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## Nietzsche's imperatives.

William H. Winstead  
*University of Massachusetts Amherst*

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NIETZSCHE'S IMPERATIVES

A Dissertation Presented

by

WILLIAM H. WINSTEAD IV

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

September 2001

Political Science

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# NIETZSCHE'S IMPERATIVES

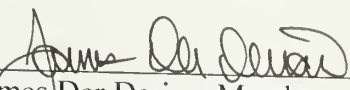
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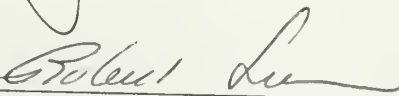
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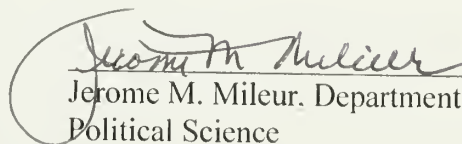
WILLIAM H. WINSTEAD IV

Approved as to style and content by:

  
Nicholas Xenos, Chair

  
James Der Derian, Member

  
Robert Sullivan, Member

  
Jerome M. Mileur, Department Head  
Political Science

ABSTRACT

NIETZSCHE'S IMPERATIVES

SEPTEMBER 2001

WILLIAM H. WINSTEAD IV, B.A. CONNECTICUT COLLEGE

Ph.D., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Nicholas Xenos

My dissertation examines three, interrelated themes in Friedrich Nietzsche's early writings. The first theme is the moral imperatives that appear in these writings. These imperatives, which are scattered throughout *The Birth of Tragedy* and the *Untimely Meditations* in seemingly haphazard fashion, articulate a rigorous, post-Kantian concept of morality designed to respond to the problems of modern nationalism and modern nihilism. In the first chapter of my dissertation, I outline the character, importance, and origin of Nietzsche's imperatives.

The second theme I examine is the relationship between Nietzsche's imperatives and his political thought. I show, through close readings of Nietzsche's early texts, that they deploy a series of moral imperatives to reformulate the tasks and meaning of modern political life. These imperatives tell the political community what ought to be done to avoid the twin dangers of nihilism and nationalism by articulating a broad principle of justice with universally valid foundations. Politics, Nietzsche argues, unlike Machiavelli or Hobbes, but like Kant, must bend its knee to necessary moral commands.

The third theme examined in my dissertation is the emergence, in Nietzsche's early writings, of a political position that he will eventually call "great politics." Great politics is Nietzsche's solution to the petty, or small, politics of modern nationalism and modern nihilism. This concept of politics shifts the realm



of political struggle away from the state and towards those values that support the state and legitimate its existence in its modern form. It achieves this end by revaluing values in response to the devaluation of values in modernity. These values are expressed in Nietzsche's imperatives.

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## CHAPTER I

### NIETZSCHE'S IMPERATIVES

How laughable, the modern *concept of nationalities* [*moderne Nationalitätenbegriff*]...and it is a clumsy wish, to want to see a nation [*Nation*] as a visible mechanical unity, equipped with a glorious governmental apparatus and military pomp.

—Nietzsche, a note to himself (1870/1871)

Between the years of 1870 and 1876, Friedrich Nietzsche, a classical philologist at the University of Basel, set down his thoughts on the world of Greek antiquity and then, turning his sights to the contemporary world, issued four blistering polemics against the newly founded German *Reich*, condemning it for its failure to escape the petty politics of European nationalism, while refusing to give up his hope that the German state he had long dreamed of might still be transformed into a political community guided by the highest moral aims and worthy of the great cultural achievements of the ancient Athenians. These thoughts, penned in Nietzsche's first two books—*The Birth of Tragedy* and the *Untimely Meditations*—are occupied with large-scale questions of politics and social life, and represent one of the earliest attempts by a modern thinker to formulate a politics appropriate to an era in which the predominant vocabulary for theorizing political life—liberalism and conservatism, left and right, revolutionary and counterrevolutionary—appear less and less capable of conceptualizing the problems posed by the period.

Nietzsche's writings from these years—in contrast to those appearing between 1878 and 1888, the final year of his authorship—are of particular interest to political philosophers, because they formulate, with great originality and foresight, theoretical solutions to the predominant pathology of modern politics—what Nietzsche calls, with prophetic foresight, the madness of nationalism—and they do so without retreating from the sphere of politics or renouncing the possibilities of communal life. In these early writings, Nietzsche still holds out the hope that modern political institutions—particularly those institutions created by the unification of the various German States into a single Empire in 1871—may be reformed and salvaged, that they may yet be saved from the

destructive forces of nationalist identity politics and made to serve ends higher than those of the accumulation of state power, the subordination of the individual to the ends of the nation, and the regulation of social conflict for the purposes of the accumulation of wealth. The same may not be said of Nietzsche's great later works—*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *The Genealogy of Morals*, and *Beyond Good and Evil* among them—and so in my study of his political thought, I concentrate on his early writings, the works of his first period, as he termed it.

