernity that escapes Marion’s assertion that all idols prepare their own twilight. Is there an idol, in other words, that, rather than providing a merely transient strategy for avoiding suffering and Becoming, successfully deepens and permanentizes this avoidance in perpetuity, severing humanity from Dionysus permanently and thereby creating an unending nihilism?

In some ways, it makes sense to first ask whether truth, as the idol of the modern scholar or scientist (the *Wissenschaftler*), could be such an idol. In this context “truth” – a complicated word for Nietzsche – means the factual results of modern research. Textually, I am thinking mostly of the third book of the *Genealogy of Morals* here, where this is certainly what “truth” means. There, Nietzsche narrates the process by which Christianity’s own respect for truth ultimately develops into its own demise, which arrives when a love of the truth is no longer compatible with Christianity.¹⁰⁹ If a respect for truth disqualifies belief in the otherworldly realm of reality into which the Christian escapes, necessarily immanentizing our understanding of the world, though, then what could destabilize truth’s status as a beacon, once science has given us a “this-worldly” understanding of what counts as real? Modern *Wissenschaft* does not appear vulnerable, at first glance, to the same self-immolation that Christianity unwittingly performed upon itself. For this reason, I pose the truth of modern scholarship as the first candidate for the role of idol that does not expire, the idol that could break Marion’s rule about idols.

That truth is an idol of modernity is confirmed by Nietzsche. The key word of III.24 is “faith,” *Glaube* – and it is applied exclusively to inhabitants of the modern world. In that section, Nietzsche speaks of individuals who fancy themselves anti-Christian “free spirits,” but who are

¹⁰⁸ Stiegler, “On the Future of Our Incorporations,” 133.

¹⁰⁹ See especially III.27 (KSA 5:408-411).

absolutely “not *free spirits*: for they still have faith [glauben] in truth!”^{110,111} The pursuit of “truth” in the scholarly sense, the narrative of Book III makes clear, does not simply undo the basic structure of “faith” in the Christian idol, but rather allows it to live on in a form that does not demand an untenable belief in God. Earlier the same year (1887), in the late-added Book V of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche also speaks of the “faith [*Glaube*]” of modern “godless ones and anti-metaphysicians,” who still believe in “that belief of the Christians [*Christen-Glaube*] ... that God is truth.”¹¹² To speak of the modern attitude toward truth in these religious terms is more than a stylistic choice: all of the aspects of the “idol” that we found identified in the early chapters of *Twilight of the Idols*, and confirmed by Marion, are present in the “truth” pursued by the scholar of *Genealogy* III. The “prerequisite” of modern *Wissenschaft*, which is based on the “overestimation of truth ... the faith [*Glauben*] in the inestimability of truth, the impossibility of its being criticized,” is “physiological ... impoverishment.”¹¹³ The anesthesia that the faith structure peculiar to *Wissenschaft* provides to its adherents is accomplished, like the “reason” of Socrates and Kant, via the implementation of a kind of seeing that in fact strategically conceals much of reality: “Oh, what doesn’t *Wissenschaft* conceal today! How much, at least, is it *supposed* to conceal! ... *Wissenschaft* as a means of self-numbing.”¹¹⁴ *Wissenschaft* makes sense of the world, makes it coherent, through such partial concealment of reality: the physiological weakness of the scholar or scientist, which is, as we have seen, necessarily associated with a kind of internal

¹¹⁰ KSA 5:399.

¹¹¹ One could defang this passage somewhat by translating in a more deflationary way, conventionally rendering “*glauben*” as “believe,” but, in context, there is no doubt that Nietzsche is using the word specifically in order to emphasize the affinity between the pursuit of truth and Christian religious *faith*.

¹¹² KSA 3:577.

¹¹³ KSA 5:402-403.

¹¹⁴ KSA 5:397.

anarchy, is compensated for by a kind of superficial coherence provided by the quest for truth, which offers “a *closed system* of will, goal, and interpretation.”¹¹⁵

Although modern *Wissenschaft* does not *appear* ready to undo itself the way Christianity does, Nietzsche suggests that, like Christianity, the idol of scholarly truth does in fact prepare its own twilight, despite its apparent status as a “genuine,” worldly “philosophy of reality [*Wirklichkeits-Philosophie*]” that rejects “God [and] the beyond.”¹¹⁶ The reason for this is found in the 1887 addition to *The Gay Science*, in which Nietzsche argues that the individual who has faith [*Glaube*] in *Wissenschaft* ... *thereby affirms a world other than* that of life, nature, and history” [emphases in original].¹¹⁷ Insofar as he affirms a world “other than that of life,” “must he not therewith deny its opposite, this world, *our world?*”¹¹⁸ There is a sense, then, in which the “truth” of *Wissenschaft* creates a new “beyond,” a new *Jenseits*, even as it rejects the Christian one, and chooses to live in this beyond. As Nietzsche had already pointed out in the second *Untimely Meditation*, to immerse oneself in the factual “world” of scholarship is not to fearlessly confront reality, and may actually be an evasion of reality, as we saw in Chapter 1. But this means that *Wissenschaft* is still vulnerable to the same self-scrutiny, practiced by the truthful person, by which the will to truth killed the Christian God. The “piety”¹¹⁹ with which we regard “truth” must get called into question once we realize that the world furnished by the sincere pursuit of the truth is more a new “true world,” in the sense used in *Twilight*’s “How the ‘True World’ Became a Fable”¹²⁰ – a world that stifles the reality of Becoming – than it is a real world. In this way, the will to truth, now secularized, threatens again to undo itself: quoting this *Gay Science* passage at

¹¹⁵ KSA 5:396.

¹¹⁶ KSA 5:396.

¹¹⁷ KSA 3:577.

¹¹⁸ KSA 3:577.

¹¹⁹ The 1887 *Gay Science* passage I have been referring to is called “To what extent we are still pious” (KSA 3:574-577).

¹²⁰ KSA 6:80-81.

length in *Genealogy* III, Nietzsche declares that, after God, “there is a new problem: that of the value of truth.”¹²¹ In this way, it becomes clear that the idol of scholarly truth is not likely to be the particular configuration of decadent physiological enervation that threatens to become permanent.

Before we move to Wagner, we should note that the sorts of passages we have been discussing so far as articulations of Nietzschean modernity have been erroneously regarded, on some readings, as more or less exhaustive of this modernity in general. “‘Reason’ in Philosophy,” “The Problem of Socrates,” and the treatment of modern *Wissenschaft* in *Genealogy* III provide examples of the sort of texts that have served readings of Nietzsche whereby “modernity” is tantamount to a kind of dystopian hyper-rational societal configuration in which humanity is utterly alienated from its deepest desires.¹²² This is true of a whole host of appreciative readings that most would now regard as outdated, incompetent, or vile, such as those put forth, to name just a couple examples, in the irrationalist Lev Shestov’s 1899 and 1903 works, *The Good in the Teaching of Tolstoy and Nietzsche* and *The Philosophy of Tragedy, Dostoevsky and Nietzsche*,¹²³

¹²¹ KSA 5:401.

¹²² Such readings tend to avoid the fact that, if the philosophers of *Twilight* and the scholars of *Genealogy* III are both associated with paradigms that can be called “rational,” they are rational in very different ways.

¹²³ Both works are contained in the collection *Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Nietzsche*.

Like the early American commentator William Barrett, who is credited with popularizing existentialist thought in the United States with his 1958 work *Irrational Man* (New York, Anchor Books, 1990), Shestov sees a deep link between Nietzsche and Dostoevsky and understands Raskolnikov’s act of murder in *Crime and Punishment* as a (misguidedly) Nietzschean act of defiance against a coming “crystal palace” society in thrall to a desiccated rationality (see Barrett 137, Shestov 223).

Another strain of responses to Nietzsche that have leaned toward the accusation of irrationalism has been that of Marxists. For Georg Lukács (*The Destruction of Reason*, originally published in 1954 [Trans. Peter Palmer. Humanities Press: Atlantic Highlands 1981. Chapter 3: “Nietzsche as founder of irrationalism in the imperialist period.” Pages 309-399]), Nietzsche is the “founder of irrationalism” in the age of German imperialism. Nietzsche starts out a democrat but eventually senses that democracy, reason, and truth are all on the side of revolution. Nietzsche thus rejects “any criterion of truth other than usefulness for the biological survival of the individual (and the species)” (*The Destruction of Reason* 389) and becomes a full-blown irrationalist, as well as an opponent of democracy, motivated by his class interests.

Similarly, for Mikhail Lifshitz, writing in Moscow in the early 1930s, Nietzsche is a professionalized intellectual defender of the bourgeoisie, leading a “sort of *professional counter-revolution*” (“Johann Joachim Winckelmann and the Three Epochs of the Bourgeois Weltanschauung.” Reprinted in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 7, Issue 1 (September 1946). 42-82, 63) in which “reaction” masquerades “under the

or in the nationalist “German Faith Movement” during the rise of National Socialism.¹²⁴ It is also true of receptions still taken far more seriously, however, such as that offered by Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, whose Nietzsche predicts, in modern society, the ever-widening oppression of the individual in the name of reason,¹²⁵ or the reading advanced in Jürgen Habermas’s *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, whose Nietzsche “renounces a new revision of the concept of reason and *takes leave of the dialectic of enlightenment.*”¹²⁶

The first objection to be made against these sorts of readings of Nietzsche’s modernity is that they demand that we forget whole swaths of Nietzsche’s corpus in which dystopian images of modernity are put forth that depict a humanity more easily described as deplorably irrational than as hyper-rational. The cult of Wagner, which we will discuss in a moment, fits this description, as do many of Nietzsche’s descriptions of the masses coalescing under the banners of socialism and democracy. Furthermore, it is clear that rationality is not strictly the root problem ailing the enervated rational figures of modernity. In the case of the *Wissenschaftler* of *Genealogy III*, for example, in which the scrutinized representative of decadent modernity perhaps can in some sense be described, on Nietzsche’s terms, as hyper-rational, Nietzsche seeks precisely to make clear how this figure develops out of, and still shares much in common with, the Christian believer. The case of the *Wissenschaftler* illustrates, then, that the modernity that Nietzsche wants to condemn cannot easily be summed up as either “hyper-rational” or “irrational.”

mask of revolution” (Ibid 63). Nietzsche “demands” monumental history and seeks out amoral heroes in the past in order to shore up old-fashioned aristocratic elitism (66), celebrating the irrational Dionysiac artistic impulse because it opposes the rational thinking that would lead to revolution (67-68).

¹²⁴ See chapter VII of Steven E. Aschheim’s *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany, 1890-1990*, “After the Death of God: Varieties of Nietzschean Religion,” for a summary of this movement (201-231).

¹²⁵ Horkheimer, Max, and Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente*. Frankfurt: Fischer 1988. “Like few others after Hegel, Nietzsche recognized the dialectic of Enlightenment. He formulated its ambivalent relationship to power (50).”

¹²⁶Jürgen Habermas, *Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1985, 106-107.

For our purposes here, however, there is a more important reason not to reduce Nietzsche's decadent modernity to a sort of hypertrophy via reason: the idol of truth, as we described it above with reference to the 1887 *Gay Science* addition and *Genealogy* III, does not seem able to pave the way for the *permanent* malaise embodied by the last man. If the last man represents the *last*, permanent stage of modern, decadent enervation, then the dynamics of *Wissenschaft*, which ultimately seem destined, as we saw, to call themselves into question and to "prepare their own twilight," do not appear to be able to yield the last man. If the last man does not emerge from the worshippers of the idol of truth, then the most dangerous idol of modernity is likely to be found elsewhere.

What, then, is the most dangerous idol of modernity, for Nietzsche – the idol that has the potential to ultimately give rise to the last man? In a sense, the notion of Nietzsche as an irrationalist critic of a hyper-rational modernity has the potential to blind us to the answer. I will explain how this is by focusing briefly on just one such interpretation of Nietzsche, that of Jürgen Habermas. For Habermas, Nietzsche stands in a tradition of critics of modernity that extends "from Hegel and Marx to Nietzsche and Heidegger, from Bataille and Lacan to Foucault and Derrida," advancing, with all these others, "a reproach ... that has not changed." Their "denunciation [of modernity] is directed against a reason that is founded in the principle of subjectivity." This reason exposes and denounces "all unconcealed forms of oppression and exploitation" only to then "install in their place the unassailable lordship of rationality itself."¹²⁷ If Nietzsche distinguishes himself at all in this anti-modern crowd, it is for the fact that he is consistent in the totality of his assault on modernity, critiquing not only institutionalized and establishmentarian forms of modern rationality, but also condemning "the betrayal of the intellectuals ... the crimes that the avant-

¹²⁷ Habermas 70.

garde types, with a good conscience informed by the philosophy of history, have committed in the name of universal human reason.”¹²⁸ What does Habermas’s Nietzsche oppose to dry, modern rationality? A pre-modern, pre-rational celebration of “taste”: “Nietzsche enthrones tastes [*Nietzsche inthronisiert ... den Geschmack*].”¹²⁹

In his relentless attack on this reading of Nietzschean modernity, however, David Wellbery¹³⁰ points out that it is impossible to square this interpretation with Nietzsche’s 1888 depiction of Wagner as a representative of modernity.¹³¹ The cult of Wagner is our next candidate for the most dangerous idolatry of modernity, the one that risks becoming permanent. A certain aesthetic taste is precisely that which is condemned in Nietzsche’s critique of modernity in *The Case of Wagner*, and this sense of taste values bombast and sentimentality – and certainly not cold reason.¹³² For Nietzsche, though, the irrational noise preferred by Wagnerian taste is no more the

¹²⁸ Habermas 72.

¹²⁹ Habermas 119.

¹³⁰ David Wellbery. “Nietzsche – Art – Postmodernism: A Reply to Jürgen Habermas.” In *Nietzsche in Italy*. Ed. Thomas Harrison. Saratoga: Ambri Libri 1988, 77-100.

¹³¹ Wellbery briefly makes clear at the beginning of his essay that one does not *need* to turn to “The Case of Wagner” in order to find fault with Habermas’s understanding of Nietzsche. In texts that might initially appear more conducive to Habermas’s reading, such as *Twilight* and *Genealogy III*, Nietzsche claims that “one *must* go forward ... *further into decadence*” (KSA 6:144, cited at Wellbery 78) and he insists that (as we pointed out above) the “rationalized form” of modern life that he criticizes emerges via “a transition to modernity [that] is here [in *Genealogy III*] narrativized as a process whereby a system of symbolic organization in a phase of decay – sclerosis, dogmatization, loss of legitimacy – preserves itself precisely through a movement of self-negation” (Wellbery 81). This already suggests that, even from within the texts that would best serve a reading of Nietzschean modernity like that put forward by Habermas, the “two-state model” (Wellbery 80) assumed by Habermas’s reading, according to which life is either pre-modern and governed by myth or modern and governed by reason, is not viable: this either/or is not operative in Nietzsche’s sense of history, and, even if it were, one could not freely *choose* between life in a pre-modern fashion or in a modern fashion.

¹³² Robert Pippin’s essay, “Nietzsche’s alleged farewell: The premodern, modern, and postmodern Nietzsche” might be said to illustrate the foundations of Habermas’s sense that “Nietzsche enthrones taste,” although this assertion about Nietzsche and taste is not a central concern of the essay (In *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*. Ed. Bernd Magnus and Kathleen M. Higgins. Cambridge University Press: New York 1999, 252-280). Addressing Habermas’s claim that Nietzsche “bids farewell” to modernity in a somewhat different register than does Wellbery, Robert Pippin argues that this claim is based on a “preliminary or surface Nietzsche” (265). If modernity, following Descartes, experiences a profound “sense of loss” (272) at our shaken confidence in external standards against which to judge our interpretations of the world, then Nietzsche feels this sense as profoundly as any other philosopher of modernity. Failing to recognize this, Habermas ascribes to Nietzsche a return to the pre-modern, “aristocratic” set of values that does not divide the morally good from the wicked, but instead distinguishes the “beautiful, or fine (*kalos*) ... from the ugly and common” (261). For Habermas, this liberating return to an pre-modern aestheticism is also a bridge to the free “play” of postmodern discourse” (266). The resultant “creator acts, with premodern glory and postmodern

root problem of modernity than is scholarly rationality: both are symptoms of something deeper. “To accuse Nietzsche of ‘enthroning taste,’ as Habermas does,” says Wellbery, “drastically foreshortens the purport of his [Nietzsche’s] critical writing, for this writing is not at all governed by a faculty of arbitration, as the regal metaphor [enthrones / *intronisiert*] implies. It is rather an engagement with and analysis of what I would call the *corporeal unconscious*.”¹³³ Nietzsche analyzes Wagner as a “sickness”¹³⁴ that manifests itself in an aesthetic that is both a physiological response and a physiological coping mechanism: Wagnerian art is a “phantasma-machine that has as its function the organization of bodies.”¹³⁵

In fact, *the true object of the essay is not Wagner the individual, but a species of organic agitation, a syndrome or type of sickness ...* The sickness in question, of course, is decadence, a disease characterized by a poison-like spreading, an inner contagion. What spreads in decadence is *a certain disorganization, analogous, I think, to what information theorists call noise*. Decadence designates the disgregation of meaning structures. [emphases mine]¹³⁶

As does the organizing and coherence-enforcing light of Socratic reason in *Twilight* (also an 1888 text), Wagnerian expression “produces the illusion of unity in a situation of fragmentation and

possibility, nobly, in supreme indifference to others” (269). This is, for Pippin, not an entirely hallucinated version of Nietzsche, but it is a picture of Nietzsche developed by means of the forgetting of the respects in which “Nietzsche himself seems to concede ... that one can never *be* radically independent or wholly active” (271). Repeatedly, we see Nietzsche *in* the modern Cartesian crisis regarding the rootlessness of our interpretations and judgments, rather than shrugging it off in favor of an unproblematized embrace of pure self-creation.

The impossibility of being “radically independent or wholly active” is a topic to which I will turn in the latter half of the next chapter.

¹³³ Wellbery 92.

¹³⁴ KSA 6:21.

¹³⁵ Wellbery 92.

¹³⁶ Wellbery 91.

atomization.”¹³⁷ Rather than “arbitrating” between tastes, Nietzsche is practicing a symptomology, “sounding out” the idol of the stage, to use the verb phrase Nietzsche implements in the preface to *Twilight*, and reading it as an indication of “sickness,” of “bloated entrails.”¹³⁸ This sickness, which extends beyond both Socrates and Wagner to be imputed to Athens and Germany generally, involves a “disorganization” that at a certain point becomes an emergency. Decadence – to use the general train of Wellbery’s argument in order to supply a supplement to the definition he offers above – is not *just* disorganization and disgregation, but is also the counteracting response, which, in all of the decadent figures of Nietzschean thought that we have examined so far, seeks reactively to “organize” the bodies that find themselves in this state of emergency, to make them stand together. In other words, decadence is not only the physiological catastrophe of the fragmented human being, composed of increasingly “atomized elements,” but is also the “imaginary totality”¹³⁹ with which Wagnerian art (or modern scholarly rationality or Socratic reason) seeks to compensate for this atomization.¹⁴⁰

Nietzsche explicitly labels the “phantasma-machine” that is the cult of Wagner as a form of idolatry: “The theater is a form of *demolatry* [*Demolatrie*]¹⁴¹ in matters of taste; the theater is an uprising of the masses, a plebescite *against* good taste... *this is precisely what is proven by the case of Wagner.*”¹⁴² This idolatry operates, in broad terms, according to the logic that we have

¹³⁷ Wellbery 91.

¹³⁸ KSA 6:57 (Preface to *Twilight of the Idols*).

¹³⁹ Wellbery 91.

¹⁴⁰ Perhaps Nietzsche’s Wagner as understood by Wellbery provides an even better example than Stiegler’s Nietzschean Socrates as to why her metaphors of “closure” for physiological decadence might be limiting. The thrashing aggression of the Wagnerian response to decadent enervation can be described as a protective sealing-off even less easily than can Socrates’s rationality.

¹⁴¹ Walter Kaufmann points out, in a footnote to his translation of the text, that the choice of the Greek *demos* in the construction of Nietzsche’s word “*demolatry*” likely refers to Aristotle’s *Poetics* and Plato’s *Laws*. Just a few lines before, Nietzsche invokes Plato’s word “theatocracy,” defined as “the folly of a faith in the *priority* [*Vorrang*] of the theater” (KSA 6:42) (From *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Modern Library 2000, 639).

¹⁴² KSA 6:42.

already identified as the logic of decadent idols. Its impetus is the physiological exhaustion of overwhelmed bodies that have suffered too much. Wagner discerns in music “the means to excite tired nerves – and with that he has made music sick.”¹⁴³ Yet, as Nietzsche says over and over again, Wagnerian art is duplicitous through and through, and this “excitation,” far from being truly invigorating, in fact “increases exhaustion.”¹⁴⁴ As by his depiction of Socrates in *Twilight*, the deception with which Wagnerian idolatry colors the world is spoken of in visual metaphors: Wagner’s genius is a “*Schauspieler-Genie*,” the genius of an actor or of one who plays with that which is visible. Wagner claims to express himself in music, the medium of Dionysus, but Nietzsche insists on reading him in terms of the visual. His falsity is the falsity of the stage, on which “*the actor [Schauspieler] becomes the seducer of those who are authentic*” and on which “*music becomes an art of lying.*”¹⁴⁵ If, as Marion says, “my idol defines what I can bear” to look at, then the Wagnerian idolatry of the stage defines modernity as an age that cannot bear to see the real, the Dionysian actuality of Becoming.

The word “demolatriy” means “idolatry of the *demos*,” or, in more Wagnerian terms, idolatry of the *Volk*. For Nietzsche, however, the word “*Volk*” often carries the implication of a *massified* people, a people made into a mass and acting as a herd – and nowhere is this more evident than in his attacks on Wagner. The 1887 edition to *The Gay Science* asserts that “in the theater, one becomes a people, a herd, woman, pharisee, yes-man, patron, idiot - *Wagnerian [man wird Volk, Heerde, Weib, Pharisäer, Stimmvieh, Patronatsherr, Idiot - Wagnerianer]*.”¹⁴⁶ Herd, *Heerde*, is a strong indicator of the status of *das Volk* in *The Case of Wagner*, although, in the work itself, the word that most often stands in for “*das Volk*” is “*Massen*,” “masses.” The audience in

¹⁴³ KSA 6:23.

¹⁴⁴ KSA 6:22.

¹⁴⁵ KSA 6:39.

¹⁴⁶ KSA 3:618. This section (“The Cynic Speaks”) is reprinted in *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* (KSA 6:420).

the theater is humanity-as-mass: “We know the masses; we know the theater [*Wir kennen die Massen, wir kennen das Theater.*].”¹⁴⁷ Here we must appreciate not only the anonymity implied in the word “masses,” but also the massiveness. “Wherefore beauty?” Nietzsche has an imaginary Wagnerian music scholar ask.¹⁴⁸ “Why not rather the huge, the sublime, the gigantic [*das Gigantische*] – that which moves the *masses*?”¹⁴⁹ In his own voice, Nietzsche adds: “It is easier to be gigantic than beautiful – we know that.”¹⁵⁰ In the context of the sense in which Nietzsche’s Wagner understands the *demos*, then, the idolatry of the *demos*, “demolatry,” is a worship of the gigantic, the massive. The idolatry of the gigantic as channeled by Wagner is fundamentally modern; “Wagner is the *modern artist* par excellence.”¹⁵¹

My sense is that the Nietzsche corpus, taken as a whole, ascribes more power to Wagnerian “demolatry” than to the other modern idolatries we have mentioned, whether the “reason” of philosophy or the “truth” of *Wissenschaft*. Whereas philosophical reason and scholarly industriousness can be achieved only by a specific sort of person, Wagnerian bombast is a response to the “physiology” of “the *Volk*” generally.¹⁵² We could feasibly speculate that Nietzsche would be willing to classify democracy, nationalism, and socialism under the heading of “demolatry,” as well, as they could all be understood, on Nietzschean terms, of worship of the *demos*. In this way, the symptomology of the cult of Wagner might be taken as a rubric for far broader social movements. We can see clear similarities between Wagnerian demolatry and the “idolatry” discussed in the *Zarathustra* chapter on the state called “On the New Idol,”¹⁵³ which we will touch upon shortly.

¹⁴⁷ KSA 6:24.

¹⁴⁸ KSA 6:24.

¹⁴⁹ KSA 6:24.

¹⁵⁰ KSA 6:24.

¹⁵¹ KSA 6:23.

¹⁵² KSA 6:24.

¹⁵³ KSA 4:61-64.

There is a deeper reason to see the Wagnerian idolatry of the gigantic as more dangerous than the other idolatries of modernity, however, and this has to do with the precise manner in which it transfigures the world as we see it.

As noted above, Nietzsche seems to suggest that Wagner merely masquerades as a musician. In reality, he is an actor, a *Schauspieler*. Wagnerian music, Nietzsche says in *The Gay Science*, is a mere means to Wagnerian drama, and even Wagnerian drama is only a means to a certain deceptive self-representation.¹⁵⁴ From *The Birth of Tragedy* to the *Dionysus Dithyrambs*, in which attention is repeatedly drawn to his lover Ariadne's ears,¹⁵⁵ Dionysus is a god of music, for Nietzsche. Wagner's pretense at being a musician is reflective of the fact that he is, for Nietzsche, a false prophet of Dionysus. Whereas Socrates operates more or less in the open as an "anti-Dionysian spirit," and the modern *Wissenschaftler* and the modern philosopher could never be mistaken as initiates of Dionysus, Wagner offers the false promise of a Dionysian experience.¹⁵⁶

We can begin to see this by observing how, over the course of *The Case of Wagner*, the entire Dionysian vocabulary, as it appears elsewhere in the Nietzschean corpus, must be perverted, by Nietzsche himself, in order to articulate the dynamics of Wagnerianism. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, "passion [*Leidenschaft*]" had been used in association with Dionysianism (in connection with Archilochus,¹⁵⁷ for example, who "introduced the folksong [*Volkslied*] into literature"¹⁵⁸). In *The Case of Wagner*, Wagnerians seek passion, as they require "the deep, the overwhelming."¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ KSA 3:617 (Book V, *The Gay Science*), reprinted in *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* (KSA 6:419).

¹⁵⁵ E.g. KSA 6:401.

¹⁵⁶ We might read a similar distinction back into the anti-Dionysian spirits of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Socrates and Euripides, as we see here between Socrates and Wagner. Barbara Stiegler, associating Socrates and Euripides as figures of modernity, argues that, in Euripides, we see "a caricature of the Dionysian, of a *πάθος* that is simulated and artificial" (Stiegler, *Nietzsche et la critique de la chair*, 120). Whereas Socrates seeks openly "'to correct' Being" (Ibid 117), Euripides *simulates* an encounter with Becoming.

I owe this comparison originally to Sam Lee, from the Philosophy of Religion Workshop in 2022.

¹⁵⁷ KSA 1:43.

¹⁵⁸ KSA 1:48.

¹⁵⁹ KSA 6:24.

They find passion in “who[m]ever throws us.”¹⁶⁰ This passion, though, is cheap: “nothing is easier than passion! ... one does not need to have learned anything – anyone can produce passion!”¹⁶¹ The lexicon of Zarathustra, “that Dionysian fiend,”¹⁶² is tarnished in a similar way. Zarathustra speaks favorably of a “chaos within” and, through the Eternal Return, seeks a confrontation with chaos without; the fact that he sees the world emerging from this Dionysian chaos causes him to say that “seeing is always seeing abysses.” “Chaos” and “abyss” are words that Nietzsche associates with Wagner, too: Wagner’s style is a case of “chaos,”¹⁶³ and Wagnerian art “drives one faster into the abyss.”¹⁶⁴ But this chaos is merely a reflection of the lack of the cohesion of the “physiological type”¹⁶⁵ that is the modern Wagnerian; it is a chaos borne of the incapacity for coherent “thought.”¹⁶⁶ The “abyss” toward which Wagner drives us is not the abyss of Dionysian Becoming, but a cavern with no “air,” in which “the instincts are weakened.”¹⁶⁷ As by *Twilight*’s Socrates, discussed earlier in this chapter, the instincts stand in “anarchy.” This time, however, the danger of this anarchy is not shot through with the light of Socratic reason, but is drowned out, though not eliminated, with a bombast that seeks to *force* the chaos it encounters within itself into a passionate unity.

More generally, in *The Case of Wagner* Nietzsche speaks of a certain way of *letting oneself go* in the Wagnerian experience, which we can identify as a fallen or sham form of the abandon of the orgiastic Dionysian festival. “[O]ne does not resist him,”¹⁶⁸ Nietzsche says of Wagner. “[T]he

¹⁶⁰ KSA 6:24.

¹⁶¹ KSA 6:25.

¹⁶² This is Nietzsche’s description of Dionysus in the 1886 “Attempt at a Self-Criticism,” added as an introduction to *The Birth of Tragedy* (KSA 1:22).

¹⁶³ KSA 6:24.

¹⁶⁴ KSA 6:22.

¹⁶⁵ KSA 6:22.

¹⁶⁶ KSA 6:24.

¹⁶⁷ KSA 6:22-23.

¹⁶⁸ KSA 6:22.

little children come to him”;¹⁶⁹ one lets oneself be seized by a “hypnotic grip.”¹⁷⁰ The “hysterics,” “convulsions,” and “instability”¹⁷¹ of the Wagnerian performance onstage are mirrored in the disposition of the audience. This attitude, the attitude of “demoltry,” the worship of the masses as the worship of the gigantic, is mirrored in Nietzsche’s description of the democratic paradigm:

The pressure applied by the church for millennia produced a gorgeous *tension* in the bow, as did that applied by the monarchies. The two attempted relaxations of the bow (rather than attempting to shoot with it) are 1) Jesuitism and 2) democracy. European democracy is *not* ... an unleashing of *powers*, but above all an unleashing of *letting-oneself-go* [*Sich-gehen-lassen*], of *wanting-to-have-comfort* [*Bequem-haben-wollen*], of inner *laziness*.¹⁷²

Demoltry, which in reality aids the nihilistic slackening of the “tension in the bow,” masquerades as an “unleashing of powers,” as, we might say to follow the metaphor, a shooting with the bow. While the encounter with Dionysus might in some sense be described as a “letting-oneself-go” in *The Birth of Tragedy*, this phrase could not describe the mature Nietzsche’s Dionysianism without heavy qualification. It is still true in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that Zarathustra seeks, to use Robert Gooding-Williams’s phrasing, “an experience of passionate, Dionysian chaos,”¹⁷³ and it is not wrong to emphasize, as T.K. Seung does, that a confrontation with what he calls the “cosmic” requires, in *Zarathustra*, a kind of self-abandonment that involves exposing one’s old self to

¹⁶⁹ KSA 6:22. This is an allusion to Matthew 19:14.

¹⁷⁰ KSA 6:23.

¹⁷¹ KSA 6:22.

¹⁷² *Nachlass* KSA 11:473 34[163].

¹⁷³ Robert Gooding-Williams. *Zarathustra’s Dionysian Modernism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press 2001, 16.

destruction in some sense.¹⁷⁴ As we suggested earlier, however, if one is to *with-stand* or *stand together* in the face of chaos, in order to resist utter annihilation, the genuine encounter with Dionysian flux cannot take place in a stance of unmitigated passivity, of non-resistance, of “letting oneself go.” Stiegler is in fact talking about Nietzsche’s scattered comments on the nascent mass media of his day, but could have been talking about members of Wagner’s audience, when she speaks of “‘shocks’ that do not really touch [modern individuals] since they have not been incorporated” and “incoherent rhapsodies” that these individuals are unable to “incorporate” because they are ruled by “the prerogative of an easing of and a diversion from the hard work of incorporation.” We saw in the last chapter that incorporation is the labor of a finite body; accordingly, Stiegler speaks of “the *astrigent* action of incorporation, which always implies at once an opening¹⁷⁵ to flux and a recentering on oneself ... [an] incorporation that settles itself in the unresolved tension between the chaos of flux and its reorganization by the organism.” To this, Stiegler opposes the disintegrating action of mass media – or, we might say instead, Wagnerianism – in which a “*dissolving* and *disorganizing* action” takes place “in which what he calls ‘the letting go’ prevails.”¹⁷⁶ Wagnerian bombast goes entirely unincorporated.

Now, in Nietzsche’s very specific time and place, Wagner is clearly an important cultural figural, even after his death – but does it not strain the limits of plausibility to see Wagner as the extreme danger we have just described above? A comparison of the idolatry of Wagner to the worship of the “new idol,” the state, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, suggests that Wagner is exemplary of a form of idolatry whose scope exceeds the ranks of Wagner’s actual devotees (*Zarathustra* was

¹⁷⁴ T.K. Seung, *Nietzsche’s Epic of the Soul: Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books 2005, 47.

¹⁷⁵ I have already expressed my reservations above regarding Stiegler’s tendency to refer to the respective “openness” or “closedness” of healthy and decadent bodies. This does not mean that she is wrong regarding incorporation being an “*astrigent* action,” however.