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In Nietzsche's early writings—and this holds true for all his works—he addresses the problem of modern politics—the pathology of nationalism—through a genealogical analysis that traces it back to its origins in a search for its potential solution. Nationalism and the nation-state, he argues, originate in the process of secularization and the crisis in meaning that it produces in Western society. They are a response to the decline of the power of religion over social life, the eclipse of theological values, and the waning of the influence of the church in modernity. This process of secularization terminates in what Nietzsche famously describes as "the Death of God," an event that marks the onset of nihilism in the West and the devaluation of those values that have historically given life meaning and purpose. These values, Nietzsche argues—and he means first of all those theological values promoted by the various Christian Churches—provided pre-modern societies with a horizon of meaning and an explanation of life sufficiently strong to bond society together, and with their collapse in modernity, forces previously held in check are unleashed and suppressed social antagonisms reemerge, creating a political crisis requiring a new form of communal organization.

For Nietzsche, it is the *nation-state*, more than anything else, that provides this new form of organization. It steps into the void created by the declining power of the church and creates the bond necessary to hold together the inimical energies of secular society. *Nationalism*, on the other hand, as devotion to one's nation, in turn fulfills the need for spiritual meaning created by nihilism and the process of secularization, replacing ineffective religious values with newly created political values. The result, for Nietzsche, is that in modernity, the state replaces the medieval church as the predominate organizing force in



society, nationalism becomes the dominant creed orienting the political community, and one set of idols—the symbols and rituals of the church—is replaced by another—those of the nation-state. In the end, Nietzsche tells us, Christian theology gives way to a political theology of the state, and citizens rediscover life's meaning and purpose in a devotion to the nation-state.

This genealogy of the nation-state, which is articulated in *The Birth of Tragedy*, the *Untimely Meditations*, and in writings from the period which he did not publish, is carried out as part of Nietzsche's critical assault on the theological pretensions of the German *Reich* founded by Otto von Bismarck in 1871 through his extraordinary military and political maneuvering with France and the South German States. Nietzsche, who at one point welcomed the creation of a German state, even longed for it, going so far as to volunteer to serve in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871 in an effort to advance the cause of German unification, quickly became the *Reich's* sternest critic after the founding of the Second Empire devolved into grotesque self-satisfaction and a thoroughgoing failure to realize the political, cultural, and educational possibilities created by the unification of the long independent German states. It is these possibilities that Nietzsche's early writings articulate in opposition to the ideology and theology of the state that quickly took hold of most Germans' minds after their rapid defeat of the French and their sudden incorporation into a unified political community in 1871. Along with Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, the *Untimely Meditations* attempt to conceptualize how those possibilities—justice, morality, and freedom, among them—could be realized in Germany and thereby legitimate its existence independently of the state and free from all remnants of theology. Taken together, these two books work to formulate a new vision of political life, suited to modern conditions, in which the fullest flowering of life, exemplified for Nietzsche by the classical Greeks of Periclean Athens, could once again be realized.

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Scholars are largely divided on what this new vision of political life looks like. One group, emphasizing Nietzsche's concept of "perspectivism," believes that it runs along a horizontal axis, as liberal societies do, in which individuals evaluate the world from their own perspectives, creating their own systems of value independently of any constraining

authority, without an ultimate ground for their decisions beyond their own power to evaluate.<sup>1</sup> According to this view, at once pluralistic, postmodern, and leftist in its American form, Nietzsche's importance for political life lies in his transformation of the negating, relativizing power of Western nihilism into a positive, creative force, capable of unmasking illegitimate forms of authority by encouraging individuals to create themselves and their interpretations of the world in accordance with their own needs and ends. This Nietzsche, the perspectival Nietzsche, is the advocate of a radical, existential individualism, a herald of the micro-politics of self-creation, who welcomes the death of God and the loss of absolute standards of value as an unparalleled opportunity for genuine freedom, beyond the horizons created by the imperatives of the nation-state and independently of the constraints imposed by conventional moralities.