¹⁷⁶ Stiegler, “On the Future of Our Incorporations,” 132.

written before *The Case of Wagner*, of course, so the chapter on the state is not a conscious extension of what Nietzsche later writes about Wagner; nevertheless, the parallels are too strong to ignore). In the chapter, it is hard to pinpoint a single moment where Zarathustra evinces any concern for what states actually *do* – rather, the state is spoken of as a mindset. As with Wagnerianism, the worship of the state massifies its participants, so that it is “the idol worship of the superfluous ones” or of the “much too many.”¹⁷⁷ Here, too, the idol in question is one of bombast and cacophony. Drowning out the “sound of the still sea,” the state “lies in all the tongues of good and evil,” and “roars [*brüllt*]” that “There is on earth nothing greater than I – the ordering finger of God am I.”¹⁷⁸ Similarly to the later scrutiny of Wagner, rhetoric of anonymization and amalgamation abounds. A further analysis of the chapter on the state as “new idol” seems redundant because of its similarity to the treatment of Wagner. The point I wish to emphasize by mentioning it is that idolatry of the *Volk* as the idolatry of the gigantic seems to be exemplified, not exhausted, by Wagnerianism.¹⁷⁹ One final point of affinity is the sense of missed opportunity due to a deception: where Wagner fills the void left by the death of God by offering a false Dionysianism, the state captivates the valiant “conquerors of the old God” by offering them a false idol.¹⁸⁰

The critique of Wagnerianism as faux Dionysianism and as “demolatry” is to some extent a self-critique, on Nietzsche’s part. After all, *The Birth of Tragedy* had dreamed of a rebirth of tragic culture in modern German, to be led by Wagner, and had specifically cited *Tristan and*

¹⁷⁷ KSA 4:63, 62.

¹⁷⁸ KSA 4:62.

¹⁷⁹ The word “*Volk*,” however, carries a different meaning in *Zarathustra* than in *The Case of Wagner*. In the Zarathustra speech on the state, the *Volk* is what is smothered by the state. The word appears to indicate a people united, in some sense organically or naturally, by a shared code of good and evil, and might be said to have a positive connotation. In *The Case of Wagner*, by contrast, the *Volk* is clearly a forced, artificial unity. It would be hard, however, to say with certainty that this is an indication of a revised sense of what a *Volk* is in general: the *Volk* spoken of in *The Case of Wagner* may just be the *Volk* as it appears in the context of Wagnerianism.

¹⁸⁰ KSA 4:62.

Isolde as an example of “Dionysian wisdom.”¹⁸¹ The deception described in *The Case of Wagner* is thus one that had duped the Nietzsche of *The Birth of Tragedy*. The self-critique goes deeper than a mere reevaluation of the art of Richard Wagner, however, as the accusations lodged in *The Case of Wagner* indicate a reversal in Nietzsche’s evaluation of the *demos* and an underlying shift in the meaning of Dionysus. In the book on tragedy, the coalescence of the *demos* in the orgiastic festival truly enacts the confrontation with Dionysus; in *The Case of Wagner*, the coalescence of the *demos* in the massification of demolatry simulates but in fact rules out the confrontation with Dionysus. The notion that the unification of disparate individuals would initiate the Dionysian encounter makes sense in a context in which the figure of Dionysus represents “the primordial unity [*das Ur-Eine*],” the “truly-being [*das Wahrhaft-Seiende*],” against which “Becoming” is explicitly denigrated as “the truly non-being [*das Wahrhaft-Nichtseiende*].”¹⁸² But the later Dionysus as the chaos of flux no longer represents the gathering of all beings into the All of Being; he is the chaos that precedes, underlies, and outstrips Being. From the standpoint of the later Nietzsche, then, the early Nietzsche’s association of the Dionysian experience with the coming-together of the *demos* could be denounced as a “demolatry” in thrall to a false Dionysus.

Of all the modern idols, the demolatry that Nietzsche perceives in the Wagnerian audience – the worship of the *demos* as the gigantic mass – is the most dangerous. Unlike the other modern idols, the Wagnerian experience that corresponds to this idolatry falsely presents itself as the Dionysian experience whose very possibility it in fact destroys. This is what sets it apart decisively. In this way, it not only advances the physiological “disgregation” of modernity – it also prevents this disgregation from being identified as the crisis that it truly is. By masking the unraveling at work, Wagnerianism prevents humanity from suffering from it, and acts as an anesthetic. Thus,

¹⁸¹ KSA 1:141.

¹⁸² I am citing KSA 1:38-39 here, although all of §4 is relevant.

demolatory is a counterexample to Marion's assertion that idols necessarily prepare their own twilight. Demolatory is destined to go unchecked until the humanity in thrall to it reaches the outer limit of decadent enervation. This outer limit is the last man.

It may be, however, that the worship of the masses as the worship of the massive eventually deteriorates *as an idolatry* by virtue of its very success. If it is the dissembling, weakening influence of demolatory that turns the anonymized and massified *Volk* into *der letzte Mensch*, the last human being, then demolatory ultimately leads to a slackening of the bow that is so complete that humanity lacks the requisite strength for idols. There is no direct textual link between the Wagnerian masses and the last man of *Zarathustra*, but the terms in which the last man is presented allow us to make the case that he is the end result of the mass-making influence of demolatory, under which humanity "lets itself go." The last man, Zarathustra tells us, no longer has any relationship to "chaos."¹⁸³ The anonymizing work of modernity has been completed to the point where there is no longer "any shepherd, and one herd."¹⁸⁴ With reference to Socrates, we referred earlier to the exclusionary character of Nietzschean idolatry: the idol does not only "offer the gaze its earth," as Marion says, but also shrinks the earth, preventing parts of it from appearing. The last man lives on an earth that has "become small."¹⁸⁵ While Zarathustra calls for the demise [*Untergang*] of mere humanity in favor of the *Übermensch*,¹⁸⁶ the last man is "ineradicable," suggesting that he represents not only a completion, but also a permanentizing, of modernity's divorce from chaos.

The last man completes the project of the idols of decadence, ending suffering as pain by completing humanity's escape from the suffering of, the engagement with, Dionysian flux. If the

¹⁸³ KSA 4:19.

¹⁸⁴ KSA 4:20. I have inserted a comma for clarity.

¹⁸⁵ KSA 4:19.

¹⁸⁶ KSA 4:17.

Leib for Nietzsche is the body as hierarchy of drives, then the last man is, as Stiegler says, *désincarné* – disembodied or disincarnated. In cutting himself off from flux, he cuts himself off from his own source as will to power. The last human being is, in this way, the undoing of the human. In seeking to sever himself from the “torrent” so as not to be pulled apart by it, he annihilates himself as human while outwardly retaining an anonymized human figure as a member of the gigantic mass. In modernity, “the impressions wipe each other out,” and the decadent modern human being “protects [himself] instinctively from taking anything in”; the end result of this self-protective move is the last man.

Is Nietzsche “Still Idolatrous”?

Having suggested that Nietzsche illuminates for us both the dynamics of idolatry and the specifically modern “twilight” of the idols, Jean-Luc Marion concludes, in his *The Idol and Distance*, that “Nietzsche remains an idolater.”¹⁸⁷ Nietzsche is crucially right – perhaps without fully realizing how right he is – to conflate the “death of God” with the “twilight of the idols,” because the God that has died is God as conceptual idol. Marion points to Nietzsche’s 1886/1887 note stating that “at bottom, it is only the moral God that has been overcome.”^{188,189} The “moral God” is a conceptual God confined to onto-theology, a θεός, ultimately idolatrous, submitted to

¹⁸⁷ Jean-Luc Marion. *The Idol and Distance*, 76.

¹⁸⁸ KSA 12:213 1886/1887 5[71]7. Initially referenced by Marion at *The Idol and Distance* 32 and *God Without Being* 32.

¹⁸⁹ One could question whether this note, taken in isolation, really says what Marion wants it to say, when the assertion I have cited here is taken in context. Nietzsche is saying that the “moral God is overcome” by the hypothetical assertion of a Spinozistic pantheism. The claim, then, may not carry the historical weight that Marion wants it to carry (from a conversation with Ryan Coyne, 2018).

That said, a similar statement is made elsewhere in the *Nachlass* without the same qualification: “You call it the self-decomposition of God: it is only his molting, however: - he is shedding his moral skin! And you will see him again soon, beyond good and evil” (*Nachlass* 1882 3[1]432, KSA 10:105).

the λόγος. Despite correctly diagnosing the twilight of the idols, however, Nietzsche fails to recognize this event as an opportunity to experience “the entrance of God into absence,”¹⁹⁰ once we have broken free of our idolatrous relationship to “the ‘God’ who inhabits the temple, or who dies from having been chased out.”¹⁹¹ The death of “God” is the opportunity for a new openness to *God* as the hyperbolically distant God, since “for God to become pertinent to us, it is first necessary that we experience his radical foreignness.”¹⁹²

Rather than considering the possibility of a divinity that would not be founded in onto-theological conceptual idolatry, Nietzsche immediately erects a new idol to fill the void, according to Marion. “Nietzsche remains an idolater because, as the final metaphysician, he does not enter into distance.”¹⁹³ In this way, “the entrance of God into absence, therefore, is in a sense masked, missed, and censured.”¹⁹⁴ The substantialized or reified “moral” God of Christianity is replaced with a new, equally substantialized divinity – that of the will to power, which Nietzsche installs as the supreme being of a new onto-theology.¹⁹⁵ “The will to power delivers to each being that which for it is Being-value ... the god, thought as will to power, uncovers a world as the sole supreme being in affirming beings in their Being (value).”¹⁹⁶ Onto-theology implies, for Heidegger, the utmost human hubris, as it submits Being to thought, as governed by the λόγος. In the thought of the eternal return, the thought which affirms the will to power, “the very situation of the thinker becomes divine, since he gathers in himself the estimation of the world. It is not that he establishes himself as the supreme being. But the supreme sum of beings – where the world alone becomes the supreme being – is stated only in a *yes*, which the thinker alone can say. And which he must

¹⁹⁰ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, 74.

¹⁹¹ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance* 75.

¹⁹² Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance* 75.

¹⁹³ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance* 76.

¹⁹⁴ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance* 74.

¹⁹⁵ This is Heidegger’s stance as well (GA 6.1:33).

¹⁹⁶ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance* 73.

say divinely, like Dionysus.”¹⁹⁷ The verb “to say” is important here. “Only an *I* can say the *Yes* in which Dionysus is performed and experienced, and only a body can ensure that *I*.”¹⁹⁸ Here the difference between the “I” supported by a body and the abstract “I” that lacks such support is the difference between the embodied and therefore authentic I who can truly affirm and the I who can perform “only the saying of a language where thought remains disengaged and as if at a distance from a body that speaks for it, without it.”¹⁹⁹ The Dionysian “Yes” is not simply “had” or “secured” once the onto-theological worldview implied by the will to power is propositionally held to be true; this “Yes” must be performed, “said,” by an embodied being.

Yet the verb “to say” also illustrates, by contrast with the linguistic stance of Denys as articulated in the later pages of *The Idol and Distance*, why Nietzsche remains idolatrous, and metaphysical, for Marion (the writer to whom Marion refers as “Denys,” the fifth/sixth-century author of *On Divine Names*, is often called Pseudo-Dionysius, as he presents himself as Dionysius the Areopagite, the first-century Athenian convert to Christianity). “Denys tends to substitute for the *to say* of predicative language another verb, ὑμνεῖν, to praise. What does this substitution signify?”²⁰⁰ The word “ὑμνεῖν” indicates a kind of utterance that takes the form of a proposition, but whose intention and meaning are not limited to the assertorial. “Praying, one acknowledges the unthinkable”²⁰¹ Praise “aims at” the unthinkable but acknowledges it as unthinkable. In the later *In Excess*, Marion says that praise paradoxically offers epithets to the unthinkable as it operates under a “new pragmatic function of language, aiming at the One who surpasses all nomination.”²⁰² Denys gives God the name αἰτία, for instance, but “αἰτία in no way names God; it

¹⁹⁷ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance* 42-43.

¹⁹⁸ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance* 51.

¹⁹⁹ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance* 51.

²⁰⁰ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance* 184.

²⁰¹ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance* 160.

²⁰² Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess* 139.

de-nominates [*le dé-nomme*]” him, where “de-nomination” is not to “name or to deny a name of God” but to “[transport] itself in the direction of the One whom it de-nominates.”²⁰³ Language takes a christological path to meaning, as it “dies from renouncing a predication of the unthinkable,”²⁰⁴ in order to be resurrected into a language that “aims at” but does not claim comprehension of the unthinkable. This is the linguistic mode appropriate to what Marion elsewhere calls “God without Being”: “the name that God is given, the name that gives God, which is given as God ... serves to shield God from presence.”²⁰⁵ Here, Marion is speaking in the Heideggerian paradigm under which the Western history of Being-as-presence is the foundation of metaphysics. In ὑμνεῖν, praise, Christian theology avoids being reduced to the “metaphysics of presence,” avoids conceptual idolatry.²⁰⁶ The journey in *The Idol and Distance* from Nietzsche, “still idolatrous,” to Denys, who exceeds idolatry, is therefore the journey from “saying” to praise.

This stance is predicated, of course, on the notion that Nietzsche’s relationship with the god Dionysus is in fact confined to propositional “saying,” that it does not approach anything like the ὑμνεῖν analyzed by Marion in the text of Denys. While it would not seem right to me to say that Nietzsche “offers praise” to Dionysus, I will seek to show momentarily that there are ways in which we can see Nietzsche’s mode of utterance with relation to his god, Dionysus, as more like than unlike that shown by Marion to take place in Denys’s praise of the Christian God. Before doing so, however, it is worth noting that Marion himself issues a statement, toward the end of *In Excess*, that invites us to ask whether the dynamics of praise that prevent it from becoming onto-

²⁰³ Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess* 140.

²⁰⁴ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance* 144.

²⁰⁵ Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess* 156.

²⁰⁶ For the sake of brevity and focus, for the moment I have cited chapter 6 of *In Excess* without addressing its framing as a response to Jacques Derrida, who asserts against Marion that ὑμνεῖν as articulated by Marion cannot actually be nonpredicative and that this fact scuttles “negative theology’s” attempted escape from the metaphysics of presence. This context will be discussed in chapter 5 (see “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials.” In *Derrida and Negative Theology*. Ed. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay. State University of New York Press 1992, 73-142).

theological might pertain to many encounters with the divine, Christian or not: Marion says, “*Never* is the proper name a name for the essence.”²⁰⁷ If this is the case, then couldn’t “Dionysus” be de-nominated in the Nietzsche text, just as “God” is for Denys?

In raising such a possibility, we should immediately delimit the scope of our claim: Dionysus is not the God of *The Idol and Distance*. He is the god of Becoming, and the traces of Becoming are all around us in Nietzsche’s descriptions of our everyday world. Our body is only understandable with reference to Becoming; the sensible world, as we noted at the outset, is associated with Becoming. It is not wrong to speak of the foreignness of Dionysus, which is emphasized by Nietzsche as it is by the historical Greek cults of the god from which Nietzsche’s “Dionysus” is derived²⁰⁸ – but the foreignness of Dionysus is not as total as that of the “God of distance” discussed by Marion.

Yet there is still a sense in which Becoming in its fullest sense radically exceeds us, radically exceeds our ability to grasp or even witness it, and this seems to be very important to Nietzsche. In saying this, we appear to be diverging from Marion’s sense of Dionysian Becoming, which ultimately appears to him to be identical to or at least coextensive with the will to power. In affirming all beings, Marion says that the body must speak “like Dionysus,” affirming itself and all beings in the sacred Yes. But it is my sense that the human being can never speak like Dionysus, or occupy the position of Dionysus in any way. The will to power as incorporation is a constant engagement with the Dionysian but is also a constant “stamping” of the Dionysian with the mark of Being, such that it never comes face to face with the Dionysian Becoming that it is constitutively unable to face head-on. Dionysus is the god of “all Becoming and growing [*alles Werden und*

²⁰⁷ Marion, *In Excess* 142.

²⁰⁸ See Silk and Stern 171 and 185.

Wachsen], which “presupposes pain.”²⁰⁹ For Nietzsche, human life (or “human, all-too human” life) is necessarily in thrall to Being – here, we could say it is in thrall to a “paradigm” of Being, but that would misleadingly shrink the scope of the claim, since we saw in the last chapter that even the most basic, pre-conscious organic processes in some sense rely on the ossification or permanentization that forces flux into beinghood. As Being is opposed to Becoming, human life *is* a departure from Dionysus; incorporation itself takes part in this flight. Here I will quote at length the most sustained explanation of this stance of which I am aware:

Enormous *self-reflection* [*Ungeheure Selbstbesinnung*]: to become conscious of oneself not as an individual, but as humanity. *Let us recollect* [*Besinnen wir uns*], let us think back: let us walk the small paths and the great paths –

... The human being is searching for “the truth”: a world that does not contradict itself, does not deceive, does not change, a *true* world²¹⁰ - a world in which one does not suffer (*leiden*): contradiction, deception, change – causes of suffering! The human does not doubt that there is a world that exists as it should be; he wants to search out for himself the way to it. ...

Why does he derive *suffering* [in general, M.M.²¹¹] from change, deception, contradiction? and why not rather his happiness ...²¹² -

²⁰⁹ KSA 6:159 (*Twilight of the Idols*).

²¹⁰ This note is written some months before the Western history of the “true world” has been narrated in *Twilight*, although it seems that the meaning is no different here than it is there.

²¹¹ That which is “derived” from “change, deception, contradiction” is not simply *some* suffering but *Suffering* generally – or, at least, this is what I take to be indicated by the implementation of the definite article in “das *Leiden*” [emphasis in original].

²¹² This ellipsis is not mine, but appears in Nietzsche’s notes as reproduced by Colli and Montinari in the *Kritische Studienausgabe*.

The contempt, the hate for everything that passes away, changes, transforms: - wherefore this valuation of that which has permanence [*des Bleibenden*]?

Clearly, here the will to truth is simply the desire for a world of permanence.

The senses deceive, and reason corrects the errors: *as a result*, one concludes that reason is the path to that which has permanence; the *most insensible* [*unsinnichsten*] ideas must be nearest to the “true world.” From the senses come the greatest infelicities - they are deceivers, beguilers, annihilators:

Happiness is only warranted in that which has being [*im Seienden*]: change and happiness rule each other out. The highest wish, as a result, pursues a becoming one with Being. That is the *strange* path to the highest happiness.

In summation: the world as it *should be* exists; this world in which we live is only an error, - this, our world, should not exist.

Faith in that which has being [*Der Glaube an das Seiende*] shows itself to be only a consequence: the real *primum mobile* is a lack of belief in Becoming [*Unglaube an das Werdende*], mistrust against everything that becomes, the devaluation of all Becoming ...²¹³

The flight from Becoming and into Being is the flight from suffering. On Nietzsche’s terms, the fact that we have not cut ourselves off from suffering entirely in our present world, as the last man apparently has, indicates that we have not severed ourselves completely from Dionysus – but if every human being can only stand a finite degree of suffering, as we discussed earlier, then the flight from Becoming is a universal condition. Manuel Dries has pithily summed up the way this

²¹³ *Nachlass* 1887 9[60], KSA 12:364-365.

conviction expresses itself with regard to language, saying that Nietzsche's "semantic thesis" is that "ordinary human discourse is ineliminably committed to the staticist worldview," despite the fact that "our ordinary attitude" of staticism, humanity's commitment to Being, "is false."²¹⁴ This is why Dries says that "language *cannot* express becoming." If human language cannot express Becoming, then Nietzsche cannot *say* Becoming, in the way Marion seems to mean when he says that "Only an *I* can say the *Yes* in which Dionysus is performed and experienced" – he cannot say Becoming in such a way as to divulge its essence. He cannot "name" Dionysus without denominating him.

From Nietzsche's point of view, this is not because his text is composed of language acts that lie outside the domain of philosophy. In fact, at one point, Nietzsche defines his form of philosophy in terms of the engagement with Dionysian Becoming:

Philosophy, in the only way that I will still allow it to hold any validity, as the most general form of history [*Historie*], as the attempt to somehow describe Heraclitian Becoming, and to abbreviate it in signs (to *translate* it, so to speak, into a kind of semblance of Being, to mummify it).²¹⁵

The "translation" of Becoming cannot hope to comprehend it, as, I think, the words "semblance" and "mummify" make clear. Nietzsche expresses this incomprehensibility with reference to Dionysus himself, too: the Ariadne of the *Dionysus Dithyramb*s addresses Dionysus as "Unnamable One [*Unnennbarer*]" and "Unknown One [*Unbekannter*]."²¹⁶ If the "metaphysician

²¹⁴ Dries, "Nietzsche's Critique of Staticism," 5.

²¹⁵ KSA 11:562 1885 36[27].

²¹⁶ KSA 6:398, 399.

is obsessed with reducing the Name to presence,”²¹⁷ then the assertion that Dionysus is an ontological figurehead must address the frequency with which the god of masks is invoked as a god of absence, if not distance. Denys’s ὕμνεῖν is founded in its directedness toward an “unattainable and inescapable”²¹⁸ god, as opposed to the sort of graspable god that anchors a conceptual idolatry. If this is how we are to understand ὕμνεῖν, though, then Dionysus’s brief and cryptic response to Ariadne does not make clear how her form of address to the god should be seen as different from Denys’s: Dionysus tells her, “*I am your labyrinth.*”²¹⁹ Dionysus is, pointedly and definitively, “unattainable and inescapable.”

To be clear, in suggesting that Nietzsche manages to speak of Dionysus in a way that avoids conceptual idolatry, I do not mean to say that Nietzsche’s philosophical discourse generally proceeds along a path that is similar to de-nomination as articulated by Marion with regard to Denys. Nietzsche makes plenty of claims about Becoming and about our engagement with it that he wants us to evaluate first and foremost for their propositional truth value, and even if Nietzsche does not have a philosophical system, these claims often fit together in a way that demonstrates something like systematicity – as, for example, in the case of the body’s engagement with Becoming, as addressed in the last chapter. Unlike with Denys’s God in *On Divine Names*, it would not make sense for us to wade through pages of such claims constantly reminding ourselves how *Becoming* actually exceeds the “Becoming” of the Nietzschean text.

However, when we read that Dionysus is the “Unnamable One [*Unnennbarer*]” and “Unknown One [*Unbekannter*]” even for the thinker who dedicates himself to the god as his “last disciple and initiate,” we should be ready to acknowledge that Dionysus does not, like an idol or

²¹⁷ Marion, *In Excess* 158.

²¹⁸ Marion, *In Excess* 133.

²¹⁹ KSA 6:401.

an onto-theological supreme being, create a light that endows all beings with a comprehensibility that allows them to be secured and dominated by the human mind. To the contrary, Stiegler advances the assertion that Dionysus represents a “*critique of the flesh* ... delimiting its sovereignty.”²²⁰ Becoming is a radical “excess”²²¹ which defies the comprehension of the human being, finite because embodied – but it is an excess with which valorized Nietzschean figures courageously maintain a relationship, despite its incomprehensibility. Unlike the last man, Ariadne stands “open” to Dionysus.

This “openness,” however, is vexed. It is fundamentally tragic, since, as we saw last chapter, “the ultimate truth [*die letzte Wahrheit*] of the flow of things [*Fluß der Dinge*] does not tolerate *incorporation*; our *organs* (in order to live) are configured for error.”²²² To Stiegler’s conclusion, we must add that the “openness” of any Nietzschean hero needs to be understood as an openness that is always already closing, as our very self-founding in incorporation is a flight from the Dionysian Becoming that is paradoxically also the source of the body. The choice between Dionysus and the idols of decadence is the choice of what to worship, not a choice between *living in Being* or *living in Becoming*, since Nietzschean physiology firmly indicates that we are always on the way to Being, as we flee from the “flow of things” toward their permanence. Dionysus, as a god without Being, is for humanity a god with whom we cannot live in any enduring way, now or in the future, a divinity with no *parousia*. Nietzsche tells us that the confrontation with Dionysus, with Becoming, causes suffering; the problem of coherence is the problem of obliteration by this suffering encounter, and the idolatrous evasion of this encounter is the evasion of suffering. Yet, paradoxically, this encounter is never exactly an encounter.

²²⁰ Stiegler, *Nietzsche et la critique de la chair* 16.

²²¹ *Ibid* 17.

²²² KSA 9:504, 1881 11[162].

Conclusion

In the way we have outlined above, the evasion of suffering in modernity, after the death of God, has the possibility to lead through decadent idolatry to a total severing of humanity's relationship to Becoming. The culmination of this process, the "last man" or "last human being," is last because there is no way out of his "disembodied" condition. He is, as Stiegler says, the being after whom "nothing happens." The "higher history" referred to by the madman – which we have not addressed in any detail in this chapter – is not the only possible history after the death of God. Nietzsche also shows us a possible dead end to history.

A historical dead end whose terms are remarkably similar appears in Heidegger's *Black Notebooks*. There, Heidegger says of machination, *Machenschaft*, the stamp of Being in the modern age of technology, that "its essence consists in this: that an epoch already calculates and secures its own present explicitly as future past (and thereby imperishability [*Unvergänglichkeit*])."²²³ The character of this age in which nothing happens, in which there is no future, is "the gigantic [*das Riesige*]."²²⁴ The will to the gigantic is "the will to the securing of the imperishability of the present." Here we see an echo of the terms of both Nietzsche's description of the attitude of *demolatry*, the Wagnerian worship of the gigantic, and of the "ineradicable race" of the last human being. This is the age of the human that survives the death of the human: "The more gigantic [*je riesiger*] the human being becomes, the smaller his essence must become, until he, no longer seeing himself, confuses himself with his machinations, and thus 'survives

²²³ Martin Heidegger, *Überlegungen VII-XI (Schwarze Hefte)*. Ed. Peter Trawny. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann 2014, 350.

²²⁴ GA 95:350.

[überlebt]’ his own end.”²²⁵ Whereas Nietzsche’s last man lives on an earth that has become small, Heidegger’s human being of the gigantic shrinks his own essence. Heidegger’s gigantic human being is the human being turned into “mass”: “What does this mean, that the mass of humanity [*die Menschenmasse*] is in no sense given the dignity of being destroyed at *one* blow – is there any harder proof of the abandonment of Being?”²²⁶ The abandonment of Being by Heidegger is thus articulated here in surprisingly similar terms as the abandonment of Becoming in Nietzschean modernity.

This is not the place for an in-depth investigation of this similarity, which seems too close to be coincidental. We can close with the observation that both critiques of modernity can be read through the lens of idolatry. This is made explicit by Heidegger when he says that “Contemporary humans are convinced that dashing along in machination [*Machenschaft*] (machination which is intrinsically and necessarily *incapable* of setting goals) would be strength and power and the mastery of ‘life.’ ... [They] *idolize* [vergötzen] *the antdivine* [*das Widergöttliche*].”²²⁷ In both Heidegger’s case and Nietzsche’s, *a being* is mistaken for that which is essential, which is never a being, whether it is Becoming or Being (although, in Nietzsche’s case, both “is” and “essential” must be written under something like erasure). What it means that in both cases the particular being in question is that of a “gigantic” humanity-as-mass is a question worthy of further exploration. Nevertheless, both Nietzsche and Heidegger, thinkers of the death of God, resort to what looks like a Christian model of reproach when addressing the dead-end form that secular humanity takes after God’s death, that of idolatry.

²²⁵ GA 94:282.

²²⁶ GA 94:282.

²²⁷ GA 94:341.

It remains to be seen what the other possible epoch named as a possibility after the death of God, the “higher history” referred to by the madman, means for the future of the body.

Chapter 4: The Pursuit of a “Higher History”

In the chapter that follows, we continue along a line of thought that was initiated in chapter 2 and continued in chapter 3, considering the body, in Nietzsche’s thought, as fundamentally finite. We explored the precise manner of this finitude in chapter 2. Momentarily laying aside the historical concerns of chapters 1 and 3 related to the birth and death of God and to modernity, we examined the dynamics of incorporation, *Einverleibung*, as the dynamics of embodied will to power. Returning to Heidegger for his appreciation of the importance of incorporation in the Nietzsche text, but rejecting his reading of its meaning and its broader role in Nietzsche’s thought, we saw that the body as incorporation is always, for Nietzsche, a necessarily delimited quest for power, tragically destined to squander, surrender, and leak power, in every instance in which it successfully obtains power in some other sense.

In chapter 3, we read dystopian Nietzschean visions of modernity as a crisis of the finite body. In the death of God, a certain physiological defense mechanism expires, leaving the body exposed and vulnerable to overwhelming chaos. The “idols” of modernity that Nietzsche attacks, new forms of flight from Becoming, culminate in the last man, who achieves such a degree of insulation from suffering and Becoming that his “ineradicable” existence is immune to all true happening. His dominance inaugurates a kind of anti-history, which corresponds to a post-death-of-God world in which, to once more quote Stiegler, “nothing happens.”

In this chapter, we will examine what a “higher history” – to invoke the phrase used by the *Gay Science*’s madman – might look like, for the embodied human being - for the body, that is, whose dynamics we laid out in chapter 2. Such a task must be attended by certain disclaimers and caveats. If Nietzsche’s genealogies are rarely linear, sustained narratives of the past, then his visions for the future to which he aspires – for a philosophy of the future, or revaluation, or for an

Übermensch – are even more sporadic, truncated, and ephemeral. It seems wrong, to me, to assume that Nietzsche’s fleeting gestures toward a higher history to come esoterically point to an internally coherent vision, so that one such gesture could never contradict the implications of another one. Discussing Nietzsche’s “stories ... about origins,” Kristen Brown says,

Among the tales he tells, Nietzsche seems to offer none as his official story. He waves his elaborations, entertaining one position for a while only soon to find for himself a new posture through which he might concentrate abrasive pressure on the very organizing figure or structure he had been carefully working together. Under the stress, the tale’s structure or figures may fray. Its nodes and patterns of images may partially disintegrate.¹

If this is true of Nietzsche’s genealogies, it seems to me to be even more true about his visions of the future. The future is very important to Nietzsche, and there certainly are discernible “elaborations,” “positions,” and “postures” that are sustained across time and across texts, and some of these postures deserve to be central to Nietzsche studies. The fact that they do not necessarily allow distillation into a single coherent whole does not render them unworthy of interest. It is, however, also important to acknowledge Nietzsche’s tendency to change course, to avoid making his “postures” official. In this chapter, I follow a thread in Nietzsche’s visions for the future that may be seen as challenging other, more prevalent Nietzschean visions of a post-God, post-metaphysical future. This submerged futural vision is embodied in the figure of Ariadne, who becomes prominent in Nietzsche’s last few productive years, particularly in 1888. My claim

¹ Brown, Kristen. *Nietzsche and Embodiment*, 2-3.

is that the aspirational vision represented by Ariadne is more consonant with the view of the body that we have been following in this study than are other futural visions in Nietzsche's thought, but that it also serves as a challenge to key Nietzschean slogans and quests regarding the future, potentially undermining them.

For that reason, this chapter is more critical of Nietzsche than were preceding chapters. In chapter 2, I defended Nietzsche against a Heideggerian interpretation whereby the body seeks to assert itself in absolute power over the world as willing subject. In chapter 3, in insisting upon the body's need for coherence, I pushed back against the view of "active will" put forth in Deleuze (who, unlike Heidegger in chapter 2, was only a starting point, not a main focus), whereby the vibrant active will apparently finds pure enjoyment in difference, with no need to compromise its own configuration when confronted with other forces. Along the way, then, in our scrutiny of the Nietzschean body and its modern predicament, I have sought to defend that body from historically important interpretations that, in different ways, seek to caricature the highest manifestation of that body as a radically hubristic force that knows no limits to its creative or affirmative power. Even if these interpretations go too far, though, they do not pull their hubristic Nietzsche out of thin air. It is still the case that, in "revaluation," the mature Nietzsche wants us to "actively" will our way through the malaise of nihilism. In a well-referenced 1887 note, Nietzsche distinguishes nihilism-as-dead-end from nihilism as historic opportunity by dividing "passive" from "active" nihilism.² We would be ignoring the tenor of large swaths of the Nietzsche corpus if we were to suggest that it nowhere evinces any ambitions of radical self-assertion or self-creation. Nietzsche's visions for a higher future are indeed colored by this pursuit of a transition from passivity to activity. The question that I would like to raise in this chapter is that of the extent to which these dreams of

² See *Will to Power* §22 and *Will to Power* §23, KSA 13:350-352, 9[35] 1887.

activity are in fact compatible with the Nietzschean body we have been studying, particularly in chapter 2. That body, as we have seen, can never be *fully and purely* active and self-assertive, for Nietzsche. In ignoring this fact, Heidegger and Deleuze are able, in turn, to extract *a certain* “story” told by the Nietzsche text (to refer again to Brown’s phrasing), a story which is, in both cases, one of hubristic self-assertion on the part of a higher body, and to erroneously assert this story as the “official story.”

I will argue that the figure of Ariadne exposes Nietzschean visions of a radically active future will to “stress,” “fraying,” and “disintegration.” Ariadne represents, for the late Nietzsche, the vision of a higher human being, but this higher human being is characterized by a certain kind of passivity, and is associated with a renunciation of hubris.³ My claim is not that Ariadne is explicitly formulated, in Nietzsche’s own mind, as an annulment of “revaluation” and “strong nihilism,” but that she represents elements of his own thought regarding a “higher humanity” which he cannot wholly incorporate into his other visions for a higher future. The thread that Nietzsche follows with Ariadne does not become the “official story” regarding a possible higher history, but it may thwart Nietzsche’s other stories regarding that higher history.