Another group of scholars, approaching Nietzsche from the right, locate his political importance not in his advocacy of a pluralistic perspectivism, but in his call to revalue values in the wake of nihilism and establish a new table of virtues that would once again be capable of guiding collective life towards a greater common good.<sup>2</sup> These political philosophers, taking their cue from the late Allen Bloom, see liberal interpretations of Nietzsche's thought as an unwarranted over-evaluation of the importance he assigns to self-creation and relativistic value creation. They emphasize instead Nietzsche's criticisms of liberalism and his call for a new aristocracy of philosophers who would legislate values capable of guiding society beyond the contingent and unproductive seas of pluralism. Their interpretation of Nietzsche's future political community runs along a vertical axis, which separates the more virtuous from the less virtuous, the noble from the base, the master from the slave. They emphasize, with as much justification as Nietzsche's more liberal interpreters, the German philosopher's impatience with liberal individualism and its

<sup>1</sup> This interpretation is best formulated in the works of William Connolly and Bonnie Honig. See, for example, William Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> This interpretation is best formulated in the works of Peter Berkowitz and Bruce Detwiler. See, for example, Peter Berkowitz, *Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).



tendency to devolve into a complacent mediocrity which undervalues humanity's greatest accomplishments and future possibilities.

Both of these interpretations of Nietzsche's response to nihilism and the process of secularization have much to offer. I mention them, however, in order to emphasize their one-sided nature. In my dissertation, I show that Nietzsche's contribution to political thought lies less in his advocacy of a liberal relativism or an aristocratic conservatism, than in an attempt to think the possibility of both together. This possibility, I believe, is realized most perfectly in Nietzsche's early writings, where he formulates the possibility of a political community that would give full reign to the development of the fullest and most differentiated forms of individualism without falling into the abyss of an indifferent, and ultimately dangerous, relativism. In these works, Nietzsche attempts to overcome the dichotomy of liberalism and conservatism in order to theorize a form of community that would at once advance the cause of the individual and simultaneously promote the common good of society. Nietzsche believed that he had uncovered this possibility in the Greek *polis*, and in his critiques of the German state, formulated in *The Birth of Tragedy* and his four *Untimely Meditations*, he tried to show how some of the virtues of classical Athens could be realized in the modern world.

Nietzsche's strategy in these works—in the *Untimely Meditations* and in his study of Greek tragedy, *The Birth of Tragedy*—is essentially *moral*. At first sight, this might appear paradoxical, or even false. Nietzsche himself declared that he was the first immoralist of the West, and in his *Genealogy of Morals*, he subjects the value of the moral values "good" and "evil" to a critical revaluation which reveals their origin to lie less in a solid and authoritative foundation than the immoral needs and interests of individuals and society. Rather than simply constituting an unbridled assault on the principles of morality, however, Nietzsche's genealogical revaluation of morality is carried out in the service of morality, in the service of a more perfect and more rigorous morality, something perhaps best characterized as a meta-morality, or a morality of morality. Far from asserting that we should give up morality and feel free to kill, steal, and commit crimes of all kinds, Nietzsche's "assault" on morality aims at its perfection and refinement, a task necessitated

by the emergence of nihilism itself, which deprives Judeo-Christian morality of its theological foundations.

What, then, does Nietzsche's morality look like, and what role does it play in political life? Nietzsche's morality, as a response to nihilism and a rejection of nationalism, takes the form of a series of imperatives, scattered throughout his works, that tell what ought to be done. They are not hypothetical imperatives, but categorical imperatives, descendants of Kant's critical morality. Hypothetical imperatives tell what ought to be done in order to achieve something else. They are expeditious and prudential, matters of efficiency, utility, and pragmatic interest: Do "x" to achieve "y." Categorical imperatives, by contrast are unconditional. They tell what ought to be done irrespective of the particular circumstances or desired ends. They simply articulate universal laws that command what must be done, no matter what.

Nietzsche's imperatives look nothing like Kant's. Their content is different, and they are derived from different sources. But Nietzsche's morality is nevertheless a descendent of Kant's.<sup>3</sup> Nietzsche acknowledges his debt to Kant in many places and in many ways, and it is worth noting some of them to understand the nature of his imperatives and their originality. The most obvious way in which Nietzsche acknowledged this debt was by choosing to write his dissertation on Kant's third critique, the *Critique of Judgement*. Nietzsche never finished this dissertation, but the signs of that project appear in his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*. Nietzsche himself acknowledges that he used a Kantian framework in that work to interpret the logic of Greek tragedy and its importance to the political life of Athens. And Nietzsche also acknowledges that his *Untimely Meditations* owe something to Kant. In a Preface to that work written in 1885, nearly 10

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<sup>3</sup> Two important essays examine the concept of the imperative in Nietzsche's writings and their relationship to Kant: Werner Hamacher's "The Promise of Interpretation: Reflections on the Hermeneutical Imperative in Kant and Nietzsche," and Jean-Luc Nancy's "'Our Probity!' On Truth in the Moral Sense in Nietzsche." Both may be found in *Looking After Nietzsche*, ed. L.A. Rickels (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

years after its completion, he tells us that the *Meditations* furthered Kant's legacy by creating new "categorical imperatives" suitable for the post-Kantian era.<sup>4</sup>

I mention these examples of Kant's importance to Nietzsche because Nietzsche's imperatives are to a great extent a product of, and shaped by, his engagement with the critical philosopher. Why is this so? Kant shows us that human reason is finite, limited, and imperfect, fundamentally incapable of fathoming ultimate reality. This discovery had a profound effect on Nietzsche, and he mentions the difficulties it poses for thinking about all aspects of human existence in many places. More than anything else, it revealed to Nietzsche the true ground and source of nihilism in modernity—our inability to truly understand our world and the impossibility of perfectly grounding our moral, political, and epistemological judgements in any of the traditional sources: Reason, revelation, or nature. Nietzsche treats this discovery, however, like the death of god itself, as an opportunity rather than a liability. He sees it as a chance, perhaps the first chance in Western civilization, to get behind conventional morality and consider what good might still remain open now that the traditional sources of authority—God, reason, and nature—have been closed off.

It is this morality and good that Nietzsche's categorical imperatives articulate. They express the one remaining authority that Nietzsche believes to still exist in a secular age beset by the imperfections of human reason. This authority, however, is a negative, rather than a positive, authority, and Nietzsche derives it, in a manner reminiscent of some of Kant's deductions in his critiques, from the limits of human reason and the essential unknowability of human nature, the nature of the world, and the nature of God. The *limits* of human reason, Nietzsche believes, act to *subordinate* us to the authority of what it cannot know. This authority acts as a check on or a limit to all authoritative delimitations of humanity, be they those articulated by a state, a people, or an individual. As I have said, this authority is purely negative, and yet it suffices for Nietzsche to command specific moral acts.

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<sup>4</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), vol. 11, 670.



I'll give some examples from Nietzsche's texts to concretize my discussion and show how this is possible. First, an example from Nietzsche's best known *Untimely Meditation*, his second, "On the Use and Abuse of History for Life." In this essay, Nietzsche is concerned with showing how our preoccupation with history in modernity can serve the political community by expanding our conception of humanity beyond the confines of national characteristics. He writes about history in this essay, because he believes that the rise of historicism in modernity has produced a debilitating relativism which rightly exposes our cherished beliefs to be the contingent effects of particular cultures and times, but which nevertheless fails to mobilize our knowledge of the great deeds of the past to advance the cause of humanity and individual self-cultivation. In the final section of the meditation he recalls a categorical imperative of the past which would advance the cause of humanity and the individual alike, were it only heeded. This categorical imperative is the simple command which the Greeks inscribed in their temple at Delphi: "Know thyself." For Nietzsche, the command to "know thyself" is a categorical imperative necessitated by the rise of historicism and its exposure of the contingent nature of our values and beliefs. Modern historicism, like Kant's critique of reason and the death of God, teach us that we are not who we thought we were, that we must begin anew the now interminable process of getting to know ourselves. Only by heeding this categorical imperative, Nietzsche believes, may we, like the Greeks of classical antiquity, once again take possession of ourselves and achieve a freedom worthy of the name.

Nietzsche announces another, analogous imperative in this same meditation. This one concerns not the individual but the collective. It says, "Create for yourselves the concept of a 'people': You can never conceive it to be noble and lofty enough." This imperative compliments the Delphic command to know yourself by expanding it to the political community as a whole. It is necessitated, like the Delphic command, by our inability to know how great a people could be or what a people should properly be. Nietzsche offers it as an alternative to the German people's belief that greatness and nobility is achieved through the achievement of a state. For him, it is necessary for a people to aspire instead to the highest possible accomplishment, for anything less, he argues, does an injustice to the concept of a people. In fact, both of Nietzsche's imperatives—the one for

the collective, the other for the individual—are motivated by a concern for justice, and this holds true for his other imperatives as well.