Ariadne’s passivity is strongly gendered as female by the Nietzsche text. For that reason, I will begin with a discussion of what Nietzsche scholarship has made of the status of woman in Nietzsche’s thought. This will help clarify what “female” means, for Nietzsche – and what it does not, and cannot, mean. For the duration of that discussion, I will largely step away from the terms that have been guiding this dissertation, before relating my observations there to a direct consideration of Ariadne’s status as (embodied) female, and her meaning for a higher history that

³ In this way, the figure of Ariadne might be of interest for recent Buddhist readings of Nietzsche that pose the question of whether Nietzsche’s thought seeks to ultimately lead us beyond willing (see commentators on Nietzsche and Buddhism cited in the footnotes below).

would surpass God and metaphysics.

Nietzsche's "Woman": *Beyond Good and Evil* §231-239

Nietzsche's reputation as a misogynist is beyond interrogation for most educated people who read Nietzsche but are not Nietzsche scholars. In the last half-century, however, it seems that the consensus among people who *are* Nietzsche scholars is almost as conclusive – it is almost diametrically opposed, though, to the conclusion drawn by non-professionalized readers. Nietzsche's thought is regarded as full of potential for feminist readings. I will keep the following overview of receptions of Nietzsche on "woman" as brief as possible, since it will be familiar to Nietzsche scholars, only going into the degree of detail necessary to draw out common threads, and then to respond to them.

The easiest and simplest origin story for this tendency to find salutary elements in Nietzsche's commentary on women would perhaps begin with Derrida, who, in his *Spurs* and *The Question of Style*,⁴ explores Nietzsche's invitation, in the first sentence of *Beyond Good and Evil*, to "suppose that truth is a woman."⁵ This is, for Nietzsche as well as for Derrida, primarily a reflection upon truth: in contradiction to the dreams of dogmatic metaphysicians, for those who set themselves "the task of remaining awake,"⁶ truth is multiple, dissembling, ephemeral. Derrida, however, observes that the discussion of the "woman" called truth in the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil* must carry implications for actual, literal woman, as well, for the metaphor to work. "There is no such thing as a woman, as a truth in itself of woman in itself. That much, at least,

⁴ Jacques Derrida, "The Question of Style." In *The New Nietzsche*. Ed. David B. Allison. MIT Press: Cambridge, MA 1985, 176-189.

⁵ KSA 5:11.

⁶ KSA 5:12.

Nietzsche has said.”⁷ Derrida here refers to *Beyond Good and Evil* §231, in which Nietzsche places the phrase “*Weib an sich*” in apparently ironizing quotation marks, and insists that the ensuing observations about woman in §232-239 are “my truths.”⁸ Of “my truths,” Derrida says that “they are not *truth* since they are multiple, multicolored, contradictory. There is therefore no one truth in itself but additionally, even for me, of me, truth is plural [...] There is therefore no truth in itself of sexual difference in itself, of woman or of man.”⁹ Careful attention to the Nietzsche text is thus said to de-essentialize sexual difference, paving the way for a paradigm under which gender roles are not necessarily assigned by unchangeable biological distinctions. *Beyond Good and Evil* §232-239 appears to claim that woman’s instincts always fit her out most naturally for “slavery”¹⁰ rather than for a modern “emancipation”¹¹ that must necessarily be a “de-womanizing [*Entweiblichung*],”¹² but, contrary to this appearance, Derrida says, the text in fact seeks to liberate woman from the concept of “woman.”

This reading might be said to have paved the way for other French poststructuralist readings that saw similarly liberating, anti-essentialist potential in the Nietzsche text, even if the endorsement was sometimes more metered. For the apparently psychoanalytical reading of Luce Irigaray’s *Nietzsche: Marine Lover*, Dionysus represents a return to ourselves as desirous, sexual beings, a return which has the potential to unleash the powerful “waters” of desire, which are capable of destroying oppressive (gender) norms and hierarchies: “His crazy desire loosens all bonds, destroys all homes, overthrows all institutions, laughs at all stability. Lets out what is

⁷ Derrida, Jacques. *Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles*, 101

⁸ KSA 5:170.

⁹ Derrida, “The Question of Style,” 187.

¹⁰ KSA 5:177.

¹¹ KSA 5:176.

¹² KSA 5:177.

already walled up. Sets flowing all the water that is frozen into solid walls.”¹³ Sarah Kofman observes that, for Nietzsche, “woman” as constructed by the Victorian era is by no means the only “woman” who can exist or who has existed. She says that “[w]oman’ as ‘weaker sex’ is not an essential determination of woman, but a historical event that threatens to become definitive and to constitute henceforth the feminine ‘type’ par excellence.”¹⁴ Sure enough, *Beyond Good and Evil* §239 depicts woman as an animal who is “‘more natural’ than man,”¹⁵ who has suffered a “sickening of the power of her will”¹⁶ via modern domestication.

The interpretive strategies common to the above readings might seem to mark them out as belonging to a classically deconstructive mode of textual engagement. The apparently overwhelming tendency of the text in one direction – where that direction is misogyny – is allegedly undermined by a small number of moments in the text which are said to reverse that overwhelming tendency, or, at the very least, to scuttle its apparent directional integrity. Kofman thus takes herself to have shown that “to consider Nietzsche a misogynist is to forget what he always emphasizes: [...] there is no woman ‘as such.’”¹⁷

It may be, however, that it is not in French poststructuralist Nietzsche scholarship, but in some Anglophone readings of Nietzsche on women, that the Nietzsche text’s ability to undermine itself reaches its zenith. For Christa D. Acampora and Keith Ansell-Pearson, and for Maudemarie Clark, all of whom concern themselves with the *Beyond Good and Evil* sections referenced above and discussed by Derrida and Kofman (§231-239), Nietzsche’s own preliminary disclaimers

¹³ Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. New York: Columbia University Press 1991, 129.

¹⁴ Sarah Kofman, “The Psychologist of the Eternal Feminine (Why I Write Such Good Books, 5).” In *Yale French Studies* 87 (1995) 173-189, 180. Kofman sees in Nietzsche an endorsement of Bachofen’s view of the history of power relations between the sexes.

¹⁵ KSA 5:178.

¹⁶ KSA 5:178.

¹⁷ Kofman, “The Psychologist of the Eternal Feminine,” 189.

regarding “*his* truths” do not just *complicate* the ensuing, apparently misogynist claims about sex and gender, but appear to *annul* them entirely as assertions about actual man and actual woman, turning them, for all practical purposes, into reflections on Nietzsche himself *only*, as someone whose “personal confession”¹⁸ takes the form of philosophy.^{19,20} Nietzsche’s misogynist assertions are preemptively qualified as mere prejudices, because they are merely *his* prejudices. Providing what is perhaps an even more paradoxical reading of the same sections, Vanessa Lemm observes that Nietzsche calls on men, in §238, to regard women like Greeks and “Orientals” do, “as possession, as property that can be locked up”²¹ and kept at home – and suggests that “It is possible that one element in Nietzsche’s apparently ‘conservative’ recommendation for women to ‘remain at home’ may be rather to shield them from [the leveling effects of the modern age] that would disempower them from effecting the needed cultural transformation” that would set woman free.²² Woman’s role as the weaker sex is not essential to her so-called nature, but is the historical result of the institution of marriage, of which “Nietzsche’s critique ... is not unlike that of Karl Marx: both suspect beneath the marriage contract a form of domination that gives men power over

¹⁸ KSA 5:19 (*Beyond Good and Evil*).

¹⁹ Christa D. Acampora and Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Nietzsche’s ‘Beyond Good and Evil’: A Reader’s Guide*, London: Continuum 2011, 168.

²⁰ Maudemarie Clark, “Nietzsche’s Misogyny,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Friedrich Nietzsche*. Ed. Kelly Oliver and Marilyn Pearsall. Pennsylvania State University Press: University Park 1998, 187-199. The categorical word “only” is in fact used in this sense by Clark, who takes Nietzsche’s phrase in §231 “only *my* truths” to mean something like “claiming nothing about the world outside of my own mind”: “that these are ‘only [his] truths’ should already be clear to us from the comments that evidence Nietzsche’s ‘abundant civility’ in relation to himself. Those comments told us that what thinkers have to say about man and woman *merely* express [*sic*] their convictions, and that convictions express the great stupidity they are, and are *only* steps to self-knowledge, sign-posts to the problem they are. Nietzsche thus admits in effect that his so-called ‘truths’ about woman as such are really expressions of the great stupidity he is ... *At the very least*, Nietzsche is letting us know that *he is not claiming that his comments on woman are true*” [emphases mine] (191).

²¹ KSA 5:175.

²² Vanessa Lemm, *Homo Natura: Nietzsche, Philosophical Anthropology and Biopolitics*. Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh 2020, 150.

women, that is, makes women their possession.”²³ The historico-socially fabricated essence of woman as weaker sex “explodes ‘at home,’ so to speak.”²⁴

There is an erroneous premise that unites all of the above readings: it is not so much asserted as it is assumed, on these readings, that the Nietzsche text treats the concept “woman” basically in terms of gender, rather than in terms of sex.²⁵ “Woman,” that is, is thought to be a social, and not a physiological, construct. In resisting this assumption, I should point out that, while the sex/gender distinction is typically spoken of as the difference between *biology* and culture, I mean to say not that Nietzsche is principally thinking about material biological difference, but that he is frequently here speaking in his habitual physiological paradigm. To insist that Nietzsche is speaking about physiology is not the same as to say that he is referring to biology in today’s sense. Nietzsche’s “physiology” is first and foremost the study of drive formations, whereas “biology” is typically taken to start from the notion of the organism as a material mechanism. What Nietzsche’s physiology does have in common with biology, though, is the understanding that individuals are born into certain configurations (for Nietzschean physiology, certain drive configurations) that they cannot will their way out of. In §231-239, as we will see, it is an unavoidable reality that Nietzsche is very frequently talking about “man” and “woman” this way – not as the ideological products of culture, but as two different drive configurations that he speaks of as enduring in a basically transhistorical way. The human being is “the still undetermined animal,”²⁶ but “still

²³ Lemm 154.

²⁴ Lemm 157.

²⁵ Lemm, to be fair, does explicitly raise the question of whether Nietzsche thinks “woman” as “sex” or as “gender” (Lemm 121). Her conclusion is that Nietzsche does not “clearly distinguish between sex and gender.” In her attack on Laurence Lampert, she rejects his reading of “sexual difference” into the phrase “granite of spiritual *fatum*” in §231, at the outset of the nine sections on sex and gender. The role that “sex” plays in the apparently liberating reading of Nietzsche that follows, however, seems completely to exclude sexual difference. Lemm may take this to be justified by the notion that “Nietzsche situates sexual difference beyond the reach of knowledge” (143). That allows her to place *all* visible or articulated difference between “man” and “woman” in the realm of gender. As will become clear in this chapter, I do not think that is a justifiable reading of the text in question.

²⁶ KSA 5:81.

undetermined” is different than “totally malleable.”

In my ensuing argument against the tacit belief that Nietzsche thinks “man” and “woman” entirely in terms of changeable social construct, I am not suggesting that it is wrong to appreciate the de-reifying potential of Nietzschean genealogy “*when it is applied to the psychological categories that govern much popular and theoretical thinking about gender identity [emphasis mine],*” as Judith Butler confirms in both statement and practice in *Gender Trouble*.²⁷ Such *applications* of Nietzschean investigative practices, however, have a somewhat different task than does Nietzsche scholarship, which is obligated, in a way that *Gender Trouble* is not, to address textual evidence that suggests that Nietzsche himself is not thinking *only* about the idea or cultural construct of woman, but also about the physiological configuration that is woman.²⁸

A less selective consideration of the same text that interests the critics discussed above (*Beyond Good and Evil* §231-239) makes it far harder to conclude that Nietzsche’s intentions there, with respect to “woman” and “man,” are entirely deconstructive, or to claim that he views the sexes purely as ideological productions, ripe for genealogical demystification. §231, the very first section in question, the one which begins the discussion of man and woman, begins as follows:

²⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 28.

²⁸ A distinction should be made, in other words, between what a certain Nietzschean methodology – such as that of genealogy – could do, or could have done, to deconstruct the concepts “man” and “woman,” and what Nietzsche himself actually does with those concepts in the text in question. Scholars seeking to create a feminist Nietzsche often seem to conveniently elide this distinction.

In two different essays, Raymond Geuss seeks, to the extent possible, to abstract the methodology of Nietzschean genealogy from its content. This distillation has the benefit of allowing genealogical methods to be marshalled in ways that Nietzsche himself does not use them. Geuss says that genealogy problematizes previously self-evident values by revealing them to be the product of “a number of *diverse*,” and sometimes almost haphazard, “lines of development” (Geuss, “Nietzsche and Genealogy, 276), so that “To offer a genealogy is to provide a historical dissolution of self-evident identities” (Geuss, “Genealogy as Critique,” 212). One can clearly imagine how such an approach *could* be turned against the concepts “man” and “woman,” but to pursue this possibility is not the same as to claim that this is actively being done by the Nietzsche text itself.

See:

- Raymond Geuss, “Genealogy as Critique.” Trans. Nicholas Walker. In *European Journal of Philosophy*. Volume 10, Number 2, 2002, 209-215.
- Raymond Geuss, “Nietzsche and Genealogy.” In *European Journal of Philosophy*. Volume 2, Number 3, 1994, 274-292.

§231. Learning transforms us; it does what all nourishment that does not merely “sustain” us does – *as the physiologist knows. At our foundations, though, far “down there,”* there is truly something unteachable, *a granite rock of spiritual fate,* of predetermined decision and answer to predetermined, singled-out questions. With regard to such cardinal problems there speaks an unchangeable “That is what I am”: *when it comes to man and woman [Weib], for example, a thinker cannot unlearn what he knows, but can only complete his education [auslernen] – can only discover, in the end, what is “established” in him on this topic.* Soon one finds certain solutions to problems that inspire strong belief specifically in *us*; maybe one names them one’s “convictions” henceforth. Later – we see in these convictions only footprints toward self-knowledge, signposts on the way to the problem that we *are* – more correctly, to the great stupidity [*Dummheit*] that we are, to our spiritual fate, to that which is *unteachable* far “down there.”²⁹

It is only after Nietzsche has said all this that §231 concludes with the sentence that tends to preoccupy the diverse commentators referred to above:

On the heels of this liberal compliment that I have just paid myself, perhaps it will be permitted to me to pronounce some truths about “woman as such” [*das ‘Weib an sich’*],

²⁹ KSA 5:170. The first five instances of italics are mine; the last two are Nietzsche’s.

assuming only that one knows from the outset to what an extent they are only – *my* truths.³⁰

The passage concerns the relationship between, on the one hand, that which is “unteachable” and which lies “at our foundations” (regarding, “for example,” the sexes), and, on the other hand, our “convictions.” It is heavily implied by both the last word of the first sentence (“physiologist”) and the example of sexual difference that the “foundations” in question are physiological foundations. As Nietzsche could not have stated more clearly, these foundations are “predetermined” and “unchangeable,” as opposed to what we “learn,” which was not a part of us before we learned it. Everyone from Derrida to Clark correctly identifies that the passage certainly concerns ideological formation - it concerns the origin of “convictions.” Nietzsche’s reason for bringing up the topic of ideological formation, however, is to lead ideology back to an “unchangeable ‘this is what I am.’” Once we see all this rhetoric insisting upon the immutability of physiology, we should begin to question whether this passage is really all about liberating us from narrow-minded, historically contingent beliefs that would seek to reify their claims into physiological destiny.

The word “my” in “my truths,” then, does indeed indicate, as scholars have recognized, that the production of these “truths” has everything to do with the person who Nietzsche is. More specifically, though, this production of “truths” has to do with the *embodied* person who Nietzsche is. The passage that precedes the well-cited last line does nothing to indicate that “my truths” are mere prejudices that can be picked up or dropped by anyone who happens upon this text; rather, they emanate from an “unchangeable ‘this is what I am.’” Furthermore, if the “unchangeable ‘this is what I am’” is the sort of reality that would be available to the “physiologist,” then this

³⁰ KSA 5:170.

unchangeable identity is unlikely to be mere idiosyncrasy: the physiologist studies *patterns* and *structures* of the will to power. The word “my,” then, does not serve to discredit the “truths” that follow as *mere* “stupidities,” but rather ties their manifestation to a specific (sexed) physiology – namely, Nietzsche’s own physiology.

I do not mean to argue, against the notion that this passage confirms Nietzsche’s rejection of an “essence” of woman and man, that Nietzsche is here declaring physiology to be equivalent to essence. The physiological “origin,” the will to power, as the “*unteachable* far ‘down there,’” is a split origin, as we articulated in chapters 1 and 2. It is an abyssal origin, one which we cannot perceive directly (chapter 1). Nevertheless, this split and shrouded origin is a “reality outside the text,” a “reality of drives” on which “Nietzsche never stopped bringing his questioning to bear.”³¹ The word “my,” then, does not renounce any relationship between the text that follows in §232-239 and an extra-textual reality, but names the specific extra-textual reality that is addressed, namely, that of physiology. The text of §231, when read in its entirety, does not claim that “self-knowledge” and investigation of the “problem that we *are*” are impossible because any given investigation is tied a certain perspective, embedded in a certain physiology. Rather, it asserts that any such investigation, which will be a physiological investigation, will emanate from “what is “established” in us,” “far ‘down there’”³² – from our own physiological configuration.

³¹ Blondel, *The Body and Culture* 53.

³² At the beginning of §230 (which is the well-cited paragraph about “translating the human being back into nature” [KSA 5:169]), Nietzsche specifies what he means by “spirit [*Geist*]”:

Perhaps one will not have understood me, without further clarification, when I spoke of a “fundamental will of the spirit [*Grundwillen des Geistes*]; allow me to explain.

The commanding entity that is called “the spirit” by the people, wants in itself and for itself to be master [*Herr*] and to feel itself to be master ... Its requirements and capacities are in this sense the same ones that the physiologists establish as the requirements and capacities of everything that lives, grows, and reproduces. The power of the spirit to appropriate foreign entities reveals itself in a strong inclination to assimilate the new to the old, to simplify the variegated, to overlook or cast out the utterly contradictory ... Its intention in all this concerns the incorporation of new “experiences,” to arrange

Nietzsche, then, when speaking about man and woman, must speak as a man. It may be that, from the standpoint on offer in §231-239, there is no more authoritative position from which to talk about woman than the position of a man, because everything in woman refers to man, whether the “woman” in question is natural, healthy, pre-modern woman or modern, emancipated, de-feminized woman. The agonistic relationship between the sexes prior to emancipation is defined by “fear,” *Furcht*, of man. Healthy, pre-modern woman responds to “the fear-inspiring in man [*das Furcht-Einflössende am Manne*]” – or, “let us say more precisely ... the *man* in man.”³³ Modern woman’s self is no less derivative in her relationship to man: seeking emancipation, she seeks to become man. Nietzsche calls the “emancipation of woman” a “becoming ‘*Herr*.’³⁴” The phrase literally means “becoming master,” but Nietzsche’s ironic quotation marks draw attention to the fact that the term *Herr* is necessarily gendered as male.³⁵ “What does all this mean,” Nietzsche concludes, “if not a disintegration of female instincts, a de-womanization [*Entweiblichung*]?”³⁶ Far from criticizing the merely contemporary oppression of woman, Nietzsche appears to actively endorse the “slave-like” state in which woman has been kept for millennia (“as if slavery were a counterargument, rather than a condition of every higher culture, every elevation of culture”³⁷).

new things within old orders – so, *growth*, or, to be more precise, the *feeling* of growth, the feeling of waxing power. (KSA 5:167)

It may not initially seem like the “granite rock of spiritual fate” referred to at the beginning of §231 is physiological in nature, but Nietzsche here, just before that paragraph, clearly does not allow for much space between the “spiritual” and the “physiological,” and appears to actually conflate the two under the rubric of the will to power.

³³ KSA 5:176.

³⁴ KSA 5:176.

³⁵ This is not immediately evident to readers referring to standard English translations. Walter Kaufmann translates “‘*Herr*’ zu werden” as “to become ‘master,’” placing a footnote immediately after the word “master” that reads simply, “*Herr*.”, with quotation marks around the German word (*Basic Writings of Nietzsche* 348). The much more recent Horstmann-Norman translation does not provide any footnotes, translating *Herr* simply as “master” (*Beyond Good and Evil*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, 128).

³⁶ KSA 5:177.

³⁷ KSA 5:177.

In his closing remarks on woman in §239, Nietzsche offers a kind of homage to pre-
emancipation woman, taking the position of one who would defend woman against those who seek
to make “the ‘weaker sex’³⁸ *strong* through culture.”³⁹ He celebrates woman as “suffering more,
more easily injured, more capable of love ... than any other animal.”⁴⁰ Woman’s “*nature*,”
Nietzsche says, italicizing the word, is “more ‘natural’ than man’s.”⁴¹ This is a remarkable
assertion, given Nietzsche’s description of his project, a few pages before in §230, as that of
“translat[ing] humanity back into nature.”⁴²

It is also a surprising statement, because Nietzsche’s description in §232-239 of feminine,
pre-modern woman is that of a definitively reactive configuration of the will to power. In the
Genealogy’s II.12,⁴³ reactive forms of the will to power are described as derivative from, and less
natural than, its active forms. Woman’s “power and dominance over men”⁴⁴ is instantiated in
behavior that is motivated by her “fear” of men, much as the *Genealogy*’s slave finds power in
behavior initially motivated by fear of the nobles. Woman defines herself in relation and reaction
to man, again just as the slave’s self-understanding and moral code arise through a comparison
with the noble.

Contrary to what scholars have suggested, there is a clear vision of natural woman on offer
in *Beyond Good and Evil* §231-239, of a physiological type called “*Weib*” that is defined by

³⁸ Nietzsche uses quotation marks here to indicate that he is referencing the way other people refer to women, but these quotation marks cannot be read as entirely negating or disowning the phrase. Elsewhere, Nietzsche uses it himself, without quotation marks or apparent irony (e.g. KSA 5:175). The “weakness” of woman is complicated by the passage just as the “slave”-status of slaves is complicated by the narrative of the *Genealogy*. In both cases, human beings gain power by turning their lack of “active” power into a different kind of strength. In both instances, though, their starting position is one of weakness.

³⁹ KSA 5:177.

⁴⁰ KSA 5:178.

⁴¹ KSA 5:179.

⁴² KSA 5:169.

⁴³ KSA 5:313-316.

⁴⁴ KSA 5:178.

“absolutely feminine instincts,”⁴⁵ by the drives that comprise her as embodied being. Again, with the word “natural,” I do not mean what the most rigidly naturalist reader of Nietzsche might mean with this word – “natural” does not point to an immutable mechanical-biological structure, but to a trans-epochal drive configuration. This is the primary meaning of the word “*Weib*” in these passages, and not the merely modern, merely cultural ideological formation that is called “woman” today. “Natural” woman is the most natural human being. She earns the title of most natural human being via her capacity for suffering. Taken in the context of Nietzsche’s entire discussion of woman in these sections, this “suffering” is fundamentally passive. Woman lives in “fear” and is easily “injured.” She becomes who she is in her reception of a more active power, that of man. Clearly, for Nietzsche to continue to assert and celebrate the fundamental naturalness of this being, who violates Nietzsche’s vision of the radically active will, would complicate Nietzsche’s endorsement of that active will. Yet, I will argue in what follows, this is exactly what happens over the last few years of Nietzsche’s productive career, in the figure of Ariadne.

Ariadne

The reading of Ariadne in the Nietzsche corpus that follows will refer to Ariadne’s story in Greek mythology, which is nowhere laid out at length in Nietzsche’s written work. For that reason, before discussing Nietzsche’s Ariadne, I will recount what I take to be a standard version of that story. After that, I will give a brief bird’s eye view of Ariadne’s presence in the Nietzsche corpus, since her appearances are sporadic and fleeting, such that even Nietzsche scholars might not recall themes raised in connection to her. After this preliminary background information, I will

⁴⁵ KSA 5:176.

turn to my own argument regarding Ariadne. I will show that Nietzsche puts Ariadne forth as a figurehead of his project of an intimate relationship with Becoming, which is to say, an amorous relationship with Dionysus. As a later representative of this project, she amends certain shortcomings of Zarathustra, who, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, written between 1883 and 1885, also sought a kind of communion with Becoming, but was never entirely successful. Her status as a higher human being for the later Nietzsche reflects the vision of humanity we have been developing here, as a fundamentally finite, embodied human being of limited powers. But we will see that it also potentially creates friction with other Nietzschean aspirations, such as those of “active nihilism,” “active force,” and “revaluation.” The result may be competing and irreconcilable “unofficial stories” about what a “higher future” would look like.

First, though, here is the story of Ariadne from Greek mythology. Ariadne is the daughter of King Minos of Crete. The son of King Minos, Androgeus, is killed under circumstances that vary depending on the telling, but in most versions, his death occurs in Athens, and King Minos blames either Athenians generally or the King of Athens, Aegeus, specifically, for the death of his son. King Minos declares war on Athens, and war is averted only when King Aegeus agrees to send seven young men and seven maidens to Crete every nine years as a payment for Androgeus’s death, to be food for the minotaur who lives in the labyrinth underground on Crete.

One year Theseus is one of those fourteen young Athenians chosen. Ariadne falls madly in love with Theseus and gives him thread and a sword in order to help him avoid getting lost in the labyrinth and to aid him in killing the minotaur. Theseus does both of these things, emerges from the labyrinth, and sails away from Crete with Ariadne, his lover, for the moment. Unfortunately (and importantly for Nietzsche), the love story doesn’t work out between Theseus and Ariadne. Theseus abandons her on the island of Naxos and continues on to Athens without her.

On the shores of Naxos, Dionysus and his entourage come across Ariadne. Dionysus and Ariadne fall in love, and Dionysus takes her away to Olympus to marry her.⁴⁶

The fact that Ariadne is the lover of Dionysus makes her a figure worth of consideration in the Nietzsche corpus, but she admittedly does not come up very often – in a total of only twenty passages, in fact (to be clear, her appearance in twenty passages indicates much more than twenty appearances of her name; still, the fact remains that the totality of the text devoted to Ariadne is limited). Of these twenty passages, several might be considered irrelevant for most scholarly projects, such as the letters Nietzsche writes in 1889, after his mental collapse, which refer to Cosima Wagner as Ariadne,⁴⁷ while some other, mostly early, passages are simply so brief and elliptical that it would be difficult to develop an interpretation of them.⁴⁸ That said, from 1885 (the year Nietzsche finishes *Zarathustra*) through 1888, she appears increasingly often (11 times in total during this period), and in contexts that, as we will see, confirm her importance for Nietzsche.

A fuller picture of Ariadne's meaning in Nietzsche's last productive years will emerge below, when I consider her role in Nietzsche's thought as a development out of Zarathustra's perceived shortcomings, but, to make Ariadne's distinction from Zarathustra clearer, I will point out two aspects of the Ariadne passages ahead of time.

First, Nietzsche associates Ariadne with the body, with the *Leib*, a fact pointed out and commented upon at length by Barbara Stiegler.⁴⁹ After an extended ode to the body in his 1885

⁴⁶ Given the sexual undertones of the Apollo-Dionysus relationship in *The Birth of Tragedy*, it is interesting that Ariadne, Dionysus's final lover for the late Nietzsche, is the granddaughter of Helios, the sun god, through her mother. Nietzsche makes no reference to this fact in the published works or the *Nachlass*, however.

⁴⁷ See the following letters: the letter to Cosima Wagner from "early January" (BVN-1889, 1242a), the letter to Cosima Wagner from January 3 (BVN-1889, 1241), to Hans von Bülow on January 4 (BVN-1889, 1244), to Jacob Burkhardt on January 4 (BVN-1889, 1245), and to Jacob Burkhardt on January 6 (BVN-1889, 1256). Accessed online from Nietzsche Source, June 14, 2022.

⁴⁸ For example, 1885-1886 1[164], KSA 12:47 and 1885-1886 1[231], KSA 12:61.

⁴⁹ Stiegler, *Nietzsche et la critique de la chair*.

notes, Nietzsche proposes to translate what he has just said about drives and forces into “moral” terms.⁵⁰ As he begins to do so, he is shot down by an imaginary Ariadne, sitting on Naxos, who is disgusted by the very “German” proposal of translating the body into moral terms. In this context, Nietzsche associates his own recurring phrase “guiding thread of the body,” where the word for “guiding thread” is *Leitfaden*, with the thread, the *Faden*, that Ariadne uses for the labyrinth (Nietzsche often omits Theseus entirely from his references to Dionysus, Ariadne, and labyrinth, depicting Ariadne as herself standing in the “labyrinth” of Dionysus⁵¹).

Second, Nietzsche explicitly associates Ariadne with a rejection of the heroic.⁵² This derives in an obvious way from the failure of her romance with Theseus. Dreaming of Dionysus, presumably on the beach in Naxos, Nietzsche’s Ariadne says, “Abandoned by the hero, I dream of the over-hero [*den Über-Helden*].”^{53,54} In a sketch of what appears to be a longer intended work, Nietzsche’s Ariadne says to Dionysus, “All heroes should perish by me [*an mir sollen alle Helden zu Grunde gehen*]: that is my last act of love to Theseus – ‘I sentence you to perish.’”⁵⁵

⁵⁰ *Nachlass*, 1885 37[4], KSA 11:576-579.

⁵¹ For example, “Ariadne’s Lament” in the *Dionysus-Dithyrambis*: “Sei klug, Ariadne: *Ich bin dein Labyrinth!*” (KSA 6:401).

⁵² Vanessa Lemm appears to see Nietzsche’s thought as aspiring toward a “higher form of love” that is coded as female and is associated with “the downfall of all heroism.” This love is to be instantiated through a “return to nature, an embodiment of nature” (Lemm 160). This seems right to me in its broad outlines for reasons that will become apparent in this chapter, although my conception of Nietzsche’s “nature” bases itself more centrally on Nietzsche’s notions of drive, physiology, and will to power than does Lemm’s.

⁵³ *Nachlass*, 1883 13[1], KSA 10:433.

⁵⁴ In Ariadne abandoned on Naxos, Keith May sees “the soul in modern times, forsaken by the hero and mockingly importuned by a god. The soul is no longer consummated by heroism” (Keith May, *Nietzsche on the Struggle Between Knowledge and Wisdom*. New York: St. Martin’s Press 1993, 133). It seems not entirely wrong to me to read “our modern soul [as] abandoned specifically by ‘Theseus’, in other words, the spirit of heroism” (Ibid 133), to the extent that Ariadne is in some sense a being for the here-and-now, for the aftermath of the death of God.

That said, in his observation of the ironic, playful way that the text treats Ariadne, May misses the fact that Ariadne is not exactly *us* (“our modern soul”) but a better version of us. In the previous chapter, we discussed more explicitly modern characters from the Nietzsche text, such as the modern *Wissenschaftler* from the *Genealogy*, the academic historian from the second *Untimely Meditation*, Wagner, Socrates, and the last man. One could not say, certainly, that Ariadne belongs on this list in anything but a very highly qualified way.

⁵⁵ *Nachlass*, 1887 9[115], KSA 12:402.

From Zarathustra's Male Heroism to Ariadne's Female Suffering

In Nietzsche's last few productive years, Ariadne at times replaces Zarathustra as the human being who could successfully achieve an amorous relationship with Dionysian Becoming.⁵⁶ Zarathustra, to be sure, is never set aside or abandoned, but is challenged, by Ariadne, with a competing vision as to how this relationship might be achieved. The reconsideration of Zarathustra that Ariadne embodies needs to be read in terms of their respective maleness and femaleness. We will start, then, by considering Zarathustra's maleness. Zarathustra exhibits a stereotypically male hubris, the hubris of the hero, and there is a line of thought, in Nietzsche, according to which this hubris is his downfall. To understand why this is, we need to reflect on the dynamics of the will to power and Nietzsche's conception of the human body as it emanates from the thought of the will to power.

Despite the bombast that lies on the surface of the phrase "will to power," the thought, as it unfolds in Nietzsche's writings, actually implies a certain finitude to all life, as we have seen. In chapter 1, we observed the ineliminable "tragic gap" between drives and their satisfaction, and saw with Blondel that this "gap" is indicated in the "zur" of *Wille zur Macht*, the "to" of "will to power."⁵⁷ This gap is constitutive to life, and delimits life's ability to successfully obtain power. The move from the ideal to the organic, or, to refer to Heidegger's dichotomy without fully endorsing it implies, from the supersensual to the sensual, is a move in favor of the recognition of

⁵⁶ This claim has already been made by both Jean-Luc Marion and Barbara Stiegler, although neither one reads this transition in terms of sex or gender, as I do here. Stiegler, whose consideration of Ariadne is more sustained than Marion's, makes a claim for Ariadne's place in Nietzsche's mature thought appears to be stronger than mine: she views Ariadne not as an intermittent challenge to Zarathustra, but as his firmly established and final replacement.

See:

- Jean Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, 47-55.

- Stiegler, *Nietzsche et la critique de la chair*, chapter 8: "Surhomme : l'enfant de Dionysos et d'Ariane," 179-202.