Nietzsche's concept of justice differs from most concepts of justice. It is not concerned with the distribution of resources within a society or with retribution or the administration of the law, though it remains in contact with these conceptions through its difference from them. Nietzsche's concept of justice is, like Plato's and the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus, who he often cites, an ontological concept. Being just, for Nietzsche, means doing justice to reality. It means recognizing how things are, and respecting them rather than concealing them behind convention or mendacity. Justice is, therefore, like the authority Nietzsche derives his categorical imperatives from, a largely negative concept. Because we can never know perfectly how things are, because we can never know with the certainty of good conscience that we have done justice to something or someone, because we can never be sure we have properly understood and responded to events and persons in the right way, we always risk, in our actions and our thoughts, being unjust.

Nietzsche sees this concept of justice at work in Greek tragedy, where it plays an important role in guiding the course of many dramas, particularly those of Aeschylus and Sophocles. What these dramas reveal about the human condition, in all its dimensions, Nietzsche believes, is the reality of human hubris. The finitude and imperfections of humanity cause it to be hubristic, however good its intentions. Without God, reason, or nature to perfectly guide us, we inevitably fall prey to hubris, and the suffering that we experience from our imperfect deeds and mortal life, is the administration of justice. Greek tragedy, for Nietzsche, teaches us that we can never be perfectly just, and it thereby teaches us that the attempt to be just, which Nietzsche's categorical imperatives command, requires the heroic fortitude of an Oedipus or a Prometheus. We must, like Oedipus, try to get to the bottom of things and do justice to ourselves, the world, and those we live with, and although we must also expect this attempt to fail, anything less, Nietzsche argues, would be a form of injustice.

The name for this sort of ethical attitude and the categorical imperatives that express it is "perfectionism." Greek tragedy, like the great examples of historical deeds that

Nietzsche focuses on in his second *Untimely Meditation*, compels us to perfect ourselves and promote the perfection of those we live with, our people, our community, and ultimately, humanity itself. Anything else, for Nietzsche, would do an injustice to ourselves, our people, and our humanity. Nietzsche seems to have derived his moral perfectionism from Aristotle, whose *Politics* he studied in preparation for writing *The Birth of Tragedy*. Just as Aristotle claims that the end of life is the good life, and that the good life is the best, most perfect life, so too does Nietzsche assert, in all of writings, that the best life is the most perfected life, the life, as he puts it, that is spacious and multiple, rich and diverse, expansive and inclusive.

Nietzsche's belief that perfectionism can be our only moral position in a secular age without absolutes, that it constitutes the highest good of individual and collective life, explains why his new vision of political community is not quite the same as that of a pluralistic, postmodern liberalism. Nietzsche's perfectionism prevents him from being a straightforward advocate of value pluralism, because he values, as should already be clear, some things more than others. His imperatives—his "oughts" or values—command the very highest accomplishment. They express a concept of justice that always demands more—more self-knowledge, a higher concept of a people, a more perfect way of life. Once the absolutes of God, reason, and nature are swept away and rendered never perfectly knowable, we are placed in a position in which, Nietzsche believes, we must strive for an ever more perfect form of individual and collective life, should we wish to be just. Rather than advocating a straightforward value pluralism, then, Nietzsche believes that the value of a perspective on the world increases as that perspective itself increases and becomes broader, deeper, richer, and ultimately more universal. A broader perspective is, for him, a more valuable and more just perspective. Perspectives are unavoidable, but differences exist between perspectives, and these differences have different values. Nietzsche's morality is therefore a morality that commands us to refine our perspectives by striving for self-perfection and self-overcoming, not for the sake of accruing power, but in order to increase our capacity for justice, responsibility, and the good life.

Nietzsche's advocacy of moral perfectionism also explains why he should not be considered simply a partisan of an aristocratic conservatism. To be sure, there is an



aristocratic element to his morality, but the aristocratic excellence which he wishes to substitute for myopic nationalism is an excellence available to all. Indeed, one reason why Nietzsche's early works are valuable, is because they articulate this all-inclusive, endlessly available excellence more clearly than his other writings, since his concern in these first works is with the political community as a whole, and not simple with the "free spirit" who he latter identifies as his primary audience. In his third *Untimely Meditation*, for example, which is concerned to prove that the end of humanity is not the state, as Hegel had argued, but the perfection of individual and collective life, Nietzsche tells us that our task is to become a genius and help others to become geniuses. The genius is, as the word's etymology shows, the one who generates, the one who is involved in the process of genesis, of creating and advancing the cause of humanity. Everyone, Nietzsche believes, has this capacity, and by calling on everyone to become geniuses, he advances a position which is very far from promoting the cause of a few, conservative, aristocrats, who revalue values for the rest of us.