⁵⁷ Eric Blondel, *Nietzsche: The Body and Culture*, 47.

this finitude. Against the potential perfection and potential completeness of the idea, a perfection and completeness whose obtainment is the basic task of Western metaphysics, Nietzsche asserts the eternally unsatisfied striving and questing of the drives, which comprise the body, as the basis for our understanding of humanity. The dynamics of the will to power, which are the dynamics of the body as incorporation, are, as we saw in chapter 2, a foundational limit on human power.

Zarathustra ostensibly endorses this sea change in the Western paradigm whereby the body displaces the *logos* as the locus of our understanding of the human. His most famous endorsement of this shift comes in the chapter “On the Despisers of the Body,” in which he claims that “your little reason is an instrument of your body,”⁵⁸ although the same championing of the corporeal over the ideal can also be found elsewhere, such as in “On the Giving Virtue,” in which he describes the body as the guiding force of history and describes the spirit as merely the “herald, comrade, and echo of its [the body’s] struggles and victories.”⁵⁹

It is not clear, though, that Zarathustra has really learned the deeper lesson of the privileging of the body over reason or over the spirit. His “Thus I willed it”⁶⁰ with regard to the entirety of the past betrays the dream of a reality that is in thrall to human desire. This is the opposite of the lesson of the *zur* of *Wille zur Macht*. Zarathustra’s chosen path is that of the hero, the hero who can assert his will and thereby conquer – more than love – fate.⁶¹ Whereas *amor fati* does “not wage war against the ugly,” does not “accuse,” does not “accuse even the accusers,”⁶² Zarathustra seems able to conceive of himself only as a warrior, asserting his will over all reality. “The man should be raised for war,” he says, “and the woman for the nursing of the warrior –

⁵⁸ KSA 4:39.

⁵⁹ KSA 4:98.

⁶⁰ KSA 4:181.

⁶¹ T.K. Seung (*Nietzsche’s Epic of the Soul*) speaks of Zarathustra’s “Faustian will” that seeks to assert itself against and over the cosmos. See, for example, Seung 117.

⁶² From *The Gay Science*. KSA 3:521.

anything else is foolishness.”⁶³ His is a megalomaniacal fantasy of total control, and thus a failure or refusal to recognize the dominion of Dionysian Becoming over the human being.⁶⁴ This dream, that of human control over Becoming, is precisely what the ratio-centric (logocentric) philosophers of *Twilight of the Idols* are accused of in the chapter “‘Reason’ in Philosophy”: their dream of “breaking loose ... from Becoming” is exposed as an attempt at self-empowerment.⁶⁵ The same fantasy is at work in the “idolatry” inherent in the dazzling vision of Socrates, discussed last chapter, who blinds himself to abyssal Becoming in order to believe that he has conquered it. Zarathustra’s character thus operates according to a logic that ultimately requires his replacement: he is incorrigibly flawed.

We can begin to see how Ariadne might serve as an inversion of Zarathustra, for the Nietzsche of 1885-1888, by observing the subtle revisionary work at play in 1888, as Nietzsche reprints two Zarathustra texts, relating them, now, to the character of Ariadne. That year, in the

⁶³ KSA 4:85.

⁶⁴ The tension between the task of loving fate in the inevitable and inescapable eternal return, on the one hand, and Zarathustra’s radically self-assertive will, on the other hand, has been explored in critical discussions of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and Buddhism, in the work, for instance, of Graham Parkes, Bret Davis, and Brook Ziporyn. As the critical conversation between them acknowledges, Zarathustra develops as a character as his story unfolds. He does not remain blissfully unquestioning of his self-conception as a radically self-assertive will. The transition from Book I to Book II, in fact, is largely the story of how this self-conception gets challenged. *Zarathustra*’s ambiguous ending suggests, however, that this tension is never perfectly resolved.

See:

- Bret Davis, “Zen After Zarathustra: The Problem of the Will in the Confrontation Between Nietzsche and Buddhism.” In *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 28 (2004), 89-138.
- Bret Davis, “Reply to Graham Parkes: Nietzsche as Zebra With Both Egoistic Antibuddha and Nonegoistic Bodhisattva Stripes.” In *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 46.1 (2015), 62-81.
- Graham Parkes, “Open Letter to Bret Davis: Letter on Egoism: Will to Power as Interpretation.” In *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 46.1 (2015), 42-61.
- Brook Ziporyn, “Omnidesire as the End of Desire: Zarathustra, Mahāyāna Buddhism, Tiantai.” In *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 46.1 (2015), 25-41.

Seung also references Buddhism in articulating the tension between Zarathustra’s hubristic, “Faustian” will and the thought of the eternal return, which requires a (more Buddhist, non-assertive, selfless) “cosmic” will (Seung, *Nietzsche’s Epic of the Soul*, 272-274).

⁶⁵ KSA 6:74-75.

works *Ecce Homo* and *Dionysus Dithyrambos*, Nietzsche reinterprets two rather different songs from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* into a dialogue between Ariadne and Dionysus. The two songs in question are “The Night Song,” reprinted in *Ecce Homo*’s section on *Zarathustra*,⁶⁶ and “Ariadne’s Complaint,” in the *Dionysus Dithyrambos*,⁶⁷ which had appeared as the lament of the Sorcerer of Book IV of *Zarathustra*.⁶⁸ What is important to highlight is the shifting relationship between divinity and humanity in the two songs. “The Night Song” is sung by one who claims to give from an overabundance of wealth. In the original *Zarathustra* text, it is sung by the decidedly human Zarathustra himself. In *Ecce Homo*, however, Nietzsche glosses the song by asserting that “this is the way a god, a Dionysus, suffers.”⁶⁹ He says that the “answer” to such suffering “would be Ariadne ... Who besides me knows who Ariadne is!”⁷⁰ The identity of the giver, then – that is, the identity of the one who must be radically, almost frantically, *active* in his giving – is no longer a human being, but a specific god, Dionysus, and the one who could receive such a gift, who fulfills her role in reception, is a specific human being, namely, Ariadne. As I will argue going forward, this is reflective of the fact that such radical activity is not strictly possible for a human being, according to a certain strain of Nietzsche’s later thought. In the song that is the Sorcerer’s song in *Zarathustra* and “Ariadne’s Complaint” in the *Dionysus Dithyrambos*, the speaker is always a human being, but Zarathustra, who reacts to the song, and Ariadne, who herself delivers it, come down on opposite sides of the relationship to divinity that is manifested in the song. The speaker, the Sorcerer in *Zarathustra* and Ariadne in 1888, combatively invites a “concealed,”⁷¹

⁶⁶ The reprinted song is found in §7 of the chapter on *Zarathustra* (KSA 6:345-347), and Nietzsche’s revisionary interpretation of the song appears in the opening lines of §8 (KSA 6:348). The song’s original context is Book II of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (KSA 4:136-138).

⁶⁷ KSA 6:398-401.

⁶⁸ KSA 4:313-317.

⁶⁹ KSA 6:348.

⁷⁰ KSA 6:348.

⁷¹ KSA 4:314, l. 3, KSA 6:398, l. 10.

“unnamable,”⁷² and “unknown”⁷³ god, who in the 1888 reprint turns out to be Dionysus, to “strike deeper”⁷⁴ into his or her heart. The song is replete with images of penetration, with the speaker inviting the god to “puncture, shatter my heart!”⁷⁵ and to “plunge deeper” with the “cruel thorn” of his love.⁷⁶ He or she begs the god to “torment”⁷⁷ him or her, describing him as assailing him or her alternatively with “icy frost-arrows”⁷⁸ or with “blunt arrows.”⁷⁹ In 1885’s *Zarathustra* Book IV, this stance of voluntary passivity had been met with ridicule by Zarathustra, who says the song reveals the Sorcerer as one who is not “great [*gross*]” (KSA 4:319), whereas in 1888, this stance is no longer criticized, but is instead taken up by the valorized character herself. In both cases, then, when the *Zarathustra* text is converted into an interplay, in 1888, between Ariadne and Dionysus, the changing context of the songs implies a new evaluation of Zarathustra’s hubristic stance of self-assertive, heroic willing, and, conversely, of Ariadne’s stance of relative submission to Dionysus. For Zarathustra, the ideal is a will that can overcome the nausea inspired by a vision of cosmic Becoming through self-assertion; in the figure of Ariadne, this vision is tempered by the implication that Dionysian Becoming must be *received*, that one must be “struck” by it. The transition, then, from the *Zarathustra* passages to their 1888 reprints is a move from an endorsement of stereotypically masculine hubris, heroism, and assertiveness to one of stereotypically feminine receptiveness and submission. Since the actual text of the songs remains

⁷² KSA 4:314, l. 3, KSA 6:398, l. 10.

⁷³ KSA 4:314, l. 12, KSA 6:398, l. 19.

⁷⁴ KSA 4:314, ll. 13-15, KSA 6:398, ll.20-22.

⁷⁵ KSA 4:314, l. 15, KSA 6:398, l. 22.

⁷⁶ KSA 4:315, ll.18-20, KSA 6:400, ll. 2-5. The words in the two versions are the same; the different number of lines in my two citations here is due to the fact that the line breaks have changed slightly in the 1888 edition.

⁷⁷ KSA 4:316, l. 26, KSA 6:401, l. 401.

⁷⁸ KSA 4:314, l. 1, KSA 6:398, l. 8.

⁷⁹ KSA 4: 314, l. 17, KSA 6:399, l. 1.

the same,⁸⁰ this transition is seen in the attitude assumed the one who is marked out, in the surrounding text, as a higher human being, namely, Zarathustra, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and Ariadne, in the 1888 texts. One might point to the fact that the picture of Ariadne and Dionysus shows both a submissive and a dominant party. If this picture of unequal submission and domination is affirmed by Nietzsche, then how does this in any way challenge Zarathustra? But the question at issue here is that of the appropriate stance of the *human being*. Dionysus, as the god of Becoming, is very importantly not human. Humanity is necessarily in fact in a submissive position in relation to Dionysus; to own or accept this position is the authentic human stance, whereas the swashbuckling stance of Zarathustra is a denial of or flight from this inevitable dependence and relative weakness.

Zarathustra's and Ariadne's comparative aggression and passivity are reflected in the parts of the body with which they are routinely associated. As the title of his book suggests, Zarathustra is one who speaks constantly, who is loquacious to a fault, and who imposes his words even where they are unwelcome and feckless.⁸¹ Conversely, Dionysus more than once brings attention to Ariadne's ears, calling them "his ears" in "Ariadne's Complaint": "Be prudent [*klug*], Ariadne! ... / You have small ears, you have my ears."⁸² Both Dionysus and the cosmic flux of the Eternal Return are associated with music.⁸³ We might take the emphasis on Ariadne's ears to suggest that

⁸⁰ They remain the same with the exception of the 5-line response to Ariadne delivered by Dionysus at the end of "Ariadne's Complaint," which concludes with "I am your labyrinth" (KSA 6:401, l. 25).

⁸¹ Zarathustra says of himself, "It is difficult to live with human beings, because silence is so difficult. Especially for a talkative man [*für einen Geschwätzigen*]" (KSA 4:182).

⁸² KSA 6:401, ll. 21-22. Dionysus also refers to the small ears of Ariadne in *Twilight of the Idols* (KSA 6:124; an apparent draft of this passage appears in the *Nachlass* at 1888 16[40] KSA 13:498).

⁸³ Nietzsche surprisingly associates Dionysus more closely with music than he does Apollo in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and the Eternal Return's unending flux is rendered musical in the *da capo* of the one who embraces the Return (see *Beyond Good and Evil* §56 [KSA 5:74-75] and the *Nachlass* note concerning Zarathustra's *da capo* from the spring of 1885 (1885 34[204], KSA 11:490).

In their *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, Silk and Stern intermittently discuss both the strangeness, from the standpoint of philology, of Nietzsche's decision to view Dionysus as the god of music, and the ways in which this stance does not come completely out of nowhere (M.S Silk and J.P Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*).

she is built to hear, or receive, the music of Becoming, whereas Zarathustra seeks to talk over it.⁸⁴

This developing conviction, in Nietzsche, that an amorous relationship to Becoming must involve a note of submission, is reflected in the finitude inherent in the thought of the will to power. From *The Birth of Tragedy* onwards, finite life's ability to face Dionysus is always limited. In the later terms of the will to power, we can say that life, dependent on Being, can only handle so much of Dionysian Becoming, before its powers are overrun. "Life" here is thought as "bodied," or embodied, will to power. The body's power to face Dionysian Becoming is delimited; we cannot face the god head-on. The move from the Platonic, Aristotelian, and broadly Western understanding of the human through the rational, wielding the potentially all-powerful might of the idea, to an understanding of the human being that emanates from the strictly limited power of the body, is a move that brings with it the requirement of a certain humility in the face of the ultimate Dionysian reality, a humility that results from the fact that we can only confront Becoming through the filter of "masks," and only to a certain degree. But on the terms of that same Western tradition, this transition is the transition from a paradigmatically male humanity to a paradigmatically female humanity. Most memorably in Aristotle, the tradition's understanding of maleness emanates from the rational, and its understanding of femaleness emanates from materiality, corporeality, fleshliness. When Nietzsche proposes to read humanity as always first and foremost a certain physiological formation, on the terms of the tradition, he proposes to start from the ostensibly female side of the human being. This fact resonates with Nietzsche's association of his own "guiding thread," the thread of the body, with the "thread" of Ariadne, and with his assertion of woman as the more "natural" sex.

⁸⁴ Although we could also point out that the same observation makes Zarathustra and Ariadne similar at least in the sense that they are both associated with the aural. In chapter 3, we saw how Nietzsche, in *Twilight of the Idols*, uses aural metaphors for his own philosophical activity, speaking of how he will "sound out" both "idols of the times" and "eternal idols" (KSA 6:58), whereas the "idols" themselves are, in the 1888 works, decidedly visual.

But the male, hubristic refusal to acknowledge this finitude is not limited to Zarathustra among figures in the Nietzsche corpus, and, in the Western philosopher, it takes the form of the denial of the body. Nietzsche is very intentional in his gendering of philosophy as male, and it would be a mistake to think that he depicts the philosopher as male simply because most philosophers have been male. The preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*⁸⁵ claims that the basic mistake of philosophy as metaphysical dogma is to seek permanent ownership of unchanging truth. The philosopher is depicting as an overweening male lover, seeking to control the woman “truth.” The philosopher “controls” truth by imagining he has triumphed over Becoming, by freezing it. The dogmatic strategy for this conquering of Becoming is elucidated in greater detail in *Twilight of the Idols*: when one says “away with the *body*, above all,” one can come to the conclusion that “What is does not *become*; what becomes, *is* not.”⁸⁶ The body, as the gateway to Becoming, is also a portal onto a vision of that which circumscribes and limits human power. For that reason, it is suppressed by domineering male philosophers, seeking an illusion of total control over reality.⁸⁷ In this sense, Western philosophy, viewed in Nietzsche’s physiological, psychological terms, is an error that is the direct result of a fundamentally male configuration of the will to power. Zarathustra, capable of rejecting philosophy’s theoretical denigration of the body but unable to escape the fact that he shares this same physiological drive to domination, is thus not as far away from the metaphysical past as he believes himself to be.

⁸⁵ KSA 5:11-13.

⁸⁶ KSA 6:74-75.

⁸⁷ For Kelly Oliver, Nietzsche does open up the door to the body as the “other” of philosophy, but always thinks this body in male terms. “Nietzsche wants a sensuous, violent reading and writing that come from the body. But it seems that this body, for Nietzsche and his commentators, is always only the male body ... although Nietzsche proposes a way of reading and writing that opens onto its other, a reading and writing from the body, this body is always a masculine body.” There are clear ways in which Oliver is right to say this, but I take the story I am telling in this chapter to problematize at least the “always” in the preceding sentence (Kelly Oliver, *Womanizing Nietzsche: Philosophy’s Relation to the “Feminine.”* Routledge, New York: 1995, 23 and 25).

At one point, in opposing this historical male mistake, the text appears to suggest that Nietzsche identifies with the female Ariadne. In *Beyond Good and Evil* §295, in which Nietzsche declares himself to be “the last disciple and initiate of the god Dionysus,”⁸⁸ he also names Ariadne as the kind of human being whom Dionysus can “love, under certain circumstances.”⁸⁹ Dionysus then describes a vision for a future humanity who will be “stronger, more evil, and deeper.”⁹⁰ When this description appears, Ariadne, mentioned just previously, seems to be the template for this higher humanity. He wishes to help humanity reach this higher plane because the human can “find his way around any labyrinth”⁹¹ – which is, of course, exactly Ariadne’s strength, as the one whom Nietzsche represents as standing in the Dionysian labyrinth. As Dionysus says this to Nietzsche, though, Nietzsche reports a “halcyon smile” on the god’s face, “as if he had just given me a charming compliment,”⁹² as if the compliment regarding being able to make his way through the labyrinth had been directed at Nietzsche, as opposed to, or in addition to, Ariadne. In this way the text obliquely suggests an association of Nietzsche with Ariadne.

Ariadne, I have been trying to show here, is a “natural” woman in the sense described in *Beyond Good and Evil* §231-239, but, in her, the same traits that constitute femaleness for Nietzsche undergo the revaluation by Nietzsche that started in §239, when he commended woman’s capacity for suffering and her naturalness. Ariadne is able to love and be loved by Dionysus because she sees that the natural human position in relation to him is one that recognizes that he outstrips our finite power; human formative powers are always on their heels in relation to the chaos of Becoming. This fact is a truth of the body: out of the flux of Becoming, incorporation

⁸⁸ KSA 5:238.

⁸⁹ KSA 5:239.

⁹⁰ KSA 5:239.

⁹¹ KSA 5:239.

⁹² KSA 5:239.

only makes anything sensible and capable of appropriation – that is, it only finds itself in engagement with beings - by at the same time conceding something of itself, of its own power. This self-concession is always there from the beginning, always there at the first moment of life's self-instantiation in and as incorporation. "No activity without passivity," as Stiegler says.⁹³

Ariadne's love of Dionysus is not the only example in Nietzsche's writing of an embrace of that which overruns human creative power, a power which is limited to the world of beings. The fact that all human projects are ultimately undone in favor of the exact state of affairs that preceded them is part of what is so difficult about the Eternal Return, and *amor fati* is love of the "necessary,"⁹⁴ that which we cannot will to change. Nowhere, however, does a character apparently esteemed by Nietzsche so thoroughly vocalize the taking-on of a compromised agency that is voluntarily assumed, as does Ariadne in "Ariadne's Complaint" in the *Dionysus Dithyrambs*. Having renounced Theseus, the hero, and the hubris his character implies, Ariadne is constituted not first and foremost in action, but in reaction to Dionysus. This mirrors the position of woman in *Beyond Good and Evil*, whose existence is defined by her fear of man.

But if the naturalness of woman is the naturalness of fear, and if Ariadne, as a higher human body, is higher precisely in embracing her role of reception and reaction in relation to Dionysus, then Nietzsche risks feminizing and thereby undermining his vision of life as most naturally and fundamentally "activity."⁹⁵ If it is a modern "idiosyncrasy" to make the "adaptation" that belongs to "reactivity" fundamental, and a betrayal of the "essence of life,"⁹⁶ then Nietzsche too has betrayed life, both in his demonstration of the generalized passivity inherent to all the body's

⁹³ Stiegler, *Nietzsche et la critique de la chair*, 177. "Pas d'activité sans passivité."

⁹⁴ KSA 6:297 (*Ecce Homo*).

⁹⁵ KSA 5:315.

⁹⁶ KSA 5:316.

activity, and, beyond that, in allowing such female passivity to appear in an aspirational figure, Ariadne.

A Higher History?

There are thus two irreconcilable paths in Nietzsche's thought: one that celebrates the autonomous and active will to power, and one that insists upon the shadow of passivity in all the body's activity. The friction between these two trains of thought bears directly on the question, What sort of future life is possible? What sort of life can we aspire to without engaging in fantasy-driven wishful thinking?

One possible understanding of what a Nietzschean "higher history" would look like can be drawn by comparing Nietzsche's strategy for overcoming nihilism, according to Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche, with Heidegger's own strategy for overcoming nihilism. In his *Heidegger and Nietzsche: Overcoming Metaphysics*, Louis Blond recounts how, for Heidegger, Nietzsche, in positing the will to power as a new *causa sui* at the heart of a new metaphysics, remains able to believe that revaluation can provide a way out of nihilism. The will to power, as the source of the beingness of beings, remains able to reinvigorate meaning and can overcome nihilism by active willing. For Heidegger, this is in fact the final step in the consummation of nihilism as the forgetting of Being, whereby Western metaphysics moves from "Plato's conception of being as the condition of beings" to Nietzsche's "conditionality ... as subjective: representations or 'values'."⁹⁷ The culmination of nihilism is the total severing from Being that takes place when Being is no longer even thought as condition. Heidegger's own position rejects a Nietzschean

⁹⁷ Louis Blond, *Heidegger and Nietzsche: Overcoming Metaphysics*. Continuum: London 2010, 148.

“activity” that seeks “mastery over beings” in favor of a “radical passivity” that gives the initiative to Being in en-owning (*Ereignis*).⁹⁸

In the dispute set up by Blond, however, Nietzsche ends up appearing to ultimately have the stronger (or less weak) position, as Heidegger’s surpassing of Nietzsche turns out to have even bigger problems than does Nietzsche himself. By making any post-metaphysical thought dependent upon the “call of being,” it becomes hard to explain how humanity can make the first move in seeking to get out from under nihilism, even if it sees lucidly the nihilistic state of the epoch in which it finds itself:

Heidegger has taken ... the receptivity of human sense, which is described as being ‘prepared for an encounter with beings’, and translated receptivity into all beings. Consequently, all things, all beings are blessed or cursed by their receptive nature. They must wait for the call of being and not strive to create one’s own self-overcoming. Although *Ereignis* attempts to address the ... being-centered nature of Western metaphysics, the transformation does not come to terms with the emasculation of human activity.⁹⁹

This initiative given to Being complicates even the motivation for seeking to overcome nihilism: “the more imposing problem for Heidegger is that if where we find ourselves now is *not* due to subjective action and valuation, then it originates from within the compass of being itself. If nihilism is not something about which we have a ‘choice’, then nihilism cannot be refused: it is a

⁹⁸ Blond 168.

⁹⁹ Blond 167-168.

gift of being.”¹⁰⁰ By comparison, at least the diagnosis of nihilism offered by Nietzsche has the potential to remain coherent, and Nietzsche’s orientation toward “subjective action and valuation” allows us to believe we might again find meaning. For Blond, then, it is the “active” Nietzsche, the same one Heidegger is responding to and criticizing, who in turn ends up providing an implied critique of Heidegger himself.

If this analysis offers one argument as to why the active Nietzschean path out of nihilism might be appealing, though, it also opens up questions on two fronts. First, is the vision of a constantly self-overcoming, self-causing “*aus sich rollendes Rad*,”¹⁰¹ a “wheel rolling out of itself,” really a goal worth pursuing? Duane Armitage points out that it is hard to *value* values that are erected precisely in order to be wiped away in a constant, vibrant stream of self-legislation: “there remains no telos to will to power’s drive toward enhancement: the only telos is simply more power. ‘Values’ are posited *in order* to be overcome. This is the activity of will to power itself,”¹⁰² with the result that “the will to power *is* violence,”¹⁰³ a violence that must be turned inwards as well as outwards. This first question may be rendered moot, though, by a second, more fundamental question: does the general train of Nietzsche’s physiological thought allow us to follow this aspirational path? We saw in chapter 2 that reaction is fundamental to the organic, for Nietzsche: physiological formations always coalesce out of fear. In short – or, as a result – there is no such thing as a purely active drive.

In Ariadne, though, as we have seen, the familiar Nietzschean notion of healthy life, or a higher form of life, get inverted. She can far more easily be described as receptive or passive than she can be described as “active,” as her existence is defined by its orientation towards a divinity

¹⁰⁰ Blond 160.

¹⁰¹ KSA 4:80.

¹⁰² Duane Armitage, *Philosophy’s Violent Sacred: Heidegger and Nietzsche Through Mimetic Theory*, 30.

¹⁰³ Armitage 37.

that symbolizes that which precedes and overwhelms all possible human endeavor, creation, and willing. Is there any way to relate Ariadne to the valorized Nietzschean tropes of hubristic self-assertion – to the “rapturous” artist,¹⁰⁴ to the “creator,”¹⁰⁵ to “active force” and “revaluation” – that is not simply oppositional?

If we can in fact wed the hubris of revaluation with Ariadne’s passivity, it may be through a sort of self-overcoming of valuation itself. When the will to power reaches its zenith, valuation posits values in order for those values to be overcome, as says Armitage. As Armitage does not consider, though, such a dynamic might point toward a post-valuational mode of thought, as it is not now a historical set of values, such as Western values or Christian values, but values qua values, that undergo devaluation. Gary Shapiro entertains something like this possibility in his analysis of Nietzsche’s Anaximander. I will briefly recount a portion of his argument here. Shapiro responds to Heidegger’s accusation in “The Anaximander Saying” that, in Nietzsche’s translation of the Anaximander fragment, he imposes the valuational thinking native to a late stage of Western metaphysics onto an utterance that precedes the history that gives rise to such thinking. Shapiro points out that, as Nietzsche introduces Anaximander’s thought, he compares it to Schopenhauer’s, and that the comparison is not altogether favorable.¹⁰⁶ As opposed to Heidegger’s suggestion that Nietzsche embeds valuation in Anaximander’s thought because Nietzsche himself is predisposed to read valuation into all philosophical utterances, Shapiro points out that Nietzsche identifies a certain kind of valuation at work in the cosmological views of both Anaximander and

¹⁰⁴ E.g. Nietzsche’s *Nachlass* note from 1888, “Toward a Physiology of the Artist,” which names “rapture [*Rausch*] as a precondition” for artistry (1888 17[9], KSA 13:529).

¹⁰⁵ “The Way of the Creator,” *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (KSA 4:80-83).

¹⁰⁶ Gary Shapiro, “Debts Due and Overdue: Beginnings of Philosophy in Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Anaximander.” In *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morals*. Ed. Richard Schacht, 358-375. Berkeley: University of California Press 1994, 364.

The direct comparison between Anaximander and Schopenhauer is in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* at KSA 1:818-819.

Schopenhauer – namely, that all beings are guilty – *precisely in order to condemn this valuation*. Nietzsche identifies as an expression of pessimism the notion that all things stand under the judgment of a cosmic justice from the moment of their inception. Shapiro claims that the second confrontation with the thought of Anaximander occurs in II.20 of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “On Redemption” (although he appears to miss the strongest evidence for the notion that this is, in fact, an engagement with Anaximander – namely, that the preceding section, “The Soothsayer,” contains a speech conveying a vision of an enervated, interminable sensible world, a kind of negative vision of the eternal return, that recycles much of the basic imagery ascribed to Anaximander in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*¹⁰⁷). There, Nietzsche has Zarathustra say,

“Everything passes away; therefore everything deserves to pass away. And this too is justice, this law of time that it must devour its children.” Thus preached madness.

¹⁰⁷ Compare especially Anaximander’s speech (in fact Nietzsche’s) regarding “this world of injustice” at KSA 1:820 with that of the Soothsayer at KSA 4:172. In both speeches, we see images of dried out seas, emptiness, fire and ash, the confusion of high and low, and the fear that death is impossible.

Graham Parkes says that “The soothsayer is clearly a portrait of Nietzsche’s erstwhile mentor Schopenhauer,” an observation which seems right and in fact would play further to Shapiro’s point (Editor’s note in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Oxford: New York: 2005, 304). This suggests that the association of Anaximander and Schopenhauer continues in *Zarathustra*.

This is one instance of the tendency explored in more detail by Jim Porter, who, in his *Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future*, observes that “Nietzsche frequently plunders his philological notebooks from the 1860s and 1870s for ideas that he then carries over, sometimes verbatim, into his later notebooks, or into his later correspondence, or into his published writings” (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2000, 3).

“Things are ordered morally according to justice and punishment. Alas, where is redemption from the flux of things and from the punishment called existence?” Thus preached madness.¹⁰⁸

Shapiro observes that the ordering of all things according to “justice and punishment” is explicitly called “madness” here. Suggesting that Nietzsche is engaging not only Anaximander at the beginning of the tradition, but also Schopenhauer, Nietzsche’s immediate predecessor, he claims that “philosophy itself” here makes itself heard as “the voice of madness,”¹⁰⁹ implying, again, against Heidegger, that the imposition of justice onto beinghood is not assumed but condemned by Nietzsche. Shapiro suggests we read the valuational concepts like guilt, punishment, debt, and justice in the second book of the *Genealogy* in the context of this appraisal of cosmic “justice and punishment.” There, Nietzsche explicitly relates his definition of the human being as the “valuating animal as such” to “guilt”:

The feeling of guilt, of personal obligation, had its origin, as we saw, in the oldest and most primitive personal relationship (*Personen-Verhältnis*), that between buyer and seller, creditor and debtor: it was here that one person first *measured himself* against another ... Setting prices, determining values, contriving equivalences, exchanging – these preoccupied the earliest thinking of man to so great an extent that in a certain sense they constitute thinking *as such* ... here it was that the oldest kind of astuteness developed; here, likewise, we may suppose, did human pride, the feeling of superiority

¹⁰⁸ Cited at Shapiro 366. When citing directly from Shapiro, I have used the translations he uses (this one is by Marianne Cowan: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. Chicago 1962). See KSA 4:180-181.

¹⁰⁹ Shapiro 366.

in relation to other animals, have its first beginnings. Perhaps our word “man” (*manas*) still expresses something of this feeling of self satisfaction: man designated himself as the creature that measures values, evaluates and measures, as the “valuating animal as such.”¹¹⁰

Shapiro’s point is that Nietzsche more than once suggests that the definition of the human being as the “valuating animal as such” or as the animal that orders “all things” according to “justice and punishment” has, by Nietzsche’s own standards, base origins. Thought that is shot through with valuation, in other words, is depicted as the unfortunate prisoner of valuation. Shapiro invites us to remember this when we read the words “*Mensch*” and “*Übermensch*” in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Of the former, Zarathustra says, in “On the Thousand and One Goals,”

Verily, men gave themselves all their good and evil. Verily, they did not take it, they did not find it, nor did it come to them as a voice from heaven. Only man placed values (*Werthe*) in things to preserve himself – he alone created a meaning for things, a human meaning. Therefore he calls himself “man,” which means: the esteemer (*Schätzende*).¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Cited in two parts at Shapiro 369 and 372. Here he uses the Kaufmann translation (Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*. New York: Vintage 1967; identical to the *Basic Writings* translation). See KSA 5:305-306.

¹¹¹ Cited at Shapiro 372. Walter Kaufmann’s translation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (New York: Viking 1966). See KSA 4:75.

“And if,” Shapiro concludes, “as Nietzsche suggests, we are to translate man as ‘the evaluator,’ how then ought we to understand and translate ‘*Übermensch*’? As ‘meta-evaluator,’ as ‘man beyond evaluation,’ as ‘post-man,’ or as ‘post-evaluator’?”¹¹²

This is an innovative and compelling reading of the term *Übermensch*. We might be tempted to read Ariadne as a stepping stone to the *Übermensch*¹¹³ against the rapacious self-assertion of constant valuation. The *Übermensch* would then represent post-valuative thought.

We can, however, endorse this interpretation of the meaning of the word *Übermensch* without assuming that the *Übermensch* is a real possibility in the context of Nietzsche’s thought: to the contrary, the *Übermensch* may be a tragic impossibility. For Nietzsche, it is not just the human being that is organized by the will to power. The entire organic world is governed by the will to power, and thus, in an important sense for Nietzsche, participates in valuation. “The will to power interprets ... The organic process constantly presupposes interpretations,”¹¹⁴ and all interpretation is valuative. We saw in chapter 2 how Nietzsche reads the simplest one-celled organism as governed by will to power and thus valuation;¹¹⁵ we can add, for good measure, that the same can be said about all “trees and plants,”¹¹⁶ and any and all other life forms. So when Shapiro says that Nietzsche “is not bound to valuational thinking,” but is rather “engaged in a project of tracing the limits of that thinking,”¹¹⁷ we can endorse the second part – Nietzsche is indeed interested in the limits of our thinking – but we must point out that the first part of the

¹¹² Shapiro 373.

¹¹³ As do both Gilles Deleuze (Preface to the English edition, *Nietzsche & Philosophy*, xii) and Barbara Stiegler (Stiegler, *Nietzsche et la critique de la chair* 179).

¹¹⁴ *Will to Power* §643; *Nachlass* 1885 2[48], KSA 12:139-140.

¹¹⁵ *Nachlass* 1881 11[134], KSA 9:490-491.

¹¹⁶ *Nachlass* 1887-1888 11[111], KSA 13:52-53.

¹¹⁷ Shapiro 373.

sentence implausibly suggests that Nietzsche has, on his own terms, transcended not just humanity but the organic itself.

Life cannot rid itself of its reactive element, but it cannot rid itself of its active element, either. “Life itself is *essentially* appropriation [*Aneignung*], injury, overpowering of the alien and the weaker, oppression, harshness, imposition of one’s own form, incorporation.”¹¹⁸ We have observed in depth how terms such as “appropriation” and “overpowering” are shown, on a deeper scrutiny of the Nietzsche text, to imply concession, “assimilation,” and “fear,” as well, but this does not change the fact that all life asserts itself, and all life values. As is implied by her sometimes combative tone and the fruitless imperatives she hurls at Dionysus, even Ariadne cannot be entirely passive and receptive. More importantly, the call for the *Übermensch*, as the transvaluative-as-post-valuative being, is a call for a literal miracle, a call for life beyond life.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ KSA 5:207.

¹¹⁹ A directly opposed view appears to be offered by Christine Daigle, who proposes that we see in Nietzsche an “embodied *Übermensch*” who represents a “return to the earth and to the body” (“Nietzsche’s Notion of Embodied Self: Proto-Phenomenology at Work?”). That said, Daigle’s essay apparently claims the right to ignore whole swaths of Nietzschean thought on the body, including the sorts of considerations I am relying upon when I conclude that the *Übermensch* is incompatible with embodied life as we have explored in the Nietzsche text in this dissertation. Specifically, she downplays “physiological” considerations. Daigle says she favors a phenomenological reading of Nietzsche’s body over a physiological approach, although she also says that “the physiological approach and the phenomenological approach are not mutually exclusive” (234). She says that “While there might be a good reason to focus on [the physiological] since Nietzsche himself expresses his concern as being physiological, I think too much can be made out of it” (234). What makes it hard to respond directly to Daigle in any meaningful and succinct way is that it is hard to know what exactly is covered (and thereby discounted) by the phrase “the physiological,” for her. In the very next sentence, she refers to “Nietzsche’s biologism” as a phrase apparently synonymous with “Nietzsche’s physiology,” despite the fact that the word “biologism” suggests a material, objective, and genetic (biological) foundation, whereas Nietzschean “physiology” is first and foremost founded in drives, not genes – including for Barbara Stiegler, whom Daigle goes on to reference in connection to Nietzschean “biologism.” I can only assume that the analysis I have been offering of the body as will to power counts as “physiological” for Daigle, although her relationship to the physiological is further complicated by the puzzling fact that she wants to emphasize Zarathustra’s claim that all life is will to power (“*Wo ich Lebendiges fand, da fand ich Willen zur Macht*,” KSA 4:147, cited by Daigle at 238). This confuses things further because it is clear that for Nietzsche’s life-as-embodied-will-to-power, anything like “phenomena” show up very late in the story of life, a point which does not obviously help an argument for the body as first and foremost a “body-subject” (238) serving as the site of phenomenality. Insistence upon the centrality of the will to power would appear to work against her claim that our understanding of the body should privilege phenomenology over physiology, and not for it, unless a special, unstated meaning of either “physiological” or “phenomenological” is being assumed.

The *Übermensch*’s “return to the body” appears to mean, for Daigle, something like a turn “back to the things themselves,” a return to phenomena. What exactly this means for her specifically, though, remains unclear, and the question of why this is a superhuman task for which the merely human can act only as a bridge, and not as the enactor,

Nietzsche's visions for a "higher history" appear to end up at an impasse, then, as his very own observations on the finitude of the human being place limits on the possible paths to a higher humanity. The radical sovereignty of pure activity is not a human possibility, but neither is a post-valuational cessation of willing.

This does not render everything Nietzsche has said pointless, nor is it the final word on the meaning of Ariadne – to which we will return in a moment – but it may be that Nietzsche's meditations on modernity are doomed to a certain degree of disappointment. As the philosopher of the death of God, Nietzsche seeks to expose the epoch of Christianity as an epoch of fear. Rejecting Paul's suppression of the body and revealing the body as a hierarchy of drives, governed by the will to power, Nietzschean investigations of physiology come to the conclusion that every "rapacious" act of appropriation, every manifestation of the will to power, is tainted by "fear"¹²⁰ – to the extent that Book IV's Zarathustra can call fear "humanity's inherited and originary sensation."¹²¹ Not just Christian religion, but any human religion, is born of fear¹²²; not just the slaves' social cohesion, but human social cohesion generally, is born of fear.¹²³ In short, the human itself is an epoch of fear. No body that Nietzsche can find asserts itself in pure, heedless activity. Through Nietzsche's own analysis of the will to power, the basis of fear is radically generalized. This is, ironically, a conclusion that could only be reached in a post-Christian era, when the

is left entirely unexplored. On her reading, the "embodied Übermensch" seems to be a being any one of us can choose to become at any moment.

¹²⁰ *Nachlass* 1881 11[134], KSA 9:490-491, referenced in chapter 2.

¹²¹ KSA 4:376-377.

¹²² "The ancestor is ultimately necessarily transformed into a god. Maybe the origin of the gods is precisely here – an origin, then, of *fear!*" (*Genealogy of Morals* II.19 [KSA 5:328]).

¹²³ "The necessity of the formation of the herd lies in the fearfulness [of the weak?]." I believe Montinari and Colli's brackets and question mark in the *Kritische Studienausgabe* indicate questionable legibility, although the link between fear and sociality remains regardless (*Nachlass* 1884 27[49], KSA 11:287).

Christian suppression of the body has been overthrown and the Nietzschean physiological investigation becomes possible.

These conclusions are drawn by following the “guiding thread” of Nietzsche’s physiology. If the guiding thread leads to such deflating insights, though, then how do we explain the tone of the passages related to Ariadne, who is associated with this guiding thread? Clearly, Ariadne remains some sort of ideal. *Beyond Good and Evil*, whose subtitle is *Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, opens with a condemnation of the hubris of male philosophy, and then, when Nietzsche describes his own philosophical position as the “the last disciple and initiate of the god Dionysus,” he associates himself with the female Ariadne.¹²⁴ What does Ariadne have to do with the philosophy of the future? In what way might the “philosophy of the future” be a feminine pursuit, on Nietzsche’s terms?

To be either the “disciple” or the lover of Dionysus requires an embrace of a reality that must stand as the ultimately “Unnameable,” “Concealed,”¹²⁵ and “Unknown,”¹²⁶ to refer to epithets for Dionysus from “Ariadne’s Complaint.” Philosophers who trust in reason to yield a complete picture of reality do not need to take such a stance, and can indulge in the fantasy of an illusory permanent ownership of the woman “truth.” To follow Ariadne’s thread, however, which is Nietzsche’s guiding thread, means to confront the perspectival nature of all will to power, to observe that everything that is knowable is knowable only due to the embodied human being’s ability, or “life’s” ability, to falsify it into beinghood: “*Knowledge is FALSIFICATION of the multiple and innumerable into something equal, similar, countable.* Thus, *life* is only possible

¹²⁴ Silk and Stern repeatedly point out the association of cults and rituals of Dionysus with women, such that even the phrase “initiate of the god Dionysus” might be seen as associating Nietzsche himself with the feminine (see Silk and Stern 172-174, 181).

¹²⁵ KSA 6:398, l. 10.

¹²⁶ KSA 6:400, l. 11.

thanks to such a *falsification-apparatus*.”¹²⁷ Sigridur Thorgeirsdottir is right to read Nietzsche’s attack on metaphysics as a “feminization of metaphysics”: Nietzsche unravels the “metaphysical drive to define being as the ‘one’ and the ‘identical’” by pushing philosophical inquiry toward “the body and the earth,” which turns the pursuit of the “one” and the “identical” into a confrontation with Dionysian multiplicity and chaos, with Becoming.¹²⁸ The resultant philosophical project is one that acknowledges a definitive vanishing point, beyond which its ability to know cannot venture – the horizon of Becoming. This vanishing point is denied by Zarathustra’s image for Becoming as Eternal Return, the golden ring, which is visible, comprehensible, manipulable, and even usable and wearable, for the human being. For Ariadne, on the other hand, Becoming is symbolized by the dark, dangerous, and overwhelming labyrinth.¹²⁹

In “Ariadne’s Complaint,” the danger implied in Dionysus’s menacing last words to Ariadne, “*I am your labyrinth*,” is part of what makes Ariadne a model for a philosophy of the future. Nietzsche makes abundantly clear that to follow the guiding thread means to philosophize dangerously, to uncover dangerous truths, and that the coming philosophy will not be a domesticated affair. We can read the desire for a philosophy that takes risks and rejects security into the attempt in *Beyond Good and Evil* to reorient philosophy’s erotic configuration. We have already alluded to the preface to the book, in which Nietzsche depicts philosophers as male heterosexual lovers, demanding permanent erotic possession of the woman “truth” – demanding,

¹²⁷ *Nachlass* 1885 34[252], KSA 11:506. Emphases in original.

¹²⁸ Sigridur Thorgeirsdottir, “Nietzsche’s Feminization of Metaphysics.” In *Feminist Reflections on the History of Philosophy*. Ed. L. Alanen and C. Witt. Kluwer Academic Publishers 2004, 51-68, 61-62.

¹²⁹ For Alexander Nehamas’s reading of the Eternal Return, the total visibility and comprehensibility of the golden ring might be taken to be the whole point of the ring: advocating the “effort of turning life into literature” (*Nietzsche: Life as Literature* 137), Nehamas’s Nietzsche wants us to make the whole of the universe’s Becoming into our personal story, to “become an author, to see [all unconnected, chance events] after all as parts of a unified pattern,” a pattern that relates directly to who we are (168). The image of the incomprehensible labyrinth as a symbol of Becoming, with the human being trapped inside, would seem to offer the opposite lesson, pointing to the limits of humanity’s ability to grasp Becoming.

we might say, the risk-free security of eternal possession. Robert Pippin suggests that there is a more specific target in this passage, a philosopher whom Nietzsche often speaks of as the paradigmatic example of the type “philosopher”: “he certainly would have recalled that it was Plato who first characterized philosophy as essentially a kind of love, as erotic, even divinely, insanely erotic.”¹³⁰ Nietzsche’s psychological critique of philosophers is general in its scope, but it is more specifically an engagement with the *Symposium*, in which sexual arousal at the sight of another human body is “already an instance of the desire for the eternal possession of the idea of the good.”¹³¹ Nietzsche concurs with Plato’s decision to treat philosophy as erotically motivated,¹³² but wants to suggest that this picture, produced by the philosopher Plato, says more about the erotic interests of philosophers than it does about truth. “They ... seem like young lovers who must constantly demand from each other pledges of eternal love; as opposed to more experienced lovers, who can love passionately, and not cynically, without such delusory hopes.”¹³³ Pippin points out that the extremes to which male sexual desire’s possessiveness can be taken is in fact a recurring theme in *Beyond Good and Evil*, which returns in §194.¹³⁴

In contrast to the possessiveness of philosophers, then, Ariadne, introduced in §295, represents a Nietzschean mode of thought that loves an “ultimate truth,” that of Dionysian Becoming, which can never be possessed, which “does not tolerate incorporation.”¹³⁵ This mode of thought follows a guiding thread through a labyrinth of flux, and is always at risk of getting lost, since that which it studies, the will to power as the basis of physiology, is found only in fluid,

¹³⁰ Robert Pippin, “Morality as Psychology, Psychology as Morality: Nietzsche, Eros, and Clumsy Lovers.” In *Nietzsche’s Postmoralism: Essays on Nietzsche’s Prelude to Philosophy’s Future*. Ed. Richard Schacht. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001, 79-99, 87.

¹³¹ Pippin, “Morality as Psychology, Psychology as Morality,” 88.

¹³² Pippin, “Morality as Psychology, Psychology as Morality,” 87.

¹³³ Pippin, “Morality as Psychology, Psychology as Morality,” 89.

¹³⁴ Referenced at Pippin, “Morality and Psychology, Psychology as Morality, 90-91. See KSA 5:115-116.

¹³⁵ *Nachlass* 1881, 11[162], KSA 9:504

historically indexed configurations. In the context of this juxtaposition between the past security of Platonic, Western philosophy and the future danger of Nietzschean, “Ariadnian” philosophy, woman’s preternatural exposure to “injury” in §239 aligns her more with the philosophy of the future than the male lover of §194, hyperbolically concerned with safety and security. Unlike Theseus the hero, Nietzsche and Ariadne do not hope to conquer the labyrinth in which they are situated, a labyrinth which presents itself as fate. In this sense, “love of fate” *amor fati*, requires a degree of “feminine” submission to fate, and may even necessitate an element of fear [*Furcht*], which, for Nietzsche, is the definitively feminine affect. With Ariadne, traditional notions of the concept “woman” are not challenged but are implicitly revalued, as Nietzsche’s own philosophy moves closer to the “feminine.”

In the figure of Ariadne, then, the late Nietzsche fleetingly comes to terms with what his thought has been indicating all along: fear, reactivity, and Being are not abolished with the death of God, because these elements are constitutive of the human, all too human. In Zarathustra’s formulation, humanity is to be a “bridge” to the *Übermensch*,¹³⁶ but the fact that Nietzsche understands the human being physiologically, as a set of drives that is limited to the behavior of

¹³⁶ KSA 4:16.

the organic, makes such a leap very hard to envision.¹³⁷ “Remain[ing] true to the earth”¹³⁸ and proceeding towards the *Übermensch* do not appear to be one and the same thing. Ariadne is an aspirational figure to the extent that she is willing to maintain a relationship with Dionysus, despite the fact that he is a constant reminder of the limits of human power, and despite the fact that she must always be the secondary partner in this relationship. She thus implies a subtle revalorization of the traditionally feminine traits discussed in *Beyond Good and Evil* §231-239, but she also embodies the traits of the philosopher, referred to incessantly throughout that book and the *Genealogy*, of *Wahrhaftigkeit*, *Redlichkeit*, and *Grausamkeit gegen sich* [truthfulness, honesty, and cruelty against oneself],¹³⁹ in that, following the guiding thread, she honestly faces the limits of her power head-on, where that limit is Dionysus.

¹³⁷ The text of Deleuze’s *Nietzsche & Philosophy* is replete with statements that invite us to question whether the conversion to pure active force is really possible. Deleuze tells us, for example,

- “As soon as man began thinking he introduced the bacillus of revenge into things” (21).
- “[B]ecoming-reactive is constitutive of man” (64).
- “A man who would not accuse or depreciate existence – would he still be a man, would he think like a man? Would he not already be something other than a man, almost the Overman?” (35).
- “Nietzsche presents the aim of his philosophy as the freeing of thought from nihilism and its various forms. Now, this implies a new way of thinking, *an overthrow of the principle on which thought depends* [emphasis mine]” (35).
- “In Nietzsche, consciousness is *always* consciousness of an inferior in relation to a superior to which he is subordinated or into which he is ‘incorporated’ ... It is not the master’s consciousness but the slave’s consciousness in relation to a master who is not himself conscious [emphasis mine]” (39).
- “It is *inevitable* that consciousness sees the organism from its own point of view and understands it in its own way; that is to say, *reactively* [emphases mine]” (41).

Yet the last chapter of Deleuze’s book (“The Overman: Against the Dialectic,” 147-194) narrates the conversion from reactive to active force as a more or less unproblematic future event.

This is all in some sense to be expected from Deleuze, to the extent that he routinely fails to take the status of the physiological seriously in Nietzsche. Without an in-depth analysis of the will to power as the basis of the organic, the necessity of the reactive remains ungrounded.

A similar pattern is harder to sort out in Didier Franck, who illuminatingly shows us the economy of the dynamics of the will to power at length, revealing the impossibility of pure activity, and naming this impossibility as such: “As a principle of organization, assimilation, and above all of preservation, the will to power could only be reactive in the final analysis. Principally directed toward its own preservation, *the body qua organism is then just like the Christian body but for different reasons, a reactive body* [emphasis mine]” (Franck, *Nietzsche and the Shadow of God*, 198). In this context it is hard to know what to make of Franck’s apparent optimism regarding Nietzschean philosophy’s ability to “destroy all reactive values” (300) in the turning-active of truth (298-310).

¹³⁸ KSA 4:15.

¹³⁹ The instances of these terms are too numerous to list here, but, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, see KSA 5:15, 18, 74, 103, and, especially, 162-163.

We have been exploring a train of thought by which Nietzsche's own thinking starkly delimits the possibilities opened up by the death of God, clearly delineating the extent to which modernity is an age of opportunity, for Nietzsche. It *is* an age of opportunity, for reasons we explored in chapter 1's reconstruction of Nietzsche's history of Western culture: finally, the body can come to know itself, as it liberates itself from Paul's history, which sought to stifle the body.¹⁴⁰ If the conclusions we have drawn about Zarathustra, Ariadne, and the *Übermensch* are correct, though, reasons for strong reservation about Nietzsche's most soaring rhetoric about the world to come are to be found within the Nietzsche corpus itself.

That said, I began this chapter by emphasizing the fact that the story about the future that I follow here is not the official story of the future, for Nietzsche, and it should be emphasized that the picture outlined here is not Nietzsche's final word. I referred to Ariadne as a figure who logically implies some problems for a stance embodied by Zarathustra – but Nietzsche never wholeheartedly renounces Zarathustra. I argued that Nietzsche's body of thought regarding the body, physiology, and the dynamics of the will to power do not allow *purely* active force to be regarded as natural, yet the very passage in the *Genealogy* that lays out and defines active and reactive force names active force as the more original and natural configuration of force.¹⁴¹ Finally,

¹⁴⁰ My formulation here, and the story I tell in chapter 1 of the body's coming to know itself after the death of God, admittedly let stand an ambiguity that, I think, originates in Nietzsche's own writing: to what extent is this new modern physiological self-awareness an inevitable historical result of the Christian will to truth, and to what extent is it the result of Nietzsche's own work? Robert Pippin points out something like this ambivalence with regard to nihilism and its attendant "unmasking" of "self-delusions": "The unmistakable pride with which Nietzsche, or let us say, the official Nietzsche, unmasks self-delusions, points to the hidden, low origins of the high, and so forth, is everywhere matched by what appears to be an insistence that *he* is not doing anything. He is pointing out to us what *we* have done to ourselves, what we are beginning to require ourselves to face, now" [emphases in original] (Pippin, "Nietzsche's alleged farewell," 257).

My sense is that we might be able to close the gap between these two positions by saying that Nietzsche sees himself as hastening the inevitable, rather than himself forcing a cataclysm that would not otherwise occur. That said, this cataclysm runs the risk, for reasons we explored last chapter in our discussion of the idol, particularly in Wagnerianism, of being strategically obscured ahead of time by a weak humanity that cannot face it.

¹⁴¹ KSA 5:305-307.

and perhaps most importantly, I argued against Shapiro that the *Übermensch* is impossible on Nietzsche's own terms, but it must be noted that, as late as *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche appears to unambiguously endorse the notion of the *Übermensch* (and, implicitly, to reject the notion, popular among scholars for serious reasons, that Zarathustra abandons the notion of the *Übermensch* over the course of his story).¹⁴²

All this is to acknowledge that I have, to an extent, been reading Nietzsche against Nietzsche. If we follow Nietzsche's guiding thread more faithfully than Nietzsche himself does, I argue, we find serious difficulties in Nietzsche's envisioned paths out of reactivity, Being, and fear. Nietzsche can claim to have illuminated the body, but not necessarily to the revaluative ends that may be his greatest ambition. To what extent can the merely human philosopher of the future claim to have overcome Christianity, in the context of these concessions? This is the question of the next and final chapter.

¹⁴² For Nietzsche's sense, in *Ecce Homo*, of Zarathustra's attitude toward the *Übermensch*, see KSA 6:344. For the clearest indication, I think, of Nietzsche's own continued endorsement of the idea, see KSA 6:370.

Chapter 5: Dionysus, the God After God

“Dionysus versus the Crucified”

Particularly in the last few productive years of his life, there is often a strange ambivalence in Nietzsche’s genealogical investigations of Christianity’s expiration in the death of God. On the one hand, we see the increasingly megalomaniacal insistence that *he*, Friedrich Nietzsche, is the one finally shedding light on the poisoned roots of Christian Europe, and that it is this process of shedding light – initiated by the philosopher – that dissolves the malignant power of Christianity. On the other hand, Nietzsche at times seems to tell us that it is Christianity itself that operates according to a logic that guarantees its own eventual demise. In accordance with this second train of thought, we observed in chapter 1 how Christian conscience involves an imperative toward “truthfulness” [*Wahrhaftigkeit*] that ultimately becomes the sobriety of modern scholarship, and compels the modern Western subject to “truthfully” confront the fact that Christian faith is no longer viable. Observing the uneasy relationship between these two different causal stories that Nietzsche tells regarding the reasons for the death of God, Robert Pippin chides Nietzsche for sometimes wanting to take credit for a specifically modern sobriety for which he at other times declines responsibility:

The unmistakable pride with which Nietzsche, or let us say, the official Nietzsche, unmask self-delusions, points to the hidden, low origins of the high, and so forth, is everywhere matched by what appears to be an insistence that *he* is not doing anything.

He is pointing out to us what *we* have done to ourselves, what we are beginning to require ourselves to face, now.”¹

Even in the violently self-assertive *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche’s last work before losing his sanity, he at times emphasizes the degree to which Christianity *self-destructs*, rather than emphasizing his own role as destroyer. In his memorable reimagining of Genesis, for instance, Nietzsche has God himself take the form of the serpent below the tree of knowledge, inviting the faithful to a pursuit of knowledge that will ultimately lead to his undoing as a god.²

In Nietzsche’s final dramatic sign-off, however, there is no ambiguity regarding the degree of aggression toward Christianity that has been intended by the “discipleship to Dionysus” that has been Nietzsche’s philosophical project. In the last line of *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche asks, “Have I been understood? – *Dionysus versus the Crucified*.”³ He wants us to understand Dionysus as not just a post-Christian, but as an anti-Christian, god. Exactly in what sense Dionysus is a “god” will have to be further explored over the course of this chapter, but, for now, thinking back to chapter 3, we can say that Dionysus is divine insofar as he is incomprehensible and, in a certain sense, all-powerful. This is a very provisional description of the reasons for his designation as a god, and will have to be complicated in serious ways in what follows. Whether one agrees or not with my sense of what makes Dionysus divine, however, what cannot be avoided is that Nietzsche not only explicitly refers to Dionysus as a god routinely, but even at some points emphasizes his status as a god.⁴ We can also briefly observe that this basic sense of what makes Dionysus a god does not

¹ Pippin, “Nietzsche’s alleged farewell,” 257.

² “Speaking theologically – listen well, for I rarely speak as a theologian – it was God himself who lay down as a snake at the end of his day’s work under the tree of knowledge: thus he rested from being a god” (KSA 6:351).

³ KSA 6:374. Emphasis in original.

⁴ See, for example, *Ecce Homo*’s chapter on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, §8 (KSA 6:348).

on its own set Nietzsche's sense of divinity apart from Christian ways of thinking of divinity – but the question of Christian vestiges in Nietzsche's sense of the divine will be addressed later in this chapter, as well.

As far as Nietzsche himself is concerned, of course, the fact that he regards Dionysus as an anti-Christian god is so obvious as to hardly be worth mentioning. Dionysus is the god of Becoming, whereas Christianity, Nietzsche tells us, participates in Platonism's denigration of Becoming, valorizing Being over Becoming. Dionysus is the god of the sensual, while Christian asceticism suppresses and condemns the sensual. Dionysus recalls and looks forward to pagan strength;⁵ Christianity is born of slavish weakness. The thought of Dionysus rejects metaphysics; Christianity *is* metaphysics, as the constitutive sickness of Western thought. The figure of Dionysus implies a rejection of a Christian view of reality and its replacement with a new, different view of reality, and embodies a revaluation of values, whereby Christian views of good and evil are to be dismantled.

In all these ways, Dionysus represents a new, anti-Christian view of the world. When Nietzsche speaks of Dionysus, though, it is not only in order to advance some claims about what is and is not, or to judge old values and advance new ones. Dionysus implies not just an (anti-) ontology or a new normative outlook, but a certain *praxis*. Nietzsche does not speak of belief in Dionysus or celebration of Dionysus but, repeatedly, of “discipleship” to Dionysus.⁶ To be the disciple of Dionysus is not primarily to endorse a unique set of philosophical claims, but to take a

⁵ The use of an archaic figure as the representative of a post-Christian epoch of thought is the sort of stylistic choice that might lead to an understanding of Nietzsche like that of Habermas, discussed in chapter 3, whereby the pre-modern and the post-modern are conflated and celebrated as a mythological, aesthetically driven mode of thought that opposes itself to rational modern thought. As I briefly pointed out in that chapter, however, the mature Nietzsche's “Dionysus” does not have entirely the same meaning as the Dionysus of *The Birth of Tragedy*, which is (ostensibly) more tied to the historical god of Greek religion. To put it in Habermas's terms, the pre-modern Dionysus is not the same as the post-modern Dionysus.

⁶ E.g. *Beyond Good and Evil* §295 (KSA 5:238), the last sentence of *Twilight of the Idols* prior to the extended *Zarathustra* citation (KSA 6:160), and the opening section of *Ecce Homo* (KSA 6:258).

certain philosophical approach: to “follow the guiding thread of the body.” In the last chapter, we explored Ariadne as the figurehead of this adherence to the guiding thread, as a kind of double for Nietzsche himself. Ariadne embodies not, first and foremost, a specific set of positions on the topic of Becoming, but, rather, an amorous relationship with Becoming, as the lover of Dionysus. This relationship is never a state at which she finally and conclusively arrives, but is a constant struggle, as demonstrated by the tumult and antagonism of the Ariadne-Dionysus relationship in the Nietzsche corpus. In short, to be a “disciple of Dionysus” does not mean only to propositionally assert, once and for all, that Becoming is the highest reality, but to “walk the path [*Weg*]”⁷ of Becoming, to make the turn toward Becoming into a way of life. But certain challenges to the viability of such a project may already have emerged in the divergent ways we have spoken about Dionysus to begin this chapter: if the disciple of Dionysus orients herself toward the earthly, toward the body, how can this be in the service of an incomprehensible god who never manifests himself on that earth?

If Dionysianism is a kind of practice, then it must be practicable. In my above gloss of the Christian-Dionysian opposition, complete with all the catchwords of Nietzscheanism, there is a certain difficulty that has perhaps been underappreciated in Nietzsche studies: how can Dionysus be simultaneously the god of the sensual *and* the god of Becoming? His status as the anti-Christian god comes from his association with a celebration of the sensual, but, as we have seen repeatedly over the course of this dissertation, the flux of Becoming is the radically unphenomenalizable, that which can never be made sensible.⁸ Nietzsche condemns Christianity for being in thrall to the Platonic paradigm that valorizes Being over Becoming, and also condemns its alleged hatred for

⁷ KSA 12, 1887 9[60], 364, cited above in chapter 3.

⁸ This absolute sense of the word “Becoming” is not always the one at work in Nietzsche’s writing, as we observed at the outset of chapter 3. It is, however, the sense of the word that is at issue when speaking of the Becoming symbolized by the “unnamable,” “unknowable” god Dionysus.

the body, the sensible, the sensual. Yet, over and over again, we have seen the Nietzsche text confirm that beinghood is necessary for phenomenality, that there is no “sensual” without sensual *beings*, that reification is a prerequisite for the instantiation of the world of the senses. In other words, Being, at times clearly *opposed* to the sensual, is also unambiguously aligned with it in a certain way. The ambivalence of Dionysus is thus matched by an ambivalence in that which Dionysus opposes: the paradigm of Being only holds together if it finds the sensible world that it is elsewhere set against. The tension at the heart of Dionysianism manifests itself in its imagery, as well, which seems to go in two irreconcilable directions. Dionysian philosophy must commit itself to the sensuous – to the body, to a study of the concupiscent human being, to a “psychology of the orgy,”⁹ and so on, as well as to the sensuousness of art, whose precondition is a state of animal “rapture.”¹⁰ In apparent (and potentially problematic) opposition to all this stands the fact that the price of Ariadne’s love affair with Dionysus is that she is to be permanently confined to the darkness of the Dionysian labyrinth,¹¹ that Dionysus is the “unknown” and “unnamable,”¹² and that he is the “god of darkness.”¹³ How can Ariadne, or Nietzsche, turn simultaneously toward the sensual and the absolutely non-sensible? How can such a stance cohere?

These observations constitute not only a concern about the coherence of Nietzsche’s discipleship of Dionysus, but also perhaps call into question Dionysianism’s status as a legitimately anti-Christian stance, if we think of Christianity on Nietzsche’s own terms. In chapter 1, we recounted how Nietzsche sees certain modern insights, embodied by his own philosophy, as

⁹ KSA 6:160 (this is the last section of the *Twilight of the Idols*).

¹⁰ 1888 17[9], KSA 13:529

¹¹ The last line of “Ariadne’s Lament,” discussed in chapter 4: “Sei klug, Ariadne: ... *Ich bin dein Labyrinth!*” (KSA 6:401).

¹² KSA 6:398-399.

¹³ “*Gott der Finsterniss*,” resonating with “*Fürst der Finsternis*,” Prince of Darkness (KSA 6:352) (Nietzsche uses an older spelling of *Finsternis*).

developing out of Christian intellectual imperatives. The will to truth, or “truthfulness,” is initially founded in the Christian conscience, but eventually leads to the anti-Christian recognition of Becoming as the “ultimate truth.”¹⁴ If we are impelled to the ultimate Dionysian insight by originally Christian motives, and if the god who embodies that insight is fundamentally supersensuous, non-phenomenal, belonging, we might say, to a radical *Jenseits*, then just how anti-Christian is the thinker of the death of God?¹⁵ He sets out from a starting point that is Christian insofar as it is motivated by conscience, in order to bring us to a destination that is Christian insofar as it is supersensuous. After all the cacophony and bombast of Nietzsche’s career-long attack on Christianity, is his Dionysian philosophy merely rebranded Christian metaphysics? Now, I believe that these are natural questions with which to interrogate Nietzsche, but I also believe, as will become clear, that Nietzsche has answers to these questions – and that the even the terms in which these questions are being asked will need to be revised. We will see, for instance, this provisional designation of Dionysus as “supersensuous” will need to be revised in an important way. This chapter will answer the question regarding whether Nietzsche succumbs to Christian “supersensuousness” by way of another question, which is that of the Dionysian disciple’s relationship to beings, *das Seiende*, as a whole. Does Dionysian philosophy ultimately require one to “remain true to the earth,” to the beings of the earth? And, if it does, then what does this mean for its relationship to Becoming, which exceeds the beings of the earth? Both paths would look like a fall into metaphysics, according to Nietzsche himself: the first path, because of its resignation to beinghood, and the second, because of its Christian abandonment of the sensible in favor of a “true” supersensible world. My argument will be that the name of the thinking that seeks to avoid

¹⁴ Nachlass 1881, 11[162], KSA 9:504

¹⁵ As in the introduction, my use of the word “supersensuous” comes from David Krell’s translation of Heidegger’s *das Übersinnliche* in the *Nietzsche* lectures.

both these pitfalls is “physiology,” which is to be a fundamentally post-death-of-God mode of thought.

In advancing this view of Nietzsche’s attempt to surpass metaphysics, I will also, along the way, seek to position Nietzsche’s quest for a post-metaphysical thinking among and against other well-known such attempts, at least in a cursory way.

Gods Surpassing Metaphysics

In chapter 3, the chapter about idols, we considered Nietzsche’s Dionysus in light of Jean-Luc Marion’s crossed-out ~~God~~.¹⁶ We observed that Dionysus, like Marion’s God of hyperbolic absence, is a “god without Being,” a god that surpasses and precedes beinghood. We saw that Nietzsche’s notion of the “idol,” which is a clearly important concept but one that is not explicitly developed at length, can be shown to operate in a way that is similar to Marion’s own idol: the idol acts as the focal point for the creation of a delimited, comprehensible, visible world, whose horizons are determined by what one can bear to see, “what [one] can look at.”¹⁷ The metaphysical systems of pre-death-of-God philosophy are, for both Nietzsche and Marion, idolatrous, as their highest term is a concept of Being that is founded in the comprehensible; the god “without Being,” whether Dionysus or the Christian ~~God~~, surpasses or escapes the idolatry of metaphysics, the ideology of beinghood for which beings exhaust reality. In summary, despite Marion’s claim that Nietzsche is “still idolatrous,”¹⁸ we saw certain affinities between the post-idolatrous (post-death-of-God) divinities celebrated by the two philosophers.

¹⁶ In Marion’s actual text, the strikethrough of the word “God” is cruciform, not a single line.

¹⁷ Marion, *In Excess*, 61.

¹⁸ Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, 68.

More generally, through Nietzsche and Marion we can speak of a shift in the meaning of the death of God that takes place in the transition from “modern” to “postmodern” philosophy. In Hegel and Feuerbach, the death of God leads to the possibility of a new epoch of self-knowledge, in the self-recognition of the absolute or in the discovery, in the deposed God, of “the infinity of [humanity’s] own nature.”¹⁹ Pippin narrates how, for Hegel and other idealists, aspiring to a freedom from external grounds of knowledge (such as the Christian God) in the pursuit of a self-grounding thought came to found the very notion of modernity.²⁰ To summarize this project in the Heideggerian terms in which it comes to be critiqued, thinking strives for certainty by taking itself to be the origin and anchor of beinghood, thereby internally certifying or grounding its knowledge of beings generally.²¹ This aspiration is the culminating form of metaphysics, for Heidegger.