It is tempting to describe Nietzsche's vision of political community in his first writings as aristocratic democracy. This concept of politics would not be a concept that he himself speaks of during this period, but it might be the best way to get at what he is after. That is, it might best do justice to his intentions in *The Birth of Tragedy*, the *Untimely Meditations*, and in the other writings from this period that articulate his political thought. For these writings continually hold out the hope that a political community could collectively elevate itself beyond the ends of the nation-state and overcome nihilism through their self-perfection and ennoblement. The categorical imperatives announced in these works tell what ought to be done to achieve this, and Nietzsche intends them for the whole of the *demos*. Whether or not this adds up to a concept of democracy, perhaps depends on one's perspective. I believe, however, that his works can help us to theorize the possibility of a non-nationalistic form of political community, capable of confronting the disorienting effects of nihilism and promoting the highest excellences of the *demos*.



## CHAPTER II

### "THE LAW OF ETERNAL JUSTICE": *THE BIRTH OF TRAGEDY*

The relationship of the Dionysian and the Apollinian is recognizable in every form of the state [*Staatsform*]....

—Nietzsche, a note to himself

#### Aesthetics and Politics

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche investigates the effects of aesthetics on politics and of politics on aesthetics.<sup>1</sup> His purpose is twofold. On the one hand, art's effect on politics is to be presented through a genealogical investigation of Greek tragedy which discloses why, in the classical *polis*, "tragedy and the state [*Staat*] are bound together at their foundations [*in ihren Fundamenten verwachsen sind*]" (§23).<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, Nietzsche presents the structural transformations which tragedy undergoes as it becomes an object of philosophical, theoretical, and political speculation in order to awaken modernity to the disastrous consequences resulting from the politicization of art and the aestheticization of politics. Nietzsche's intentions are so far removed from efforts to turn the aesthetic into an all encompassing ideology—and no charge has been leveled against

<sup>1</sup> Major discussions of *The Birth of Tragedy* have not done justice to these basic dimensions of Nietzsche's argument. John Sallis's otherwise close reading of the book pays no attention to it (see *Crossings: Nietzsche and the Space of Tragedy* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991]); M. S. Silk and J. P. Stern almost entirely avoid it in their "encyclopedic" discussion of the work (see *Nietzsche on Tragedy* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984]); Peter Sloterdijk makes more headway, but remains far from the book's fundamental problems (see *Thinker on Stage: Nietzsche's Materialism*, trans. Jamie Owen Daniel [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989]); Barbara von Reibnitz's excellent "commentary" on *The Birth of Tragedy* pays attention to questions of aesthetics and politics, but only comments on the first twelve of the book's twenty-five sections (see *Ein Kommentar zu Friedrich Nietzsche "Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik" (Kap.1-12)* [Stuttgart und Weimar, 1992]).

<sup>2</sup> Translations of Nietzsche's texts are my own. All references to *The Birth of Tragedy* will appear in the body of the text. In order to facilitate use of both the German text and English translations, references will cite the section numbers in Nietzsche's text. Translations are from the *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), I, 9-165. The unfortunate state of English translations has been often noted. For an instructive reading of Walter Kaufmann's "ideological misreading" of *The Birth of Tragedy*—his mistranslation—see Andrzej Warminski, *Readings in Interpretation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1987), xlv-xlv.

Nietzsche's writings with more frequency — that *The Birth of Tragedy* accomplishes the very opposite: It offers an elaborate critique of the ideology of the aesthetic and ruthlessly polemicizes against the various political ideologies it enables.<sup>3</sup> And it announces its intention to do so on the first page of the "Foreword to Richard Wagner." There Nietzsche places an "aesthetic problem [*ästhetisches Problem*]" and a "German problem [*deutschen Problem*]" at the center of his investigations, and although each of these problems results from a certain conflation of politics and aesthetics, he insists that resolving them depends upon more than simply distinguishing between the playful values of the aesthetic and the more serious problems of politics. Treating an "aesthetic problem" seriously requires more than the construction of antitheses such as "patriotic excitement and aesthetic revelry" or "courageous seriousness and cheerful play." In the "Foreword to Richard Wagner," Nietzsche tells his readers that the "aesthetic problem" he investigates is so little opposed to politics that it lies "right in the middle" of "German hopes":