For critics of this “modern” project whom we might very loosely classify, correspondingly, as “postmodern,” such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Marion, this apparent empowerment over and among beings comes at the price of a forgetting of what we can provisionally call a radical alterity that exceeds beings. What appears to be the modern, necessarily secular power to fully determine beings is in fact an idolatrous *takenness* by beings, at the expense of an encounter with an alterity that frequently is designated, with varying degrees of explicitness, as divine, called Dionysus (i.e. Becoming) (Nietzsche), or the Holy (i.e. Beyng) (Heidegger), or $\text{G}\ddot{\text{o}}\text{d}$ (i.e. God without Being) (Marion).²² The death of God is now promising for an entirely different reason than it was for

¹⁹ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*. Trans. George Elliot. New York: Harper & Row 1957, 3.

²⁰ See chapters 1-3 of Pippin’s *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem* (2nd edition. Malden, MA & Oxford: Blackwell 1999), 1-77.

²¹ See “Hegel’s Concept of Experience” (GA 5:115-208) and “The Onto-theological Constitution of Metaphysics” (GA 11:79).

²² American death-of-God theologian Thomas Altizer thinks we could add Jacques Derrida to this list, as he associates Derrida’s *differance* with “a rupture within God” which he thinks can be traced back to Lurianic Kabbalism. “While Derrida insists that *differance* is not theological, not even in the most negative order of negative theology, it would appear that this is so only in the perspective of a Christian identification of God as pure or immediate presence” (Thomas Altizer, “History as Apocalypse.” In *Deconstruction and Theology*. Ed Carl A. Raschke. Crossroad: New York 1982, 147-177, 148-149).

thinkers like Hegel and Feuerbach. It is the event through which the hold upon us of the conceptual “God” – the God, Marion will say, who is subjected to a certain conceptual definition, and is therefore a being – is broken, potentially freeing us up for an encounter with that which is beyond conceptuality and the conceptual founding of beings. The death of God is no longer privileged as the moment when humanity can come to a new position of power among beings, but is now celebrated, instead, as the moment when it might learn to think beyond beings. After Heidegger, this potential liberation of thought explicitly coincides with the pursuit of a thinking that surpasses metaphysics as onto-theology. Now, the rubric by which I have grouped the thinkers above must be understood as a very loose framework. What exactly divinity is, the nature of the “beyondness” of the terms that correspond to that designation, and the sense in which any of them are an “alterity” are not identical in every case. I wish to show in what follows, however, how some well-known disputes regarding the liberation of thought after the death of God bear striking structural similarities, and that these similarities can be read through the themes I have laid out above.

This postmodern project of turning toward that which is beyond beinghood is exposed to a perennial difficulty: how can that which is beyond beinghood be encountered, or thought, without being brought to presence – and thus, without getting made into a being? To put things differently, but to a similar end, if this alterity is somehow “above” beings, how can it distinguish itself from a “supreme being,” to borrow the language of Heidegger’s “Onto-theological Constitution of Metaphysics”? How can it distinguish itself from τὸ θεῖον (which is, after all, a being)? Or, to employ the language of Derrida’s *Grammatology*, which characterizes the death of God as “the end of the book and the beginning of writing,” how can it show itself not to be a “transcendental signified,” where “The formal essence of the signified is *presence*”²³? All of these questions point

²³ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Spivak. Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore 1976, 18.

to the difficulty of protecting that which is hyperbolically beyond beings from falling into beinghood. We can see this difficulty manifest itself in Heidegger's changing articulation of Being over the course of his career, as, from *Being and Time* to the 1940s, he seems increasingly anxious to protect Being from beings, moving from "the Being of Beings" to "that which withdraws"²⁴ and "the Holy."

Before turning to the ways in which such questions apply to Nietzsche's thought, we will observe a version of the dilemma at issue in a case that is apparently at some remove from Nietzsche, by looking at Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion's disagreement regarding Marion's God without Being, especially in Marion's *God Without Being* and Derrida's "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials." My intention in starting with the Derrida-Marion debate is twofold. On the one hand, I wish to align a question facing Nietzsche's thought with a problem identified by both Marion and Derrida: the problem of distinguishing the highest being [as *Seiendes*, not as *Sein*] of ontotheology from that which is said to be beyond beingness, and thus to highlight this problem as a naturally recurring one in the quest to "surpass metaphysics," which is a phrase that names a recurring aspiration in Continental philosophy from Nietzsche onwards. This dilemma manifests itself in what Derrida calls the ambiguous "logic of the *hyper*" (a phrase which will be explicated below). On the other hand, I also wish to distinguish Nietzsche's response from those of Marion and Derrida. In doing so, we will see how Nietzsche's attempt to surpass metaphysics sets itself apart from other such attempts.

Most of "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials" proceeds as a scrutiny of negative theology in

²⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Zur Ereignis)*. In *Gesamtausgabe* Volume 65. 3rd edition. Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm v. Herrmann. Vittorio Klostermann: Frankfurt am Main 2014, 346.

See my discussion of Ryan Coyne's analysis of the mirroring "self-renunciation" of Being and *Dasein* in his *Heidegger's Confessions* in chapter 2. Coyne observes that "the lexical range of terms applied to Being in the *Contributions* reflects an almost singular obsession on Heidegger's part to characterize Being as 'that which retracts' from beings, and to rethink *Dasein* in the form of a self-renunciation that mirrors this self-withholding" (195).

Pseudo-Dionysius, and, to a lesser extent, Meister Eckhart (note that the name “Pseudo-Dionysius” has nothing to do with Nietzsche’s god Dionysus). Extensive footnotes make clear, however, that Derrida associates Pseudo-Dionysius and Marion intimately, and that he is thinking of Marion, too, as a negative theologian. Derrida claims that, despite ostensibly addressing itself to a God who escapes conceptuality, who is radically above this world of presence, negative theology nevertheless operates by offering “the promise... of a presence.” The theologian’s vision of the ὑπερουσίος,²⁵ of the hyper-essential or the beyond-essential,²⁶ is “the vision of a dark light, no doubt an intuition of ‘more than luminous [hyperphoton] darkness,’ but still it is the immediacy of a presence.”²⁷ Marion takes ὑπερουσίος to mean something like “beyond Being” or even “without Being,” but prayer as a practice cannot maintain a generic identity – or denominational distinctiveness – without a positive, repeatable, and repeated structure. But such structuring must involve positive predication of God, Derrida argues, and this fact ultimately thwarts the status of that which is addressed as “beyond Being.”²⁸ Prayer must be understood to accomplish something. To its positive structure, there corresponds a positive intention, namely, “union with God.”²⁹ As Mary-Jane Rubenstein puts it, “while Derrida admits that the *via negativa* is a dark and unsettling path, he maintains it is nevertheless a *path* (down the hierarchy and then back up), ‘leading to union with God’.”³⁰ This structural and practical observation about the believer’s address to God

²⁵ This term is invoked in *On Divine Names*, for the first time, I believe, at 588A (*De Divinis Nominibus*. In *Corpus Dionysiacum*. Ed. Beate Regina Suchla. De Gruyter: Berlin 1990, 108).

²⁶ Arthur Bradley points out the extent to which the debate between Marion and Derrida regarding Pseudo-Dionysius is a debate over translation: does the ὑπερ- in ὑπερουσίος yield “hyperessentiality,” hyper-being, on the one hand, or “beyond Being,” which could imply “without Being”? (Arthur Bradley, “God *sans* Being: Derrida, Marion, and a ‘Paradoxical Writing of the Word *Without*’.” In *Literature & Theology*, Vol. 14, No. 3, September 2000, 299-312, especially 304-306).

²⁷ Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” 79.

²⁸ Ibid 131.

²⁹ This is Derrida’s phrase at 79, but he cites Pseudo-Dionysius using explicit language of union at 80 and 81.

³⁰ Mary-Jane Rubenstein, “Dionysius, Derrida, and the Critique of Ontotheology.” In *Modern Theology* 24:4 October 2008, 725-741, 732.

reflects a theological difficulty for both Pseudo-Dionysius and Marion, Derrida asserts: God is supposed to be simultaneously hyperbolically *beyond* us and, at the same time, *approachable* by us via the right upward “path,” simultaneously utterly surpassing the possibility of any “union” with human beings and yet promising union through prayer.³¹ If the ladder to God can in fact be scaled, then it seems impossible to claim that God’s distance above us is that of an unbreachable, hyperbolic absence, such as is implied in phrases like “*Dieu sans L’etre*” or ὑπερουσίος. But if God is not “without Being” but merely in the highest stratosphere of beinghood as Supreme Being, then he appears not to have escaped his status as the metaphysical lynchpin, the source of beings, in which case he is a being himself, in an onto-theological system. Thomas A. Carlson sums up Derrida’s position by saying that “Derrida suspects that Dionysian theology, attempting to speak the name of God as beyond all names, or attempting to think the God beyond all thought, would in fact remain faithful to an ‘ontotheological’ economy that seeks to speak and think truly of God and his Being.”³²

The particular analogy that Derrida finds in the history of philosophy, as he seeks to show negative theology’s inclusion in metaphysics, is of interest when thinking about Nietzsche. Referring to the fact that Pseudo-Dionysius (like Marion in *God Without Being*, and against Aquinas) places “the Good” above “Being” in the hierarchy of divine names,³³ Derrida claims that this relative ordering has an exact parallel in the heartland of metaphysics, the Cave Allegory of

³¹ These concerns are directed at Marion directly in footnotes at 135-136; Derrida directs them at Pseudo-Dionysius in the body text at 80-81.

³² Thomas A. Carlson, “Postmetaphysical theology.” In *Postmodern Theology*. Ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2003, 58-75, 70.

³³ Marion discusses Aquinas’s explicit position against Pseudo-Dionysius in this regard in *God Without Being* (72-80), taking the latter’s side and portraying it as the establishmentarian position in Christianity: “When Saint Thomas postulates that ‘the good does not add anything to being [the *ens*] either really or conceptually, *nec re nec ratione*’ ... [he] states a thesis that is directly opposed to the anteriority, more traditionally accepted in Christian theology, of the good over the *ens*” (Marion, *God Without Being*, 74).

Plato's *Republic*. Derrida reminds us that the sun, as the "idea of the good (*idea tou agathou*)[,] has its place beyond Being or essence ... one may say that it transcends presence or essence, *epekeina tes ousias* [beyond being/essence]."³⁴ Yet, in *both* the Cave Allegory *and* in the hierarchy topped by the utterly distant God beyond Being,

the entire system coheres because the "logic ... of the *hyper* [ὑπερ-]... maintains a sufficiently homogeneous, homologous, or analogous relationship between Being and (what is) beyond Being, in order that what exceeds the border may be compared to Being ... most of all, in order that what is or is known may *owe* its being and its being-known to this Good."³⁵

In other words, the notion of the divinity surpassing metaphysics, surpassing the order of beings, coheres at all *precisely and only because it can be read into the order of beings*, thus suffering itself to be impressed back into the metaphysical regime that it had been celebrated for escaping. What is even worse is that this exact dynamic had already been at work in a text typically regarded as the backbone of the Western metaphysical tradition from which the thought of the God without Being is supposed to break free, namely, Plato's *Republic*. Derrida's reading of negative theology (and, implicitly, Marion's post-death-of-God *Geð*) bears striking formal parallels to Heidegger's employment of the Cave Allegory against Nietzsche. Nietzsche, Heidegger claims, takes himself to have exceeded metaphysics by placing valuation above and apart from Being as beings [*das Seiende*]. Valuation, regulating the coming-into-being of beings out of chaos, turns out, however,

³⁴ Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," 101.

³⁵ Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," 102.

to be a rebranded version of the Platonic Good [ἀγαθόν], acting as the beinghood [*Seiendheit*] of beings³⁶ (note that Heidegger, in his analysis of Nietzsche, also, like Derrida does in his emphasis on the prefix ὑπερ-, relies heavily on metaphors of vertical hierarchy). In both cases, the apparent breakout from metaphysical thinking is criticized for an alleged disguised - but fundamental – dependence on the oldest metaphysical structures.

Before considering Marion’s response to Derrida, we should briefly identify how the difficulty named in Derrida’s phrase “logic of the *hyper*” relates to the internal conflict we noted in Nietzsche’s figure of Dionysus. Dionysus is to be “beyond Being” – and therefore (by Nietzsche’s own reasoning) beyond sensibility – as the god of Becoming, but he also risks getting pulled into beinghood in his role as the god of the sensual. Beinghood and the flux that absolutely escapes beinghood must be conflated, it seems, for what Nietzsche means by “Dionysus” to cohere. In both Nietzsche’s case and with Marion as represented by Derrida, radical “beyondness” appears to be at odds with the accessibility that makes possible a “path” to some sort of engagement with (or “discipleship” to) “(what is) beyond.” This accessibility threatens, in the case of negative theology and in the case of Nietzsche’s Dionysus, to make “(what is) beyond Being” “homologous” to Being, submitting that which is beyond Being to Being itself. If this charge is not met, the hyperousiological vision on offer will not be able to substantively distinguish itself from (even Platonic) ontotheological metaphysics in the way it wishes.

Marion does have a response to Derrida’s complaint, however. He responds that Derrida’s notion of “metaphysics of presence” is both ill-defined and over-applied, for reasons that stem from his assumptions regarding the potential modes of naming. Derrida considers only kataphasis (affirmative predication) and apophasis (negative predication) as modes of naming God. He argues

³⁶ See the chapters “Being as A Priori” and “Being as *ιδέα*, as ἀγαθόν, as Condition” in *European Nihilism* (GA 6.2:190-203).

that negative theology necessarily falls back on kataphasis in a covert way, because it must positively determine God in order even to recognize itself – for example, to distinguish “Dionysius’ *Christian* prayer from all other prayer.”³⁷ It is the metaphysician, Marion responds, who is confined to “the two figures of metaphysical predication,”³⁸ which is to say the “lexicon of the ‘metaphysics of presence’”³⁹ that knows only kataphasis and apophasis as modes of naming – and it is thus the metaphysician who “is obsessed with reducing the Name to presence.”⁴⁰ But for theology, as opposed to metaphysics, there is a “third way,” in addition to kataphasis and apophasis, which Marion calls “denomination,” and which “means exactly to overcome” the exhaustive domination of kataphasis and apophasis as ways of naming God.⁴¹ It “attributes a name to a possible God” but “does not name God properly or essentially.”⁴² Denomination is catalyzed by a presence, but it is the presence referred to in Marion’s phrase “saturated phenomenon,” which “exceeds what the concept can receive, expose, and comprehend,”⁴³ and which therefore evades any “metaphysics of presence.” Denomination simultaneously names and undoes the name, acknowledging that, in the saturated phenomenon, “What is given disqualifies every concept.”⁴⁴ Marion does not cite Derrida’s exact phrasing in the following way, but we might say that the “path” implied in the “logic of the *hyper*” is able to remain a “path” in a way, while still respecting the beyondness of “(what is) beyond Being.” This provides a way forward for a post-death-of-God ~~God~~ who would not be confined to metaphysical thought.

Nietzsche’s Dionysianism could not be straightforwardly mapped onto either of the

³⁷ Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” 111.

³⁸ Marion, *In Excess*, 149.

³⁹ Marion, *In Excess*, 153.

⁴⁰ Marion, *In Excess*, 158.

⁴¹ Marion, *In Excess*, 138.

⁴² Marion, *In Excess*, 143.

⁴³ Marion, *In Excess*, 159.

⁴⁴ Marion, *In Excess*, 159.

competing “post-metaphysical” visions at play in this dispute, but can be placed into dialogue with both of them. On the one hand, as we will see, Nietzsche can be loosely aligned with Marion in seeking to evade metaphysics by insisting upon a mode of naming that is not limited to straightforwardly positive or negative predication. But this mode of naming is not directed at a “God of distance” but at all beings, corresponding to a view of beings as abyssal islands in the “sea of Becoming” (the context for this reference will be given below). Nietzsche’s notion of a non-presence not above but within presence (again, this formulation will be explained in what follows) might be said to distantly echo Derrida when the latter distinguishes deconstruction from negative theology by insisting upon the difference between *differance*, “‘before’ the concept,” and a hyperessential God, “above” the concept and above Being.^{45,46} Whereas for Marion the word “presence” needed to be given deeper consideration in order to consider what it means to think beyond metaphysics, for Nietzsche, as we will see, the word *Schein* (appearance or semblance) will need to be thought through carefully. Nietzsche will respond to the challenge of thinking post-metaphysically in his own way, but I wish to point out, in summary, that the challenge itself can be read according to terms that emerge a century later, in Marion’s dispute with Derrida: one might be tempted to say that Nietzsche’s Dionysus appears related to the realm of beinghood according to something like the “logic of the *hyper*,” ostensibly beyond beings in a total way, but, paradoxically, also accessible to them via a “path,” to use Nietzsche’s word – a path that certain individuals, like Nietzsche and Ariadne, are better at traversing than others. How this path might remain viable, coherent, and practicable despite Derrida’s concerns about this apparently vexed “logic” will have to be demonstrated below.

⁴⁵ Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” 78-79.

⁴⁶ In this context, Derrida quotes Meister Eckhart as a representative of “the” negative theological position: “God works above Being [Got wücket über wesene]” (Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” 78).

The insertion of Nietzsche in this way into the discussion of negative theology and the surpassing of metaphysics' regime of beinghood has some critical precedent: Heidegger accuses Nietzsche of being a negative theologian at two different points during the *Nietzsche* lectures. From a certain angle, the ultimate conclusion drawn by Heidegger about Nietzsche is not totally dissimilar from that drawn by Derrida about Marion, indicating a pattern in 20th-century reproaches toward earlier attempts to overcome metaphysics. Heidegger focuses on the word "chaos," a word Nietzsche sometimes uses for Becoming⁴⁷:

In Nietzsche's usage, the word "chaos" names a protective representation according to which nothing can be stated about beings [*vom Seienden*] as a whole. The whole of the world thus becomes the fundamentally unapproachable and unsayable – ἄρρητον [inexpressible]. What Nietzsche is here practicing with reference to the whole of the world is a kind of "negative theology," which seeks to conceive the Absolute as purely as possible by holding it clear of any "relative" determinations – that is, from any determinations that are made in reference to the human being. But Nietzsche's determination of the whole of the world is a negative theology without the Christian God.⁴⁸

Heidegger repeatedly claims, however, that "chaos" is not absolutely formless flux for Nietzsche.⁴⁹ The failure of Nietzsche's attempts to "dehumanize" chaos (Dionysus), to keep it free from "human" determinations, is betrayed by its ultimate "incorporation" in the beautifying thought of

⁴⁷ See the beginning of chapter 3 above regarding "chaos" and "Becoming."

⁴⁸ GA 6.1:315.

⁴⁹ See, for example, the chapter "Summary Representation of the Thought: Beings as a Whole as Life, as Force; the World as Chaos," in the second lecture course, *The Eternal Return of the Same* (GA 6.1:302-318).

the eternal return.⁵⁰ In this way the “unsayable” is revealed as sayable by, determined by, and accessible for the *Leib*.⁵¹ The god after God who was supposed to be held apart from the pervasive comprehension of metaphysics is ultimately given over to metaphysics and its regime of beinghood. The metaphor of vertical distance that Derrida uses in his engagement with Marion allows us to provisionally translate Heidegger’s take on “chaos” and the eternal return in the following way: Dionysus gets pulled down into beinghood.

The potential difficulty, though, is not merely analogous in the cases of Marion and Nietzsche, but is more serious in Nietzsche, in the following way. It would be overly reductive to say that a relationship with the unmitigated flux of Becoming is all that is ultimately desired or pursued along the path of Dionysian philosophy. One name for Dionysian philosophy, which “follows the guiding thread of the body,” studying the will to power, is “physiology,” and Nietzschean physiology certainly wants to pursue knowledge of the body’s behavior within the world of beings. Discipleship to the post-Christian god will not just *include* the pursuit of knowledge about the sensuous body, acting in the world of sensuous beings. As the importance of Ariadne’s thread suggests,⁵² knowledge – of that body and of the human world it perpetually creates – will be central to Dionysian philosophy. The “path” that constitutes discipleship, the path through the sensuous world of *Schein* engaged by the body, will not be just a causeway on the way to Dionysian flux, but will matter for its own sake. Discipleship to Dionysus is not a matter of simply learning to watch the world wash away in the Dionysian encounter; it is a path for “bold

⁵⁰ See GA 6.1:294, referenced above, regarding the incorporation of the eternal return.

⁵¹ Heidegger again defines Nietzsche as a negative theologian later in the *Nietzsche* lectures at GA 6.2:314.

⁵² See chapter 4, where I discussed how Ariadne’s thread [*Faden*] is in fact the “guiding thread” [*Leitfaden*] of the body.

searchers, researchers” who “embark with cunning sails on terrible seas,”⁵³ who “love knowledge,” and who see the death of God as an opportunity for a new epoch of knowledge of beings:

Indeed, we philosophers and “free spirits” feel, when we hear the news that ‘the old God is dead,’ as if a new dawn shone on us ... our 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.”⁵⁴

This call to the pursuit of knowledge means that, in Nietzsche’s case, it is not just an unavoidable fact that the path to that which lies beyond the order of Being must go through the world of beings. Rather, the attachment to the sensible world of beings is actively, normatively endorsed, as in the command “Remain true to the earth.”⁵⁵ Nietzsche’s stance of commitment to an extra-ontological alterity is in a sense more strained than those of the other, later postmodern thinkers mentioned above, because his pursuit of the beyond-beings goes hand in hand with a positive call to thoroughly and fearlessly engage in the phenomenal world of beings, in some sense for its own sake.

In a way, then, rather than belonging fully and unambiguously to what we above called the postmodern paradigm regarding the death of God, Nietzsche uncomfortably straddles the “modern” and the “postmodern” paradigms, dedicated both to the newly liberated pursuit of the

⁵³ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, KSA 4:202.

⁵⁴ The 1887 addition to *Gay Science*, KSA 3:574.

Maurice Blanchot associates the image of the sea in Nietzsche with “positive” nihilism, with the notion that now “All is permitted” – in particular, that all knowledge is permitted (Maurice Blanchot, “The Limits of Experience: Nihilism.” In *The New Nietzsche*. Ed. David B. Allison. MIT Press: Cambridge, MA 1985, 121-127, 122) (see also *Gay Science* §124, KSA 3:480, discussed below).

⁵⁵ KSA 4:15.

knowledge of beings, and, at the same time, to the pursuit of the beyond-beings, which is to say, to the flux of Becoming. In this same balancing act, he places himself between two dangerous poles, both of which threaten to undermine his stated philosophical intentions in different ways. If he moves too far in one direction, he commits to a world of beings that are instantiated precisely in and by a departure from Becoming. In the other direction stands his apparently suprasensuous god, Dionysus, whose very suprasensuality could be seen, by Nietzsche's own standards, as dangerously Christian.

Twilight of the Idols: The Abyss in the "Sensual"

As we observed at the outset, Dionysian philosophy is to orient itself toward both the phenomenal and to supra-phenomenal "flux." We pointed out that the figure of Dionysus is explicitly used to point in both directions. How can this double meaning of Dionysus be understood as something other than mere confusion? The difficulty that this poses for Nietzsche's thought – and for the scholarly interpretation of Nietzsche – must be taken seriously, but it would overly pessimistic to rashly conclude that this paradoxical aspect of Nietzsche's rhetoric is simply an unintentional self-undermining. Especially in 1888, Nietzsche's discussions of Dionysus or "the Dionysian" sometimes offer a combination of phrases that point in one direction and then in the other in such short order that it would be implausible to conclude that the author is not aware of the apparent contradiction. Furthermore, this sometimes occurs in passages that, given their placement or their subject matter, are likely to have been written fairly carefully. Two such passages appear in *Twilight of the Idols*. I am thinking of the last paragraph and a half of the book ("What I owe the ancients," §4-5), excluding the final quoted passage from *Zarathustra*, and the

chapter “‘Reason’ in Philosophy,” which offers perhaps Nietzsche’s most sustained condemnation of Western philosophy hitherto.

As Dionysus is introduced in §4, he clearly appears as a symbol of the sensual and the sexual. “*Goethe did not understand the Greeks,*”⁵⁶ Nietzsche asserts, and his correction to Goethe centers around his explanation of the true meaning of Dionysus. Dionysus, he begins, is “the *sexual* symbol” among the Greek gods, and therefore “the most venerable.”⁵⁷ In Dionysus, “*pain* is pronounced holy,” above all the “pain of the woman giving birth.”⁵⁸ This Dionysian mindset, which is called the “psychology of the orgiastic” and is clearly rooted in the sensual human engagement with the world, is contrasted with the “resentment” of otherworldly Christianity.⁵⁹ Yet among such expressions we also find affirmations of the Dionysian as the symbol of “all Becoming,”⁶⁰ and of “joy in annihilation.”⁶¹ Dionysus appears as both the symbol of the sensual and as the outer limit of the sensual, as both the champion of the affirmation of the world of beings and as the annihilator of the world of beings. In chapter 3, we saw an association between suffering and Becoming: the task of “standing in the torrent” of Dionysian flux is painful. Here, in the “holy” pain of the last paragraphs of *Twilight*, we can see the suffering body functions as an overdetermined hinge between the sensible and Becoming. The Dionysian pain of childbirth is linked to both the sensuality of sexuality and to Becoming.⁶² In the immediate context, the primary meaning of *Werden*, which is coupled with the verb *Wachsen*, to grow, is nothing as grandiose as pre-phenomenal absolute flux, but is something closer to the Greek γίγνομαι, whose meanings

⁵⁶ KSA 6:159.

⁵⁷ KSA 6:159.

⁵⁸ KSA 6:159.

⁵⁹ KSA 6:160.

⁶⁰ KSA 6:159.

⁶¹ KSA 6:160.

⁶² KSA 6:159.

include to be born and to become.⁶³ By the end of the passage, however, the scope of the word has been dramatically broadened, as Nietzsche speaks of “the eternal joy in Becoming”⁶⁴ and links it to the above-mentioned “joy in annihilation.” The passage thus intimates some kind of communion between the sensible world and the eternal flux of Becoming, a communion that seems to be initiated by suffering.

The pain of the mother is just one case of the positive association, in the Nietzsche text, between the body – especially the suffering body – and Becoming.⁶⁵ The opening section of “‘Reason’ in Philosophy” couples the two terms negatively by associating philosophy’s rejection of Becoming with its rejection of the body. Nietzsche accuses philosophers of a “hatred even for the representation of Becoming.”⁶⁶ “All things that the philosophers have handled for centuries,” he says, “have been conceptual mummies.”⁶⁷ The conceptual mummification that has been practiced by philosophy opposes itself to both the body, as the seat of the senses, and Becoming. These terms (*Leib, Sinne, Werden*) are clearly linked as the constellation of terms whose positive valuation ground Nietzsche’s own outlook, which he advances against that of “philosophy.” Philosophy wants to “break free from the deception of the senses, from Becoming,” and says, as a clear continuation of this thought, “away, above all, with the *body*, with that pitiable *idée fixe* of the senses!”⁶⁸ Certainly, there is a way to read this passage in a way that does not require Nietzsche’s association of the body, the senses, and Becoming to be particularly paradoxical: Becoming can be read in the rather colloquial sense referenced above, not as absolute flux but as

⁶³ Nietzsche’s “*Werde, der du bist* [Become who you are]” is from Pindar’s Γένοι' οἷός ἐσσί (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Book IV, KSA 4:297). See also *Gay Science* §270, KSA 3:519, and *Nachlass* 1876 19[40], KSA 8:340.

⁶⁴ KSA 6:160.

⁶⁵ In this context, it is worth recalling with Barbara Stiegler (see chapter 3) that the last man is no longer capable of suffering.

⁶⁶ KSA 6:74.

⁶⁷ KSA 6:74.

⁶⁸ KSA 6:75.

mere movement and temporal fluidity, opposed to the eternity of the ideal and super-sensible. In the closing sentence of the chapter, however, still speaking in the same terms that opened the chapter, Nietzsche invokes Dionysus as the god of “everything questionable and horrible,”⁶⁹ a phrase which seems to imply the more absolute sense of Dionysian Becoming that we have seen elsewhere. This reference to Dionysus suggests that, even though we can understand the word “Becoming” at the beginning of the passage as referring, on one level, to a more quotidian sense of the word (as in §4), it would be dubious to utterly dissociate the “Becoming” spoken of there with the more radical notion of Becoming (sometimes called “chaos”) commonly associated by the Nietzsche text with Dionysus. Here, then, similarly to the final passage of *Twilight*, we see the body serve as a kind of border region apparently linking the sensible and pre-sensible Becoming. This status granted to the body appears to be what justifies Nietzsche’s apparently contradictory association of Dionysus with both the sensual and with flux. But what would allow the body to play this role?

Throughout this dissertation, we have repeatedly observed passages that show that Nietzsche believes humanity is constitutively unable to incorporate unmediated Becoming – that flux must be impressed and “falsified” into beinghood as a precondition of human experience. At the same time, however, we should be careful not to force Nietzsche into a covertly Kantian position whereby Becoming-in-itself and phenomenal beings turn out to form the two sides of a new metaphysical bifurcation of reality. In “‘Reason’ in Philosophy,” Nietzsche claims that “To split the world into a ‘true’ world and an ‘apparent’ world, whether in the manner of Christianity or in the manner of Kant (an *insidious* Christian in the end) is only a suggestion of *décadence* - a

⁶⁹ KSA 6:79.

symptom of *declining* life.”⁷⁰ This statement alone does not guarantee that Nietzsche does not unintentionally stumble into a similar position, but it would be uncharitable not to examine the surrounding text to see what might justify his apparent belief that he does not do so.

In the *Twilight* chapter under discussion, Nietzsche’s rejection of a Kantian picture of a split reality is advanced by endorsing one half of that split reality while jettisoning the other. Specifically, the apparent [*scheinbare*] world is retained, while the “true” world is rejected.⁷¹ Here the apparent world is explicitly identified as the world of the senses. *Die Sinne*, the senses, are positively associated with *Schein*, which can mean appearance, shining, or (deceptive) semblance. Yet, upon closer inspection, it turns out to be less than straightforward to put our finger on exactly what Nietzsche means by the sensible, or apparent, world.

The strangeness of Nietzsche’s meaning when he refers to the *scheinbare* and *sinnliche Welt* is made apparent in Nietzsche’s brief ode to Heraclitus in §2. Nietzsche tells us that “Insofar as the senses reveal Becoming [*Werden*], passing away [*Vergehn*], change [*Wechsel*], they do not lie. In this sense, Heraclitus is eternally proven right: that Being is an empty fiction. The ‘apparent’ world is the only one: the ‘true’ world is only a lie added on after the fact [*hinzugelogen*].”⁷² Nietzsche appears to contradict what we have often seen him say in previous chapters, namely, that anything can only ever become “apparent” when life as will to power “stamps Becoming with the character of Being.” Here, the two terms (“apparent” and “Being”) are opposed, as “the apparent” is affirmed as real, whereas Being is an “empty fiction.” Nietzsche goes on to say that it is “reason” – in quotation marks here as in the title of the chapter – that falsifies the apparent world by impressing “duration and unity” onto beings.⁷³ Thus, the veracity or authenticity of the

⁷⁰ KSA 6:79.

⁷¹ KSA 6:75.

⁷² KSA 6:75.

⁷³ KSA 6:75.

pre-rationally “apparent” appears to be juxtaposed to the mendacity of the durable, discrete beings revealed by reason.

Our initial response to this way of putting things may be confusion, because Nietzsche routinely makes clear, in ways we have retraced in previous chapters, that there can be no experience of the sensual world without the imposition of “duration” and “unity,” because there can be no sensible world without beings. Rather than reconstruct a summary of why that is, we can briefly refer once again to Manuel Dries’s astute coinage “staticism,” which is able to define the “human, all too human” in a single word. “Nietzsche holds a kind of error theory about staticism,” says Dries.⁷⁴ The human being can only perceive that which has beinghood, and beinghood requires the imposition of a static state, at least to some degree. The apparent or sensible world primordially necessitates duration and unity, contradicting the notion apparently advanced in §2, which is that something called “the sensible” could precede duration and unity. Also speaking against §2’s apparent stance is the *Will to Power* note §617, where, directly after the oft-cited line about “stamping Becoming with the character of Being,” Nietzsche speaks of a “twofold falsification, of the senses and of the mind, in order to sustain a world of beings, of perdurance, of equivalence.”⁷⁵ Here, too, Nietzsche seems to go against *Twilight*’s “Reason” §2 by saying that the senses do in fact lie, and that they do so in part by allowing beings to appear in “duration.”

Passages like *Will to Power* §617 pose problems for phenomenological readings of Nietzsche which could, for a moment, seem to offer an easy explanation of a statement such as “The ‘apparent’ world is the only one.” One such reading is offered by Rudolf Boehm, who argues in his “Husserl and Nietzsche” that, in *Twilight*’s advancement of the apparent world over the true

⁷⁴ Manuel Dries, “Nietzsche’s Critique of Staticism,” 4.

⁷⁵ *Will to Power* §617, *Nachlass* 1886-1887 7[54], KSA 12:312.

world, “truth and appearance – and incidentally appearance and phenomenon (*Schein und Erscheinung*) – cease to stand against each other and instead merge into each other,” as, he says, they do in Husserl.⁷⁶ To reference just one additional passage that we have already cited that immediately strains this interpretation, we can recall that Nietzsche claims that the body can never incorporate the “ultimate truth” of Becoming, and, we can add, can therefore never bring it to appearance, refuting Boehm’s position.⁷⁷ Nietzsche does not simply reduce reality to what does appear or to what can appear. Speaking directly of Nietzsche’s relationship to Husserlian phenomenology, Husserl scholar Didier Franck points out that, from Nietzsche’s point of view, “phenomenology ... rests on a falsification.”⁷⁸ “Constituting consciousness” relies on the possibility of identical cases. Nietzsche agrees that “To become-conscious of lived experiences means to constitute them as identical cases,”⁷⁹ but says in *The Gay Science* that the notion “that there are enduring things, that there are identical things” is a fundamental human error.⁸⁰ In this way, Nietzsche asserts the “constitutive falsification of phenomena.”⁸¹ He does not allow, then, for an absolute identity between phenomena and “ultimate truth.”

What, then, is the status of the “apparent [*scheinbare*] world” that Nietzsche calls “the only one”? How can it be that, in “Reason” §2, the “senses ... do not lie,” if everything that has been made sensible is a lie? Nietzsche appears to have backed himself into an aporetic stance, and perhaps without realizing he has done so. In order to understand Nietzsche’s stance as something more than a thoughtless self-contradiction, I propose that we follow Nietzsche’s stated reasons, in

⁷⁶ Boehm’s essay was originally published in French in 1962 but appeared more recently in *Nietzsche and Phenomenology: Power, Life, Subjectivity*. Ed. Élodie Boulblil and Christine Daigle. Indiana University Press: Bloomington 2013, 13-27, 16.

⁷⁷ Nachlass 1881, 11[162], KSA 9:504.

⁷⁸ Franck, *Nietzsche and the Shadow of God*, 284.

⁷⁹ Franck, *Nietzsche and the Shadow of God*, 284.

⁸⁰ KSA 3:469.

⁸¹ Franck, *Nietzsche and the Shadow of God*, 285.

§2 and beyond, for celebrating Heraclitus as the sole exception to the malaise of Western philosophical history. Heraclitus is the champion of the *scheinbare* world. Once we have retraced Nietzsche's thoughts on Heraclitus, we will see that, for Nietzsche, a celebration of the *scheinbare* world is not the same thing as the assertion that only that only the phenomenal is real. This exploration of Nietzsche's celebration of Heraclitus will ultimately be in the service of an understanding of Dionysus's dual status as the god of both sensuality and pre-phenomenal flux.

Having delivered his manifesto against the philosophical tradition's hatred of Becoming in §1, Nietzsche begins §2 by saying, "With the highest reverence, I name *Heraclitus* as an exception."⁸² Heraclitus is wrong to say that the senses lie, but is right to celebrate the sensible world and to reject the existence of the true world. Heraclitus is the philosopher of Becoming *par excellence* for Nietzsche, who describes himself as a Heraclitian philosopher:

Philosophy, in the only way that I will still allow it to hold any validity, as the most general form of history [*Historie*], as the attempt to somehow describe Heraclitian Becoming, and to abbreviate it in signs (to *translate* it, so to speak, into a kind of semblance of Being, to mummify it).⁸³

It is important to note that this vision for a philosophy of the future does not propose a rejection of Being at the hands of Becoming, but a recognition of the priority of Becoming. This priority is already present in Nietzsche's early depiction of Heraclitus in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*:

⁸² KSA 6:75.

⁸³ *Nachlass* 1885 36[27], KSA 11:562

Louder than Anaximander, Heraclitus shouted out, “I see nothing but Becoming. Do not allow yourselves to be deceived! It is due to your shortsightedness, and not to the essence of things, if anywhere you believe yourselves to see solid land in the sea of Becoming and Passing-Away. You use names for things as if they had fixed duration [*starre Dauer*] - but even the river into which you step for the second time is not the same as the one you stepped in the first time.”⁸⁴

This stance at first appears to be as extreme a rejection of beinghood as it could possibly be. There is no such thing as a being, Heraclitus seems to say: nothing has fixed duration. In a sense, this is right, but it is not sufficient to differentiate the stance of Heraclitus from that of Anaximander, who also sees Becoming as the “ultimate truth.” Nietzsche translates Heraclitus’s single known fragment something like this:

Whence things have their inception, there must they also perish, according to necessity, for they must do penance and be judged for their injustices, according to the ordering of time.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ KSA 1:823.

⁸⁵ KSA 1:818.

The subtleties of Nietzsche’s translation decisions do not much concern me now, but, since Heidegger sees great historical importance in those decisions and thereby shines a bright spotlight on them, I will print Nietzsche’s original German translation, as well as a standard English rendering of the original and the original itself, here.

Nietzsche’s German translation at KSA 1:818 is: “*Woher die Dinge ihre Entstehung haben, dahin müssen sie auch zu Grunde gehen, nach der Nothwendigkeit; den sie müssen Buße zahlen und für ihre Ungerechtigkeiten gerichtet werden, gemäß der Ordnung der Zeit.*”

English translation from the Greek by Daniel W. Graham: “From what things existing objects come to be, into them too does their destruction take place, according to what must be: for they give recompense and pay restitution to each other from their injustice according to the ordering of time.” From: *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy: The Complete Texts and Selected Testimonies of the Major Presocratics*. Ed. Daniel W. Graham. Cambridge University

The Anaximander that Nietzsche imagines based on this fragment sees Becoming ruling over all beings, no less than Heraclitus:

See how your world wilts; the sea diminishes and dries out, the seashell in the mountains shows you all just how dried out it already is; fire destroys your world even now, and ultimately it will go up in dust and smoke. But always such a world of transience [*Vergänglichkeit*] will build itself anew: who could deliver you from the curse of Becoming [*vom Fluche des Werdens*]?⁸⁶

The difference between Anaximander and Heraclitus lies not in the question of who affirms Becoming (both do) but in their attitude toward beinghood as it as it emerges from Becoming. For Anaximander, the emergence itself is “injustice [*Ungerechtigkeiten* / ἀδικία].” For Heraclitus, on the other hand, “the eternally living fire plays, builds up and destroys, in innocence.”⁸⁷ Its translation into more stable elements, such as water and earth, is just as innocent as its inevitable return to fire.⁸⁸ The creation of durable beings is not unjust, but innocent. The innocence, on Heraclitus’s alleged account, of the interplay between Being and Becoming is a topic we will bracket and return to momentarily. This interplay, however, in addition to being innocent, is also something of a “falsification,” to use the word Nietzsche uses so often. Each apparently perduring unity is in fact the product of the ongoing agon [*Streit*] of opposites, a struggle that is destined

Press. New York: 2010, 51. The original: “ἐξ ὧν δὲ ἡ γένεσις ἐστὶ τοῖς οὐσι καὶ τὴν φθορὰν εἰς ταῦτα γίνεσθαι κατὰ τὸ χρεών· διδόναι γὰρ αὐτὰ δίκην καὶ τίσιν ἀλλήλοις τῆς ἀδικίας κατὰ τὴν τοῦ χρόνου τάξιν” (50).

⁸⁶ KSA 1:820.

⁸⁷ KSA 1:830.

⁸⁸ KSA 1:830.

always to resolve itself into fire. It is the Heraclitian philosophical gaze that is able to see this translucency in perduring beings, which can see into them in such a way as to be able to say “I see nothing but Becoming,” which, in Heraclitian terms, is to say “I see nothing but fire.” In the climactic moment of Nietzsche’s favorite of his books, Zarathustra asks, “Is not seeing itself – seeing abysses?”⁸⁹ I take this phrase to express one of Nietzsche’s central thoughts, that of the tragic shadow of Becoming cast over – or within – all beings. For Nietzsche’s Heraclitus, seeing is always seeing abysses. We can see a veiled homage to Heraclitus years later in the passage directly before the madman passage in *The Gay Science*, yet another passage about “open seas.” The passage, called “In the horizon of the infinite” (§124), cautions against being “homesick for the land” that has disappeared forever, because “there is no ‘land’ anymore!”⁹⁰ If it is right to make this textual association, then we can say that Nietzsche is here identifying the Heraclitian position as his own.

At this point it should be clear that Heraclitus’s status as the champion of the apparent [*scheinbare*] world is complicated. The apparent world of formed beings forms itself in innocence, but, if looked at with the eyes of the Heraclitian philosopher, it is seen abyssally, as a mask of Becoming. This may be part of why the word “apparent [*scheinbare*]” in “‘apparent’ world” is given in quotation marks. Certainly, one way of reading the quotation marks would be to ironize the merely apparent status given to the world of the senses when it is discounted in favor of the “true world.” But, while Heraclitus and Nietzsche strive to give the “apparent” world back its “innocence,” they also emphasize a deep sense in which this world never appears as itself. The (sensible, apparent) river, when stepped in for the second time, appears to be the same river, but Nietzsche’s Heraclitus suggests that even its initial naming as a river must be heavily asterisked

⁸⁹ From “On the Vision and the Riddle.” KSA 4:199.

⁹⁰ KSA 3:480.

(we might say de-nominated), because to call it a river is to speak of “things as if they had fixed duration.” The senses do not “lie [*lügen*],” as this word would imply wrongdoing, but they do falsify.⁹¹ “Reason” lies by suppressing the falsification, suppressing the provisional quality of “unity,” “thingliness,” “substance,” and “duration.” To see in such a way that one is always seeing abysses resists the tendency of “reason” in this way. Nietzsche’s articulation of the Heraclitian view of the world has an analog in the development of Zarathustra’s struggles. At the outset, Zarathustra calls on anyone willing to follow him to “Remain true to the earth!”⁹², but this task turns out to be extraordinarily difficult,⁹³ as visions of empowered, creative life on the sensible earth after the death of God give way to harrowing visions of “Becoming and Passing-Away” that undercut the sensible world with intimations of its perpetual dissolution. If we might initially take the earth, in Zarathustra’s vocabulary, to be simply the phenomenal world (as Christine Daigle does, in her treatment of Nietzsche as a “proto-phenomenologist”⁹⁴), this interpretation becomes far less tenable when the climactic “On the Vision and the Riddle” chapter depicts reality as the two dark, vanishing paths of the past and the future, brought together by the hollow gateway called “Moment.”^{95,96} Here, the standpoint called the “Moment,” from which all “seeing” takes place,

⁹¹ This observation about Nietzsche’s exact rhetorical choices when speaking about the senses admittedly cannot be reconciled with every single statement in the Nietzsche corpus across time. In *Dawn*, for instance, Nietzsche says, “The habits of our senses have spun us into the lies and deceptions of sensation” (KSA 3:110). Here, following a train of thought that he develops over several consecutive sections and can therefore not be dismissed as an aberration, Nietzsche unambiguously says that the senses “lie.” On the other hand, Nietzsche uses moralized language to the opposite effect when talking about the senses in aphorism 134 in *Beyond Good and Evil*, which reads, “All credibility [*Glaubwürdigkeit*], all good conscience, all appearance of truth comes first from the senses” (KSA 5:96). The list of such mutually contradictory statements could undoubtedly be made longer. This speaks to Nietzsche’s uneasy position, articulated below, of wanting both to reject the Christian denigration of the sensual and to celebrate pre-phenomenal flux.

⁹² KSA 4:15.

⁹³ The phrase returns, although with less machismo, at the very end of Book I (KSA 4:99-100).

⁹⁴ Daigle, “Nietzsche’s Notion of Embodied Self: Proto-Phenomenology at Work?,” 240-242.

⁹⁵ KSA 4:199-200.

⁹⁶ Kathleen Higgins reminds us that the dwarf and Zarathustra very clearly disagree on how to read the vision that they both experience. If we overlay her observations on the passage with terms in which we have been speaking here, we might say that she points us to the way in which the passage presents two competing visions of vision. The dwarf believes, metaphysically, that he possesses a kind of vision that exhausts all reality, whereas Zarathustra scorns this

leads to “seeing abysses.” The earth is indeed the home of *Schein*, as Daigle might say, but it the home of a dark *Schein* that is seen as always slipping away, if it is viewed authentically.

The abyssal quality of the sensible is not, however, a condemnation of the sensible. In the 1873 *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, the “innocence” not only of fire, but of fire’s transmutation into durable beings, reflects a shift that is already taking place in Nietzsche’s attitude toward the “apparent world” after *The Birth of Tragedy*. If fire signifies formless, pre-phenomenal Becoming as utter chaos, then the sensible world that emerges when fire forms into more stable elements is not condemnable, sinful, or “unjust” for having so emerged: this separates the Heraclitian position from Anaximander’s view. This implies a different valorization of the empirical world of formed beings than was on offer in *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1872, where “empirical reality” is the meaningless “truly non-being [*das wahrhaft Nichtseiende*]” from which we escape in the moment of the Dionysian encounter.⁹⁷ Despite the young Nietzsche’s belief that he is celebrating Greek sensuality by exalting Dionysus, in the terms of the older Nietzsche, offering a “self-criticism” of the book years later, this denigration of empirical reality must imply a quasi-Christian otherworldliness.⁹⁸ Looking back, Nietzsche speaks of the book’s “deep hatred for ‘the now,’ ‘reality,’” and calls his early work “artist metaphysics.”⁹⁹ There was, in other words,

view. When the dwarf says that “All truth is crooked; time itself is a circle,” Zarathustra rebukes him, saying “do not make things too easy for yourself!” (KSA 4:200). Higgins interprets this interaction by saying that Zarathustra rejects the implication of omniscience in the dwarf’s reading: “The dwarf is content with the view that ‘time itself is a circle,’ but Zarathustra objects to this statement, which approaches time with the detachment of a God who has synoptic vision and who is not himself involved in the temporal sequence” (Kathleen Higgins, *Nietzsche’s Zarathustra*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1987, 175). For the moment, Zarathustra sees the vision of eternal return as importantly and paradoxically a vision of the invisibility of what cannot be brought to vision (this chapter is the source of his rhetorical question, “Is not seeing itself – seeing abysses?”). Whether Zarathustra remains faithful to this reading of the eternal return is another matter, as he himself might be said to indulge in the fantasy of “synoptic vision” in the image of the golden ring.

⁹⁷ KSA 1:39.

⁹⁸ Indeed, Nietzsche’s few references to early Christianity in the book are basically positive, as when he opposes “the first four centuries of Christianity” to the supposed “Greek cheerfulness” that would have consisted, had it ever been a historical reality, in “womanly flight before seriousness and terror” (KSA 1:78).

⁹⁹ KSA 1:21.

an implicit hatred for “seeing” in *Birth of Tragedy*, which was devalued in favor of “seeing abysses.” Certainly, a particular kind of cultivated artistic sight is celebrated in the figure of Apollo. The broader world of individuation, however, which is to say the world of beings as the world of the four elements,¹⁰⁰ is shown to be “something in itself reprehensible [*etwas an sich Verwerfliches*]” in the cult of Zagreus, the name of the dismembered Dionysus.¹⁰¹ The overcoming of individuation in the recovery of the primordial unity is spoken of as the reunion of “nature ... with her prodigal son,”¹⁰² humanity, suggesting that Nietzsche maps the very existence of the everyday world of individuation onto the Christian idea of sinfulness. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, then, there is no innocence ascribed to the seen world of individuation – to the world that has fallen into beinghood. To this effect, the older Nietzsche of the “Self-Criticism” cites his younger self’s wish for an “art of metaphysical comfort” and exclaims that the one making such a wish, pining after the transcendent, could only “end up Romantic, *Christian...*”¹⁰³ He counsels the writer of *The Birth of Tragedy* to turn his sights in a more “*this-worldly*” direction.¹⁰⁴ Nietzsche begins to realize this transition in *Tragic Age*’s celebration of the innocence of the entire interplay of Becoming and Being, but we should also note that this transition will eventually imply a shift in the meaning of Dionysus. In the mature Nietzsche, Dionysus is no longer thought of as being simply killed (like Zagreus) in the emergence into empirical reality that is the process of the individuation of beings – in the process of stamping Becoming with the character of Being. He is retrievable in any moment in which this individuated, empirical world is seen with the right kind of philosophical vision, a vision which will act as a kind of “*Gegenbewegung gegen die*

¹⁰⁰ The special Heraclitian meaning of fire is not assumed in *The Birth of Tragedy*’s references to the four elements.

¹⁰¹ KSA 1:72.

¹⁰² KSA 1:29.

¹⁰³ KSA 1:21-22.

¹⁰⁴ KSA 1:22.

Verfallenstendenz des Lebens,” to use Heidegger’s 1922 description of philosophy as *Destruction*, a countermovement against life’s “soothing” tendency to fall the “self-evidence” of already-revealed beings.¹⁰⁵ In Nietzsche’s own post-*Birth of Tragedy* terms, the Dionysian countermovement against decay (*Verfallen*) is the tragic movement against the self-confidently idolatrous vision of a decadent like Socrates, who secures all beings in the light of reason, a light which blinds him to the shadow of Becoming (see chapter 3). The tragic attempt to retrieve the abyssal Dionysian element in the self-evident present world of beings can be thought of as a kind of “critique of the present,” a countermovement of the present against the present, as philosophy is for Heidegger in the *Natorp Report*.¹⁰⁶ This is reflected in the hollowness of the gateway “Moment” in “On the Vision and the Riddle,” a gateway which opens on to the vanishing path of eternal flux. Philosophy, as an “enhancement of questionableness [*Steigerung der Fraglichkeit*],”¹⁰⁷ works against the self-evidence of beings (“*das Selbstverständliche*”¹⁰⁸) as given to life that is decadent and idolatrous (Nietzsche), or decayed (*verfallen*) and “ruinant” (Heidegger).¹⁰⁹

The result of the paradigm shift advocated here is the stance for which seeing is always seeing abysses, a stance that does not treat Dionysus as an “otherworldly” god, but as a god that is embedded in the interstices of this seen world, in and behind the apparent [*scheinbare*] beings

¹⁰⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles (Anzeige der hermeneutischen Situation)*. Ed. Günther Neumann. In *Gesamtausgabe* Volume 62. Vittorio Klostermann: Frankfurt am Main 2005, 362, 357, and 366, respectively.

¹⁰⁶ GA 62:350.

¹⁰⁷ C.f. Dionysus as the god of “everything questionable [*allem Fragwürdigen*]” in the last sentence of “‘Reason’ in Philosophy” (KSA 6:79).

¹⁰⁸ GA 62:366.

¹⁰⁹ Hans Ruin (“Thinking in Ruins: Life, Death, and Destruction (in Heidegger’s Early Writings.” In *Comparative and Continental Philosophy*, Volume 4:1, 2012, 15-33) interestingly finds the most important antecedent for Heidegger’s ruination in a discussion, in Augustine’s *Confessions*, of the impulses of the body. “It is Augustine who literally speaks of how men tend to *fall (cadunt)* upon that which they are able to do; [sic] resting content therewith, a term which Heidegger then picks up and elaborates in his explication of the nature and division of *tentatio*.” Ruin points us to a passage in which Augustine, discussing the temptations of eating and drinking, “speaks of the body in terms of its ‘daily ruin,’ *quotidianas ruinas corporis*” (19).

whose demise he promises. The apparent world, which, for Nietzsche, is not only the world of the sensible in the narrowest sense but also of intention, will, and telos, is to be celebrated, but always, tragically, as the world into whom death is already inscribed as pre-phenomenal Becoming. Once this is understood, it is possible to answer the question about Dionysus with which we began. We asked how it is possible for Dionysus to represent both the sensible (the seen) and the abyss. The answer to this question is that Dionysus is the abyss that resides in all sensible beings, and that Dionysian philosophy, as the philosophy of the “questionable and horrible,” gazes into the abyss precisely through its confrontation with beings.

Physiology as Post-Metaphysical Thought

We are now in a position to better address the concerns we raised at the beginning of this chapter. We asked whether Dionysus could, so to speak, survive his contact with beinghood, or whether his ostensible alterity is ultimately undermined by the fact that Nietzsche wants to preserve a pathway to the god, a pathway that runs through beings. Does Nietzsche’s thought succumb to onto-theology as Dionysus gets pulled into the world of beings, according to the logic Derrida articulates with regard to negative theology? The question assumes that the specifically Nietzschean approach to the overcoming of metaphysics would require (to quote Heidegger’s *Contributions*) “that the human being ... cast herself loose from beings,”¹¹⁰ toward an alterity that would be (to speak with Marion) hyperbolically distant. But Nietzsche does not propose a casting-loose from beings, and Dionysus is not a “god of distance.” Rather, the approach to Dionysus takes place in the abyssal approach to beings themselves. It is through such an abyssal approach that

¹¹⁰ Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, GA 65:452.

discipleship to Dionysus finds itself. In this way, Dionysus, as a god of the earth, is both a god of the sensual and, at the same time, of pre-phenomenal flux. It is in fact this otherworldliness-within-the-world that, on my account, allows Nietzsche to think of Dionysus as a god. Related to the above concern about Dionysus and the world of beings is the question of whether Dionysus is a new supersensible deity and thus a disappointingly Christian response to the death of God, a question we can now answer on Nietzsche's behalf. The difference between Dionysus and the Christian God lies not only in the inversion, observed by Heidegger, of the Platonic ontological hierarchy in which Being had been placed over Becoming, but also in the nature of the relationship between Being and Becoming. Whereas the Christian-Platonic paradigm sought to stifle Becoming, holding Being as far away from Becoming as possible (*"Was ist, wird nicht; was wird, ist nicht ..."*¹¹¹), Nietzsche's celebration of what is now the higher term, Becoming, does not occur via the suppression of the lower term, Being, nor does it hold the higher term apart as a distinct and distant *Jenseits*. To the contrary, the Dionysian turn toward Becoming occurs in and through an abyssal vision of beings. Nietzsche's Dionysianism can thus not be accused of participating in the supersensuality Nietzsche sees in Christianity.

Dionysian philosophy, then, does not seek to blind itself to beings in order to face the pre-phenomenal god, but rather studies the agonistic interplay between beinghood and Becoming – between "fire" and "fixed duration," to say it in Heraclitian terms. For Nietzsche, the study of this interplay of Becoming and Being is the study of embodied life: physiology. Having condemned philosophy's suppression of Becoming in §1 of "Reason' in Philosophy," and having excepted Heraclitus from this critique in §2, Nietzsche begins §3 with a celebration of the forgotten body, praising the perceptiveness of the nose. He exalts the kind of thinking that would attend to the

¹¹¹ KSA 6:74.

body at the expense of those kinds of thinking which, like the “philosophy” of §1, seek to forget it, among them “metaphysics, theology, psychology, epistemology.”^{112,113} Philosophy must be physiology because “life” organizes, enacts, and itself *is* the stamping of Becoming with the character of Being: “‘Being’ – we have no other representation of this than as ‘*life*.’ So how can anything dead ‘be’?”¹¹⁴ But, to repeat Heidegger’s phrasing once more, for Nietzsche, “*Das Leben lebt, indem es leibt* [Life lives insofar as it bodies].”¹¹⁵ The other of life is implied in life’s very definition as *Einverleibung*, as the harnessing of chaos into beinghood, a process that always has its limit and therefore confronts that which is beyond life and thus beyond Being as beinghood. Derrida rightly speaks of a beyond-life or a “life death” in Nietzsche’s sense of life;¹¹⁶ more specifically, we can say that life becomes “life death” in the insight specific to physiological vision. In this phrase, we can see how Nietzsche seeks to think beyond beinghood and metaphysics in a way that resonates with both Marion and Derrida in different ways. The engagement with the divinity beyond being will, on the one hand, require an engagement with beings that has something of the logic of Marion’s “denomination,” as it will acknowledge an abyssal otherness in beings that never be comprehended by thought or successfully articulated in language. On the other hand, this abyssal threat to presence (“death”) is not “distant” but within presence itself, as is implied by Derrida’s rejection of the vertical metaphor allegedly guiding negative theology. Vanessa Lemm sees something similar to Derrida’s “life-death” in Nietzsche’s sense of life, but finds her observation specifically in the dynamics of incorporation, which reveal that “Life is an incessant

¹¹² KSA 6:76.

¹¹³ Clearly, the inclusion of the word “psychology” here should be taken with a grain of salt, and cannot mean Nietzsche’s own brand of psychology, which very frequently seems to overlap or even become synonymous with his “physiology” (see *Beyond Good and Evil* §230, KSA 5:167, for instance).

¹¹⁴ *Will to Power* §583, *Nachlass* 2[172], KSA 12:153.

¹¹⁵ GA 6.1:509.

¹¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Life Death*. Ed. Pascale-Anne Brault and Peggy Kamuf. Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. University of Chicago Press: Chicago 2020, 5.

striving towards the outside of life which continuously exceeds the limits of its own being.”¹¹⁷ Physiological vision is thus tragic, always viewing life as constituted in a process that also highlights its limits, its “outside,” its demise. As William McNeill illustrates, life always arises in and of the chaos in which it must partake, but from which it must also paradoxically differentiate itself.¹¹⁸ Whenever physiology sees life, it sees an abyss open up within life.

The relationship of life to Becoming is tragic, but it is not straightforwardly elegiac: physiology does not mourn life’s “fall” into beinghood, but actively studies its various strategies of “stamping” Becoming with the imprint of beinghood. Physiology sees an abyss when it sees life, but quite often the emphasis is not on the abyss within life, but on knowledge of life as a positive formation. The various “stamping” strategies of life correspond to the different physiologies discussed in the Nietzsche corpus, such as the noble, slavish, Roman, Greek, Jewish, male, female, Christian, and modern-decadent “physiologies,” to name a few. Lemm argues that a consideration of the word *Einverleibung* reveals that “Showing that ... cultural processes can be traced back to organic processes and vice versa is part of the Nietzschean task of translating ‘the human being back into nature’.”¹¹⁹ Although we have not explicitly interpreted all of the “physiological” formations named above as formations of incorporation, the understanding of incorporation as the process of engaging Becoming with beinghood hopefully allows one to imagine how this could be done, and illustrates how this dissertation’s treatment of Nietzsche’s physiology provides a foundation for thinking about Nietzsche’s social thought as a whole.¹²⁰ Lemm has undertaken the task of making explicit the ways in which the terms of Nietzsche’s

¹¹⁷ Lemm, “Nietzsche, *Einverleibung*, and the Politics of Immunity,” 5.

¹¹⁸ McNeill, “A Wave in the Stream of Chaos,” 159.

¹¹⁹ Lemm, “Nietzsche, *Einverleibung*, and the Politics of Immunity,” 4.

¹²⁰ This is not to say that we have not already been discussing the ways in which physiology underpins the social world as seen by Nietzsche. History as the history of the will to power (chapter 1), modern decadence as the incapacity for suffering (chapter 3), and the consideration of woman and man as drive formations (chapter 4) are examples.

physiology can be read as providing the basis for the study of broad-scale social phenomena. The levelling effect of the dynamics of incorporation as we studied them in chapter 2 are reflected in Lemm’s reading of socialization itself as it takes place in Nietzsche’s thought. She argues that “all modern political and juridical institutions are bound up with the negative logic of immunization,” where “immunization” implies a self-protective harmonization of parts to protect against external threats.¹²¹ “*Einverleibung* is understood,” here, on the social level, “as an equalizing and ordering force (*gleichmachende-ordnende Kraft*) through which the exterior world (*Aussenwelt*) ... is subsumed under the greater whole of society.”¹²²

Einverleibung operates on the broadest social level as the structuring of human (social) life. This structuring operates as the “equalizing” and “ordering” through which the life world becomes visible and accessible. “Equalizing” and “ordering” are, as Didier Franck has explained in great detail, fundamental aspects of all reification, for Nietzsche – of all instances in which beinghood is instantiated out of Becoming.¹²³ Nietzsche’s physiology will thus trace the various strategies of reification, which is a task quite different from that of seeking to think in a manner that leaves beinghood behind.¹²⁴ This is why I proposed, near the beginning of this chapter, to use the phrase “radical alterity” in a merely provisional way when speaking of Dionysus.

¹²¹ Lemm, “Nietzsche, *Einverleibung*, and the Politics of Immunity,” 8.

¹²² Lemm, “Nietzsche, *Einverleibung*, and the Politics of Immunity,” 8-9.

¹²³ See Part 4.3 and Part 5 of Frank, *Nietzsche and the Shadow of God*, called “Simplification and Judgment” and “The System of Identical Cases,” 199-267.

¹²⁴ The notion of a breaking-loose from beings appears to be at issue in Heidegger’s reading of *The Gay Science*’s madman. Ryan Coyne observes a clear affinity between the madman and Calchas, the blind seer from Homer’s *Iliad*, in Heidegger’s *Holzwege* essays “Nietzsche’s Word: God is Dead” and “The Anaximander Saying.” Given the thematization of vision – and, in a sense, abyssal vision – that this comparison implies in connection to Nietzsche’s thought, Coyne’s observation is interesting in light of our discussion here. Calchas is described as a madman (GA 5:347), and, like Nietzsche’s madman in the “Nietzsche’s Word” essay, is described as “out of himself. He is away” (GA 5:347) (Heidegger had described Nietzsche’s madman as *ver-rückt*, both mad and transported – or, as Coyne suggests, “de-ranged” [GA 5:266, Coyne, *Heidegger’s Confessions*, 205). Calchas’s capacity as a seer emanates from the fact that, as a blind man, he is “not dominated by the proximity of beings” (Coyne 204). He “goes beyond the presently present (beings as a whole) and ecstatically relates to what is un-presently present (Being)” (204), achieving this by escaping the “sheer crush of the present at hand [*bloßen Andrang des Vorliegenden*]” (GA 5:348).

To be clear, this transposition of *Einverleibung* from the direct analysis of the organic body to the level of society is not merely an analogy to be used for rhetorical or pedagogical effect, but reflects Nietzsche's literal view: the body, as the coalescence of the will to power, guides history. This point is driven home eloquently by Roberto Esposito, whom I will quote at length here:

Certainly, using a physiological terminology in politics is anything but original. Still, the absolute originality of the Nietzschean text resides in the transferal of the relation between state and body from the classical level of analogy or metaphor, in which the ancient and modern tradition positions it, *to that of an effectual reality* [emphasis mine]: no politics exists other than that *of* bodies, conducted *on* bodies, *through* bodies. In this sense, one can rightly say that physiology, which Nietzsche never detaches from psychology, is the very same material of politics. It is its pulsating body. But ... the body is [also] constituted according to the principle of politics – struggle as the first and final dimension of existence. Struggle outside oneself, toward other bodies, but also within as the unstoppable conflict among its organic components. Before being in itself [*in-sé*], the body is always *against*, even with respect to itself. In this sense, Nietzsche can say that 'every philosophy that ranks peace above war' is 'a

While I take Coyne's reading of Heidegger's treatment of these two figures to be correct, I think their association reveals a misunderstanding, on Heidegger's part, of what philosophical "seeing" could be for Nietzsche. Heidegger's association of these figures underscores the way in which Nietzsche ultimately fails, for Heidegger: trying to overcome metaphysics, Nietzsche (as the madman) ultimately remains ensnared by "the present at hand," and finds a new metaphysics of the representing, willing subject. For Nietzsche, though, what we might call "true seeing," vision into the abyss of Dionysian Becoming, could not be enacted by blindness to the "present at hand," but, as I have been trying to illustrate, is only possible through an engagement with present beings. "Seeing abysses" does not depend on a cancellation of "seeing."

An exception to this might be the very earliest Nietzsche, the Nietzsche of *The Birth of Tragedy* whom the later Nietzsche will criticize for turning his back on the empirical world and seeking Dionysian insight beyond this world. Indeed, in a 1870 note, Nietzsche calls the decolated Oedipus a "symbol of *Wissenschaft*" and "the riddle-solver of... nature" (*Nachlass* 7[22], KSA 7:141).

misunderstanding of the body.' This is because in its continual instability the body is nothing but the always provisional result of the conflict of forces that constitute it."¹²⁵

We can see, now, how the worldly Nietzsche of social commentary and the quasi-religious sounding Nietzsche who calls himself the disciple of Dionysus can be the same thinker without contradiction, and how a commitment to the "empirical world" so derided by the young Nietzsche of *The Birth of Tragedy* is compatible with such a discipleship. Dionysian philosophy-as-physiology studies the body as the site of incorporation's engagement with Becoming, and the domain of bodily incorporation is the entire human realm, from the individual to the social level. In this way the view into the abyss coincides with the worldly intellectual task of observing historical human will to power, such that the resistance to metaphysics can take the form of social inquiry. To remain true to the earth means to study the emergence of the world of beinghood, in incorporation, from abyssal Becoming.¹²⁶

If physiology covers everything named above, addressing the human being in its entirety, does it not become too capacious to be distinct? How does it set itself apart from the ways of knowing derided in "'Reason' in Philosophy" - "metaphysics, theology, psychology, [and] epistemology"? These modes of thought share the errors of "philosophy," as introduced in §4 and

¹²⁵ Roberto Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*. Trans. Timothy Campbell. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota 2008, 84.

¹²⁶ Marylou Sena appears to be on the right track when, in an interesting essay favorable to Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche's "sensuousness," she speaks of the "being beyond itself of sensuousness" ("Nietzsche's New Grounding of the Metaphysical: Sensuousness and the Subversion of Plato and Platonism." In *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol. 34. Koninklijke Brill: Leiden 2004, 139-157, 155). But the "beyond" toward which the "being beyond itself of sensuousness" appears to be oriented is the still-sensuous self-revealing of the gods. Dionysus, the most important of the gods, is described as "as the primordial *Ursprung*, the origin, in fact, of all sensuous life" (149). The terms "Dionysus," "life," and "sensuousness" are thus placed in untroubled harmony in a way that makes things easy on Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche's alleged metaphysics of *Schein* but that is, in my view, unwarranted. On my reading, Dionysus's theophany (if it could be called that) in Heraclitian abyssal vision is not simply a higher kind of sensuous manifestation, but the intimation of the limit or end of all sensuousness.