You will recall that I collected these thoughts together during the same period when your marvelous *Festschrift* on Beethoven came into being, that is, during the terrors and sublimities [*Schrecken und Erhabenheiten*] of the war that had just broken out. Yet, as regards this collection, anyone would be mistaken who should think of the antithesis between patriotic excitement and aesthetic revelry, of courageous seriousness and cheerful play: Rather, to their astonishment, it would become clear to them, with a real reading of this writing [*einem wirklichen Lesen dieser Schrift*], what a serious German problem we are treating—one placed by us right in the middle of German hopes, as vortex and turning point. But perhaps it will be simply offensive for just these readers to see an aesthetic problem taken so seriously, in case they are namely in a state to recognize in art nothing more than a cheerful sideline, a readily dispensable ringing of bells accompanying the "seriousness of existence [*Ernst des Daseins*]": As if no one knew what

<sup>3</sup> For interpretations of Nietzsche which charge him with aestheticism, see Gert Sautermeister, "Zur Grundlegung des Ästhetizismus bei Nietzsche. Dialektik, Metaphysik und Politik in der 'Geburt der Tragödie'," in *Naturalismus/Ästhetizismus*, ed. Christa Bürger, Peter Bürger, and Jochen Schulte-Sasse (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), 224-243; Henning Ottmann, "Nietzsches Politische Philosophie. Versuche in Postmoderner Politik," in *Bayreuther Nietzsche-Kolloquium* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989), 107-129; Thomas Heilke, *Nietzsche's Tragic Regime: Culture, Aesthetic, and Political Education* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998); Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 1987), 83-105; Josef Chytrý, *The Aesthetic State: A Quest in Modern German Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 318-358; Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1985); Nicholas Martin, *Nietzsche and Schiller: Untimely Aesthetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

was involved in this contrast with such a "seriousness of existence."  
("Foreword to Richard Wagner")

Taking an "aesthetic problem" seriously may not only not be inconsistent with problems of politics; under certain conditions it may be the only way to take the problems they pose seriously. This is never truer than when politics becomes something more than just rational calculation, the implementation of a program, a technique for actualizing a theory, or a procedural means for realizing the law. Under these circumstances, politics is not simply rational, programmatic, technical, or procedural. Nor is it only a matter of employing abstract concepts, enforcing universal values, or according with timeless truths. Rather, problems of aesthetics must be taken seriously once politics is recognized for what it always will have been—ineluctably sensational and irrevocably worldly. Politics and aesthetics, the "German problem" and the "aesthetic problem," are united in their inability to dissociate themselves from the sensuous life of the body, from its feelings, passions, moods, and emotions, from its drives and instincts, from, in short, the dimension of life which, in contrast to the timeless universality of essences, the term "existential" was designed to capture.<sup>4</sup> This dimension, which Nietzsche identifies in the "Foreword" with the word "existence [*Dasein*]," is the sphere of the aesthetic and the political, and to this extent, the aesthetic is already political. Not simply because it shares the sphere of sensibility with politics, but because it marks the rebellion of the material world against the tyranny of theory, the despotism of the philosophers, and the abstractions of the supersensible. The philosophers and their theories—the whole phenomenon of "Socratism" which Nietzsche struggles with throughout *The Birth of Tragedy*—have always attempted to suppress this rebellion of the sensuous, irrational, contingent, non-conceptual, and non-programmable. Problems of aesthetics, then, are indissociable from problems of politics to the extent that the contingency of sentiment constantly threatens to upset the rule of reason and destabilize the order of the *polis*. The philosophers' response to this unstable situation has always been to provide a theory of the aesthetic—what Aristotle called a "poetics"—capable of determining the types of art and forms of feeling which accord with the moral ends of the *polis*. Once these theories are in place and put into

<sup>4</sup> On aesthetics and the realm of sensibility, see Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. 1 (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1989), 99-100.



practice, rationalized works of art can be produced and a program of aesthetic education instituted. However much these programs may vary, they all attempt to make the irrational rational and the contingent necessary, and in each case they do so through the habitual exposure of the young to works of art whose effects ought to harmonize their souls in accordance with the moral ends of the *polis*.