§5 of “‘Reason’ in Philosophy” (the “philosophy” in question here, of course, is pre-Nietzschean philosophy). Among these errors are “confusing the last and the first,” “the problem of error and appearance,” and the belief that “Everything that is of first rank must be *causa sui*.”¹²⁷ To an extent, these diverse complaints about philosophy build a unified picture. The body, in fact never entirely active, is doomed always to be responding to Becoming, but this priority of Becoming is inverted in philosophy and given to that which has beinghood, which is then eternalized. The end result of this process is God as *causa sui*: “All the highest values are of the first rank; all the highest concepts, *that which has being* [*das Seiende*], the unconditional, the good, the true, the perfect – all this cannot have become, and *must* therefore be *causa sui*.”¹²⁸ In this way, the static world of Being must be the source of Becoming, which appears as a fallen reflection of Being. “Everywhere Being is projected as cause.”¹²⁹

The problem here, for Nietzsche, is not simply an inversion of priority or preference. The priority of Being over Becoming does not operate according to the same dynamics of the (Nietzschean) priority of Becoming over Being, because Being is comprehensible. “Metaphysics” and “theology” are motivated to allow Being to lord over Becoming because that enables them to lord over Becoming, too, as they present themselves as the modes of thought that understand the “true world” of Being. As long as Being, as *causa sui*, dominates their picture of the real, nothing escapes the comprehensibility of the metaphysical system. Nietzschean physiology, by weaving pre-phenomenal, pre-comprehensible Becoming into the very fabric of the phenomenal world, insists upon a reality that escapes conceptualization, a reality that metaphysics, in submitting everything to beinghood, refuses to acknowledge. Physiology is itself a mode of revealing, a mode

¹²⁷ KSA 6:76-77.

¹²⁸ KSA 6:76.

¹²⁹ KSA 6:77.

of conceptualization, and thus cannot itself offer up a vision of the chaos that is Becoming: what sets it apart from “metaphysics, theology, psychology, epistemology” is that it adopts a stance that always acknowledges the anteriority of that which it cannot articulate. In this way, physiology seeks to evade what Heidegger comes to call onto-theology, and at the same time insists upon human finitude, in its picture of the embodied human being’s confrontation with that which it cannot subdue.

In associating Nietzsche with the 20th-century desire to overcome onto-theology, however, it is also important to point out how physiology, as Nietzsche’s specific attempt at post-metaphysical thought, differs from other such attempts, such as those of Heidegger and Derrida. The reason physiology cannot “cast loose” from beings, as Heidegger aspires to do, is that to take the body as the guiding thread of thought means to track the emergence of beings in the process of incorporation. The physiological view sees beings abyssally, as a waystage of Becoming, but this does not mean that it seeks to depart from beings. Nietzsche should also be protected, to a degree, from Derrida’s camaraderie. Incorporation, in this or that body, proceeds according to the possibilities open to that body. If the consideration of human life’s mediation of Becoming forgets that this mediation is always the limited, embodied mediation of incorporation, then the “liberation of the signifier”¹³⁰ for which Derrida celebrates Nietzsche can turn into the “disembowelled” and “bloodless” “floating [of] signifiers” that Blondel scorns in deconstructionist renditions of Nietzsche’s thought.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 19.

¹³¹ Blondel, *Nietzsche: The Body and Culture*, 9 and 39.

Dionysian Eternity

In each previous chapter, we have examined human finitude in Nietzsche's thought. In each case, this finitude has been the finitude of the body, although it has manifested itself in different ways: 1) as the eternal striving of the will to power through (unending) history, 2) as the body's limited powers of incorporation, 3) in the overwhelmed body's limited capacity for suffering (especially in decadent modernity), and 4) in the "female" submission to Dionysian Becoming demanded by the Nietzschean philosophical stance. In chapter 1, we saw that the physiology that can illuminate the body as we have discussed it only becomes possible in the death of God, a moment which corresponds, for Nietzsche, to the possibility of overcoming metaphysics.

A reading that insists upon the centrality of the finite human being in Nietzsche's thought should address the fact that Nietzsche offers us a vision of the in-finitely returning human being. The body, which I have read as constitutively finite, is infinitely resurrected. Does the phrase "human finitude," which in most contexts would seem, very naturally, to imply the thought of human death, really apply here?

In chapter 1, we observed that the eternal return is not merely an accidental circumstance that Nietzsche imagines as afflicting or being imposed upon the body from outside; rather, the eternal return is an expression of an originally physiological fact. That fact is that of the body's finitude, which necessitates that human drives always take the form of will *to* power, rather than simply accomplished power. In light of the ground we have covered since that first chapter, we can say that this finitude can be otherwise understood as the body's limited capacity to incorporate Becoming. Dionysus is the god of the sensual embrace of *Schein* and the god of abyssal, pre-phenomenal Becoming because the abyss, for Nietzsche, resides within the sensible, as Heraclitian

philosophical vision sees the abyssal dissolution of beings wherever it sees beings. The earth is the site not of the self-evidence of appearance, nor of the simply pre-phenomenal, but of the abyssal interplay of beinghood and the Dionysian Becoming which rules it.

This sense of the interplay between Being and Becoming requires a different conception of “eternity [*Ewigkeit*]” than the Christian one, to which Nietzsche always refers derisively.¹³² An eternity ruled by Being is static and removed from time, but an eternity ruled by Becoming implies unending time. This Dionysian vision is, on one level, clearly supposed to oppose itself to Christian eternity as an affirmation of life. The Christian vision of “eternal life” is in fact something of a misnomer, as the Christian mode of eternalization nullifies life by erasing its basis as the “*differential* element of force,”¹³³ uniting disparate wills-to-power in the unity of Christ’s eternal church, “incorporating the ‘self of the believer’ in ‘another than himself,’ in the form of a unity of ‘equal members.’”^{134,135} By contrast, Dionysian eternal life is worthy of the designation, in that it eternally retains the disparate, finite drive structures that constitute life as life. The apocalyptic transfiguration of bodies is in fact a denial of life itself, in addition to being a denial of the apparent world in which they appear. The Dionysian thought of the eternal return restores life to life.

Yet, as our investigation of the relationship between Ariadne and Dionysus made clear, Dionysus represents not only vitality but also our doom. If loving Dionysus is an act of *amor fati*, then it is the love of a dark fate. In Dionysus’s closing words to Ariadne in “Ariadne’s Complaint,” “*I am your labyrinth,*” the significance of the god could not be read simply as an exultant celebration of “life,” as life over or opposed to death. To follow the Ariadnian guiding thread,

¹³² Including after Nietzsche’s fullest thinking-through of the eternal return in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (see KSA 5:332, for instance).

¹³³ Deleuze, *Nietzsche & Philosophy*, 7.

¹³⁴ Emmanuel Falque, *Metamorphosis of Finitude*, 52.

¹³⁵ Franck speaks of the fundamental negativity of Christian willing, for Nietzsche: we will not to will individually, so that God can will his Will through us (Franck, *The Shadow of God*, 11).

which can only be recovered after the death of God, means not only to observe life, but to see into the abyss that lurks with life, undoing life. Tragedy is constituted in part by the fated demise of the protagonist, and the tragic Nietzschean, Dionysian view of life retains this traditional element of the literary genre. A reflection upon Dionysian Becoming, whether it occurs in what Nietzsche calls physiology or in the eternal return, is a reflection on that which lies beyond the point to which our power and our life extend, and is thus a reflection, implicitly, on death, not primarily as a moment in time, but as the absolute limit on the extent and power of life as incorporation.¹³⁶ To see life through the Dionysian lens in which seeing is always seeing abysses is to see all life worlds as shot through with the overwhelming fact of *Werden und Vergehen*, Becoming and Passing-Away. Life is life-death, for Nietzsche, and Dionysus is the god of this life-as-life-death.

These observations resonate with Barbara Stiegler's opening observation in her *Nietzsche et la critique de la chair*, where she claims that the notion of Nietzsche's philosophy as an "affirmation of life" has hindered Nietzsche studies.¹³⁷ Stiegler's position is, of course, not that Nietzsche does not in any way "affirm" "life," but that the word "affirm" carries the unwarranted connotation of unconditional and unproblematized approbation. Stiegler, who is unfailingly cognizant of the fact that Nietzschean life is always embodied life, shows how Dionysus is to be read, after *The Birth of Tragedy*, not as the symbol of unconditional affirmation of the body or of life but, rather, as a symbol of a critique of the flesh, a critique of embodied life.^{138,139} By this, she

¹³⁶ The notion that the eternal return is a meditation on the inseparability of life and death is supported by both Gooding-Williams's and Seung's association of the eternal return with the myth of Dionysus as Zagreus, the underworld god who is reborn only after being killed by dismemberment (Seung, *Nietzsche's Epic of the Soul*, 179 and 205; Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism*, 261-268).

¹³⁷ Stiegler, *Nietzsche et la critique de la chair*, 16-17.

¹³⁸ This position is advanced for the first time at Stiegler, *Nietzsche et la critique de la chair*, 17.

¹³⁹ Stiegler's application of the concept of critique to Nietzsche's thinking brings to mind Foucault's "What Is Enlightenment?" (In *The Foucault Reader*. Ed. Paul Rabinow, New York: Pantheon 1984, 32-50), which also raises the question of how the idea of critique does or could inform thought in an era that takes itself to be post-Enlightenment. Extrapolating from Kant's 1784 article by the same name, Foucault speaks of Enlightenment as

means that “Dionysian” philosophy exposes the body to the thought of that which exceeds and overwhelms its capacities, in order to delineate the limits of those capacities. That which exceeds the body and its powers is Dionysian Becoming – “the judge of the flesh, Dionysus.”¹⁴⁰ If Nietzsche’s philosophy affirms the body as life, it does so by submitting it to “a god that remains always in excess of [the body],” a god that can only appear after the death of God.^{141,142}

Interestingly and perhaps surprisingly, then, Nietzsche implicitly accuses Christianity of suppressing the human finitude that is endemic to human life. This may be surprising because Christianity, as Nietzsche reads it, is always telling humanity that it is weak. But it also engages in the fantasy of a future world in which seeing would not mean seeing abysses, in which the limits of incorporation would not determine human life. The name Nietzsche gives to such thinking, the metaphysical thinking that believes in a seeing without shadows, a seeing that admits of nothing that would absolutely overwhelm human comprehension, is alternatively “idolatry” (chapter 3) or

“permanent critique of ourselves” (43). Whereas the “Kantian question” had been that of “knowing what limits knowledge had to renounce transgressing,” today we must “transform the critique” such that its self-questioning is

[a]rchaeological – and not transcendental – in the sense that it will not seek to identify the universal structures of all knowledge or of all possible moral action, but will seek to treat the instances of discourse that articulate what we think, say, and do as so many historical events. This critique will be genealogical ... (45-46)

Post-Kantian critique, as envisioned by Foucault, sounds rather Nietzschean. Certainly, the terms in which “critique” is envisioned as proceeding are different in Stiegler’s treatment of Nietzsche’s physiology than in Foucault’s “historico-critical ... ontology of ourselves” (46). Both senses of “critique,” though, are understood as “work done at the limit of ourselves” (46), and, when applied to Nietzsche, could serve as the starting points of complementary forms of investigation – as synchronic and diachronic critiques of the historically situated body, for instance.

¹⁴⁰ Stiegler, *Nietzsche et la critique de la chair*, 33.

¹⁴¹ Stiegler, *Nietzsche et la critique de la chair*, 35.

¹⁴² Stiegler’s articulation of Dionysus as the “judge” to which Nietzschean philosophy invites us to submit may offer us a path by which to think through Leo Strauss’s apparent belief that Nietzsche envisions and proposes a literal religion for the post-death-of-God world (see Leo Strauss, “Note on the Plan of Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*”). This would admittedly mean importing quite a bit that is foreign to Strauss’s own engagement with Nietzsche, but Strauss’s own commentary is so opaque and elliptical, on its own terms, that this may be inevitable for anyone who wants to imagine what this future religion might look like in any detail. Strauss’s difficult essay suggests that “the religion of the future” will be “terrible” (193) and will acknowledge its roots in nature (“religiosity ... is also an instinct” [197]), but will turn to nature (the act of this turn is named in Strauss’s word *Vernatürlichung*) in a way that is not a simply “return” but is an “ascent” to a new engagement with nature. The subjection of the (natural?) interplay of Becoming and Being in embodied will to power to the god and “judge” Dionysus could form the basis of such a post-Christian religious stance.

“philosophy.”¹⁴³ The name for the thinking belonging to a new epoch that has moved beyond such fantasies, the kind of thinking practiced by the disciple of Dionysus, is “physiology.”

¹⁴³ The notion that the death of God provides an opening to an experience of human finitude or the opportunity to escape an epoch of human hubris is of course most famously evident in Heidegger’s thesis regarding the “closure of metaphysics,” but has echoes in Christian thought as well. Marion argues that the death of God as the “twilight of the idols” is the closure of the idolatrous gaze that would “dismiss the *invisible*” (Marion, *God Without Being*, 22) as that which escapes human conceptual comprehension. Noreen Khawaja (*The Religion of Existence*) has recently read such a dynamic into Kierkegaard, for whom “undoing the metaphysical denigration of finitude” depends on “*revis[ing]* the definition of a Christian” (71), which can only happen in the secular age since “Christianity, by its very [historical] ‘success,’ has created conditions hostile to itself” (79).

Concluding Remarks: Nietzsche, Remembering and Forgetting

This dissertation has examined the death of God as the moment in which an “abyssal” recollection of Dionysian Becoming is possible. While this characterization makes the death of God out to be a moment which might witness a return of the divine, and is thus not an entirely pessimistic characterization of this historical event, it also runs the risk of sounding overly somber. After all, the title of what is perhaps Nietzsche’s most sustained reflection on the death of God in his own voice, *Gay Science* §343, is “The Meaning of Our Cheerfulness.”¹ Nietzsche does not in every instance speak of the death of God as a heavy, “abyssal” event. The “higher history” to come is sometimes portrayed as an era of newborn freedom and innovation. I would like to close by relating the death of God as I have analyzed it in this dissertation to this lighter, brighter sense of the death of God. I will argue the two apparently distinct visions of the post-death-of-God world, the one of “abyssal” engagement with Dionysus and the bright one of “cheerfulness,” are in fact part of a single vision.

One key word in Nietzsche’s descriptions of the more cheerful “higher history” that is possible after the death of God is “innocence,” *Unschuld*. After the “hangman’s metaphysics” that is Christianity, Nietzsche wants to see the “innocence of Becoming” restored.² The child of *Zarathustra*’s “Three Metamorphoses,” who can only arrive after humanity has done battle with

¹ KSA 3:573-574. The end of this passage was briefly discussed in chapter 5, and its beginning is discussed in a footnote in the Introduction.

² These phrases both appear in 1888’s *Twilight of the Idols*, “The Four Great Errors” §8 (KSA 6:96). Nietzsche speaks explicitly of the restoration of the innocence of Becoming, which can only occur after “We repudiate God,” shortly thereafter in §9 (KSA 6:97).

The phrase “innocence of Becoming” also occurs in eleven notes and one letter between 1883 and 1887.

the “dragon” of Christian morality, is “[i]nnocence ... and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a wheel rolling out of itself, a first movement, a holy affirmation [*Ja-sagen*].”³ As the description of the child explicitly indicates, innocence implies a lack of memory. Yet recollection – and harrowing recollection, the kind that would seem to rule out innocence – is not just implied but emphasized in Nietzsche’s visions for a philosophy of the future. Genealogy recovers the “blood and horror ... at the bottom of all ‘good things’” in history;⁴ physiology leads ultimately, I argued in chapter 5, to an abyssal vision of the limits of what can become real for us. “When you stare long into an abyss,” Nietzsche famously warns in a *Beyond Good and Evil* aphorism, “the abyss stares back into you.”⁵ To pose a question that has certainly been posed in some form many times before, how can Nietzsche simultaneously advocate forgetful innocence and a mode of recollection that leaves one penetrated by “the abyss”?⁶ The question is a basic one for any reading of Nietzsche and the future he envisions. Here, I intend to answer it in light of what we have discovered, over the course of this dissertation, about Nietzsche’s physiology, and about the death of God as a physiological event.

First, I would briefly like to point out the remarkably central role that the concepts of memory and forgetting play in the well-known interpretations of Nietzsche against which I framed my own approach to his work in the introduction. For Heidegger, Nietzsche ambitiously attempts philosophy’s greatest act of recollection by trying to think back to the origins of nihilism, yet ultimately deepens the utter forgetfulness, the forgetting of Being, that permeates Western thought.

At the very end of the *Nietzsche* lectures, Heidegger launches the “remembering into metaphysics

³ KSA 4:31.

⁴ KSA 5:297.

⁵ *Beyond Good and Evil* §146, KSA 5:98.

⁶ This might be said to be the guiding thematic question of T.K. Seung’s *Nietzsche’s Epic of the Soul: Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. It is also a recurrent topic in Stanley Rosen’s *The Mask of Enlightenment* (2nd edition. New Haven: Yale University Press 2004). See, for example, the discussions of “On the Three Metamorphoses” (78-84) and “On Old and New Tablets” (198-201). Rosen pithily sums up the dilemma: “innocence ... cannot be achieved intentionally” (199).

[*Erinnerung in die Metaphysik*]” that Nietzsche has failed to accomplish.⁷ At the heart of Derrida’s response to Heidegger is the notion of “active forgetfulness” (as opposed to forgetfulness as a mere weakness of memory), which is advanced at the beginning of the second book of the *Genealogy*.⁸ In “The Ends of Man,” speaking of Nietzsche’s “laughter... ‘beyond’ metaphysics,” Derrida says that Nietzsche “will dance, outside of the house [of Being], this ‘aktive Vergesslichkeit,’ this active forgetfulness (“oubliance”) and this cruel (grausam) feast is spoken of in *Genealogy of Morals*. No doubt Nietzsche called upon an active forgetfulness (“oubliance”) of Being which would not have had the metaphysical form which Heidegger ascribed to it.”⁹ Yet this readiness to forget the conditions of metaphysical discourse means ultimately relinquishing the possibility of in any way breaking out of them.¹⁰ Gayatri Spivak sums up Derrida’s position in her introduction to *Of Grammatology*: “Nietzsche cracked [the concepts inherited from metaphysics] apart and then advocated forgetting that fact! ... The will to knowledge is not easy to discard ... [Nietzsche decides] to know and then actively to forget, convincingly to offer in his text his own misreading.”¹¹ Sarah Kofman, in her *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, does not reverse the association of forgetfulness and metaphysics present in the readings of Heidegger and Derrida, but does reverse Nietzsche’s relationship to the forgetfulness of metaphysics, portraying his work as a remembering of metaphor that restores its creative power. Implicitly resisting Derrida’s suggestion that Nietzsche (in Spivak’s words) “advocated forgetting” the concepts and limitations of metaphysics,

⁷ GA 6.2:439-448.

⁸ KSA 5:291.

⁹ Jacques Derrida, “The Ends of Man.” In *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, September 1969, Vol. 30, No. 1, 31-57, 57.

¹⁰ Derrida’s response to Nietzsche’s “forgetting” seems potentially more multivalent and favorable at the end of the later *Spurs*, where he seems to suggest in his closing lines that Nietzsche preempts Heidegger’s notion of *Seinsvergessenheit* in a way Heidegger does not recognize: “Forgetting, then, not only *attacks* the essence of Being (*das Wesen des Seins*) inasmuch as it is apparently distinct from it. It belongs to the nature of Being (*Sie gehört zur Sache des Seins*) and reigns as the Destiny of its essence (*als Geschick seines Wesens*)” (143).

¹¹ Spivak, Introduction to *Of Grammatology*, xxxviii.

Kofman argues that the will to power, as Nietzsche's central thought, is itself metaphorical. In all three cases, then, some kind of sustained recollection is represented as the path "beyond metaphysics" in some sense, and whether or not Nietzsche holds out in such a recollection is decisive in his overall success, or lack thereof, in the attempt to walk this path.

As Derrida's framing suggests, however, Nietzsche clearly believes that something is won by a certain kind of forgetfulness. Even Kofman's reading seems to recognize the power of forgetting, despite disparaging it in a seemingly total way from time to time¹²: conceptuality, which catalyzes the forgetting and repression of metaphor, must itself be suspended – we might say, forgotten – in order to metaphor to be remembered. Indeed, at one point Kofman speaks of an "originary" forgetting, presumably vital and consistent with the free metaphor, that is suppressed via an anticathexis that results in the forgetting of metaphor via the concept.¹³ In both Derrida's and Kofman's readings, then, conceptuality is forgotten, although in a different way in each case. For Derrida's Nietzsche, the metaphysical nature of inherited concepts is forgotten in order to use them creatively; for Kofman's Nietzsche, "'the proper,' the concept" itself must be forgotten, at least provisionally, in order to return to the "originary forgetting" of "improper" artistic metaphor.¹⁴ Creative power of expression is, on both accounts, what is won by forgetting (Nietzsche will "dance").

Without a doubt, this celebration of a certain kind of forgetfulness associated with creative power is evident in every stage of Nietzsche's writing. The Dionysian experience is not simply a voyage to, but is a return to, the primordial unity that precedes individuation. The Dionysian artistic drive thus goes hand in hand with a forgetting of individuation and a "*forgetting* of the self," a

¹² For example, "So forgetting ... implies the transition from the affirmation of life in its diversified plurality to the will to nothingness, the ascetic ideal" (Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, 51).

¹³ Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, 43.

¹⁴ Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, 17.

Selbstvergessenheit, Nietzsche repeatedly says.¹⁵ Yet, as Günter Figal points out, Nietzsche's rhetoric also invites us to associate the Apolline drive with a certain kind of forgetting.¹⁶ He speaks of the Apolline as a kind of "naivete,"¹⁷ and thus, an innocent lack of memory.¹⁸ The second *Untimely Meditation* warns of a culture deprived of creative power by an overweening memory, and, in a *Human, All Too Human* note titled "Good Memory," Nietzsche claims that "Some people never become thinkers only because their memories are too good."¹⁹ In the well-known "poets of our lives" passage in *The Gay Science*, he argues that we ought to learn from poets the skill of blinding ourselves to – we might say, forgetting – details that make things less beautiful.²⁰ In the opening sections of *Genealogy II* discussing the conditions for responsibility, Nietzsche says that there is "no hope, no pride, no *present* without forgetfulness."²¹ This is undoubtedly only a partial list of the passages suggesting the creative power of forgetting.

I raise the themes of innocence and forgetting here because, as I noted at the outset of this conclusion, they are crucial to some of Nietzsche's most memorable descriptions of the "higher history" that follows the death of God, and yet they have not been thematized in this study of the death of God as a physiological event. Indeed, it might be said that the basic story we have told of the death of God can be heard as a story of recollection. First, the body as will to power is recovered from the suppression of Christian history in Nietzsche's genealogy (see chapter 1), and this first

¹⁵ This exact word appears in association with the Dionysian artist or the Dionysian festival at KSA 1:29 and 1:41, although Nietzsche frequently speaks of a *Vergessen* that clearly involves a forgetting of the self in other places, as well.

See also the unpublished "The Dionysian Worldview [*Weltanschauung*]," KSA 1:554, 1:565, and "The Birth of Tragic Thought," KSA 1:582, for similar usages of *Selbstvergessenheit*.

¹⁶ Günter Figal, *Nietzsche: Eine philosophische Einführung*, 88-89.

¹⁷ See *The Birth of Tragedy* §3-6, but especially §3 and §4, KSA 1:37-39.

¹⁸ Lack of memory implies forgetting here because the Dionysian insight which is not remembered in purely Apolline art has already occurred in Greece at the time of the Apollinian stages of Greek art.

¹⁹ KSA 2:430.

²⁰ *The Gay Science* §299, KSA 3:538.

²¹ *Genealogy II.1*, KSA 5:292.

recollection ultimately paves the way for a deeper recollection, the indirect recollection of the Dionysian Becoming out of which all bodying emerges. This emphasis on memory corresponds to the comparative passivity of Ariadne, the anti-heroic champion of a certain “higher history,” who is always at the mercy of Dionysus, whom she engages indirectly via the “guiding thread” of the body. But how does this picture relate to the new forgetting, new innocence, new creativity, and new freedom which is often spoken of in connection with this higher history? We do not want to end up with a narrative that obscures or suppresses the fact that the post-death-of-God era often appears, in Nietzsche’s writing, as one of unprecedented possibilities.

I would like to suggest that the forgetfully creative future of “open seas” is not distinct from, but dependent upon, the new possibilities of remembering that open up with the death of God.²² We can begin to see how this is by considering the child of *Zarathustra*’s “Three Metamorphoses.” The playful child is “a game” and “a holy affirmation” in part because it is a “forgetting.” What must be forgotten is identified in the description of the previous “metamorphosis,” the lion. The lion does battle with the “great dragon” named “*Du-sollst*,” “Thou-shalt,” on whose scales shine “values, thousands of years old.”²³ The dragon, who appears to represent Judeo-Christian morality, claims that “all the value of things” glistens on its body.²⁴ The word “value,” here, is importantly singular, a rarity in the Nietzsche text. The unity hereby imparted to “all the value of things” is reflected in the fact that there is only one dragon: “all the value of things” are held on a single body. “All value was already created,” says the dragon, “and all created values am I.”²⁵ The Christian past which the lion must overcome, then, is an era of

²² KSA 3:574.

²³ KSA 4:30.

²⁴ KSA 4:30.

²⁵ KSA 4:30.

values that allows only one code of valuation. Since this code of valuation has already been created, the dragon does not admit the possibility of the creation of new values.

Even if it were not the case that the Christian past is represented as the suppression of the body very shortly after “On the Three Metamorphoses,”²⁶ we could say, based on what we have seen in this dissertation, that Nietzsche’s own leonine confrontation with Christian values is a remembering of those values as physiological manifestations. The *Genealogy* describes how the enervation of the body leads to the rejection of the body in ascetic Christianity; *Antichrist* narrates Paul’s suppression of the body in the Bible (chapter 1). Accordingly, two chapters later, Zarathustra says that “It was the body that despaired of the body” and created “the afterworldly.”²⁷ The study of Christianity is the study of a culture in which only one specific configuration of the drives came to be allowable. Christianity thus serves as an epochally specific unity of the body. Accordingly, the death of God is the death of this unity. Didier Franck says, “The love of God, in both senses of the genitive [the love given to God and the love God gives], is the bond of the body, while the death of God is its dissolution.”²⁸

The “forgetting” of this unity or bond is what is accomplished by the child, who is the “game of creation.”²⁹ Once the old modes of incorporation, the old modes of “stamping Becoming with the character of Being” as the very process of life, are recognized as subject to dissolution in the death of God, new modes of incorporation can be established. As I emphasized with Eric Blondel (and against the notion of the Nietzsche text as an unfettered “liberation of the signifier”), no real human body is ever absolutely free to found itself in incorporation in whatever way it

²⁶ See especially “On the Afterworldly” and “On the Despisers of the Body,” 2 and 3 chapters after “On the Three Metamorphoses,” respectively (KSA 4:35-41). That the believers in the dead God are the people named in the chapter titles is only made explicit in “On the Afterworldly,” but can be inferred in “On the Despisers of the Body.”

²⁷ KSA 4:36.

²⁸ Didier Franck, *Nietzsche and the Shadow of God*, 59.

²⁹ KSA 4:31.

wants: each human body, as a specific configuration of drives which are never entirely malleable, is finite in its possibilities. There is no possibility of phoenix-like, total self-creation.³⁰ This is part of what Zarathustra must learn, although perhaps never fully learns, in the transition from his exaggerated rhetoric of the “Way of the Creator” to his confrontation with the past and its “it was.”³¹ Nevertheless, Nietzsche will never stop implying that a great freedom is newly within reach with the death of God – that God’s death opens up an “open sea” of new possibilities.³² There will be a new opportunity, after the death of God, to orient our bodies in a new way.

Given these observations, I propose that we interpret the forgetfulness of the child in the following way. Contra Derrida, the child’s forgetfulness does not imply an attempt to cease to remember the fact of the Christian metaphysical past, but to disengage its imperatives, so to speak, from our muscle memory. From the second *Untimely Meditation* on, Nietzsche routinely emphasizes that knowledge and belief can be held and retained in different ways and to different degrees – that there is a difference between knowing of something and really “digesting” it in a deeper sense,³³ and between simply ceasing to endorse an ideological framework, such as Christian faith, and really freeing oneself of its influence (on this latter point, we might think of the

³⁰ Nevertheless, when Harold Bloom seeks to use Nietzsche as a foil for his own understanding of the poet’s production, he seems to go too far in emphasizing continuity in Nietzsche’s understanding of artistic production. He says,

Continuities start with the dawn, and no poet *qua* poet could afford to heed Nietzsche’s great injunction: “Try to live as though it were morning.” As poet, the epebe must try to live as though it were midnight, a suspended midnight. For the epebe’s first sensation, as newly incarnated poet, is that of *having been thrown* (Harold Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. Second Edition. Oxford University Press: New York 1997, 79).

The position at the other extreme is held by Bloom’s Yale colleague Paul de Man, who associates Nietzsche with a “literary modernity” that aspires “moments at which all anteriority vanishes, annihilated by the power of an absolute forgetting” (Paul de Man, “Literary History and Literary Modernity” in *Blindness and Insight*, 147). I disagree with this stance, as well, for reasons that should become clear below.

³¹ KSA 179-181.

³² KSA 3:574.

³³ “Modern man ultimately carries around with himself an immense quantity of undigestible stones of knowledge” (KSA 1:272).

Wissenschaftler of Genealogy III). As long as we are using the verb “to forget” in a colloquial way, physiology does not forget the fact, central to Nietzsche’s Western history, that “the body despaired of the body,” but seeks to remember this fact while unlearning, or “forgetting,” the despair – to relate itself to the historical fact of this despair in a new, different way.³⁴ This means to unlearn the drive orientations that led to the idolatries that sought to sever humanity from Becoming. This, I think, is the sense in which the child “forgets,” recovering “innocence” by reestablishing the “innocence of Becoming.” Rather than “to know and then actively to forget,” we might say that Nietzsche’s higher history “forgets, knowing.”³⁵

I have suggested that Nietzsche’s “discipleship to Dionysus” can be seen as religious in that, having declared the Christian God dead, Nietzsche reestablishes a god who warrants discipleship, but who remains incomprehensible and inaccessible to human experience. Unlike Feuerbach, Marx, and Husserl, then – thinkers whom I named in the introduction as in some sense secularizing – some kind of divine mystery remains at the center of the worldview with which Nietzsche seeks to replace Christianity. Unlike Christianity, however, Nietzsche’s Dionysianism

³⁴ As such, Vanessa Lemm’s sense that Nietzsche wants to free the human being from its “all-too-historical perspective on the past” in favor of a forgetful “artistic historiography” (Vanessa Lemm, *Nietzsche’s Animal Philosophy*, 95 and 102) seems too categorical to me. My position is that Nietzsche does crucially want to recover what can fairly (given his premises) be called historical realities, and that the cultural memory of these realities will be crucial to the vital future that the death of God makes possible for some. Referring to the animal of the beginning of the second *Untimely Meditation*, Lemm states, “The animal’s forgetfulness stands at the beginning and rebeginning of philosophy” (94). She says that “Nietzsche wants to bring back the forgetfulness of the animal” to correct for the deleterious effects of modern historical education (101).

I mention Lemm in this context in part because her sense of Nietzsche’s history seems importantly right to me in some ways: although she does not often invoke the word “physiology,” her reading of Nietzsche’s history as the history of the perpetual battle, within the human being, between animality and culture seems to in some sense be a rendering of that history as a physiological history. There appears to me to be a disconnect, though, between her rendering of Nietzsche’s own historical narrative, which (Lemm recognizes) clearly puts weight on propositional claims about what is and is not historically real, and her sense of how Nietzsche proposes we engage that history in the present. In reading into Nietzsche a call to a “forgetful” “counterhistory” (95) that treats history as an artist’s canvas, she seems to imply that Nietzsche asks us to be indifferent to the purported historical facts that he claims to give us and is himself clearly invested in.

³⁵ This interpretation should assuage Stanley Rosen’s worry about how a child’s play is not necessarily “spontaneous production.” He observes that “Without ... preparation, [children’s] action is unpredictable, haphazard, childish.” On my reading, the history being “forgotten” can in some sense serve as “preparation” for the child’s creative play, especially in the very experience of this history’s passing (Stanley Rosen, *The Mask of Enlightenment*, 83).

endorses as innocent life's constitutive, tragic departure from the divine origin. The physiological study of the multiplicity of life's ways of "stamping Becoming with the character of Being" reinforces the range of possibilities open to life and thus encourages new avenues of self-realization. To suggest that physiology "sees abysses" in all its seeing might make the abyss sound like a terminal stage of the sort of thought it proposes, but this is not the case. In remembering its originary engagement with Dionysian Becoming in incorporation, the body also comes to recognize the possibility of unlearning the drive configurations that have protected it from exposure to Becoming. In this way, the higher history that physiology embodies will be an epoch of both remembering and forgetting.

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