No better example of these efforts to politicize art—no better example of Soeratism—exists than the one which serves as Nietzsche's point of departure in *The Birth of Tragedy*. This point of departure—the "aesthetic problem"—is announced on the book's first page, but not until its twenty-second section is the philosopher named who is responsible for placing it at the center of debates on tragedy: Aristotle. And only then does Nietzsche finally identify the aesthetic phenomenon which Aristotle made the central problem for all future investigations of tragedy: Catharsis. Since Aristotle's *Poetics*, every interpretation of tragedy has had to grapple with the problem of tragedy's *cathartic effect*, with tragedy's strange ability to produce a feeling of pleasure in its audience through the representation of painful, pitiable, and even terrifying events.<sup>5</sup> And every interpretation of tragedy has had to decide upon this feeling's significance. These, then, are the problems which define Nietzsche's "aesthetic problem." But they are not simply a problem of aesthetics. Aristotle's first and longest presentation of catharsis takes place in the *Politics*.<sup>6</sup> Catharsis is a political problem—and this is the formulation which Nietzsche adopts—because *the sound of music affects the polis*. Indeed, the different forms of sound—the different melodies—affect the *polis* in different ways. According to the typology laid out in the *Politics* and put into play in *The Birth of Tragedy*, the only form of music suitable for purposes of rational education—for training citizens to experience pain and pleasure in the right way—is one which makes the souls of the young moderate,

<sup>5</sup> For Aristotle's discussion of catharsis, see *Poetics*, trans. Richard Janko (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 17-18 (53b 1-14).

<sup>6</sup> For Nietzsche's comments on the role of catharsis in the *Politics*, see *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. VII (notes from the period 1869-1874), 196, 220, 285. For a general discussion of Nietzsche's interpretation of Aristotle's theory of catharsis, see Hedwig Wingler, "Aristotle in the Thought of Nietzsche and Thomas Aquinas," in *Studies in Nietzsche and the Classical Tradition*, ed. James O'Flaherty, Timothy Sellner, Robert Helm (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976), 33-54.



courageous, and balanced, and the ability to create this effect, Aristotle says, makes this type of music an indispensable instrument of education for the virtuous *polis*. Other melodies, however—and it is these which attract Nietzsche's attention—have the very opposite effect: That of catharsis. Rather than attuning the soul to a moderate temperament, cathartic melodies produce enthusiasm (*enthousiasmós*) and an orgiastic (*orgiastikós*) feeling of inspiration. When these melodies conclude, Aristotle says, the effect is a "pleasant feeling of release." In tragedy, this cathartic feeling of release is experienced as joy—"harmless joy."<sup>7</sup> Such joy, however, has no ethical value, so these melodies must be excluded from the process of education and confined to the theater. According to the *Politics*, then, catharsis belongs in the theater and nowhere else. Tragedy in turn becomes an instrument for the cathartic purification of the emotions, while Aristotle's theory of tragedy turns the theater into a site where the pathologies of the *polis* can be safely purged and immoderate and excessive emotions—fear and pity are the two with which Aristotle is most concerned—harmlessly released. In the end, catharsis is politicized therapy, rudimentary psychoanalysis, or, as Aristotle himself says, a "medical treatment" for the body politics.<sup>8</sup>

Nietzsche already indicates how close he is to Aristotle's concept of catharsis in the "Foreword to Richard Wagner." Of the two events referred to there—"I collected these thoughts together during the same period when your [Wagner's] marvelous *Festschrift* on Beethoven came into being, that is, during the terrors and sublimities [*Schrecken und Erhabenheiten*] of the war that had just broken out"—of these two events, both, in their own way, are bound up with problems of the emotions and their excesses, and both, in their own way, are the subject of Nietzsche's book. Indeed, the two feelings which Nietzsche associates with the Franco-Prussian War—the terrifying and the sublime—originate in the failed efforts to comprehend a magnitude so excessive that the resulting emotions are themselves pure expressions of excess. It is all the more remarkable, then, that Nietzsche should refer to Wagner's *Festschrift* on Beethoven and the terrors and

<sup>7</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), 240 (1342a 14-15).

<sup>8</sup> *Politics*, 240 (1342a 10).

sublimities of the Franco-Prussian War in one and the same sentence, for the *Festschrift* has no other aim than to demonstrate music's properly sublime—and not at all beautiful—character.<sup>9</sup> And by suggesting that the Franco-Prussian War and Wagner's theory of music are united in the similarity of their effects, Nietzsche indicates just how close he is to Aristotle's theory of catharsis. For according to that theory, the structure of catharsis is itself homologous, even, as has often been remarked, homeopathic: Fear and pity are purged by means of fear and pity. Tragedy's fearful and pitiable events inspire fear and pity in the audience, and when the drama ends, these emotions are relieved. Yet Nietzsche departs from Aristotle's theory of tragedy—and this departure lies at the root of each of his criticisms of Aristotle in *The Birth of Tragedy*—when he refers not to the emotions of fear and pity but to the "sublimities of the war" and to a text on the sublimity of music. Rather than following Aristotle's understanding of tragic catharsis as a homeopathic remedy for those members of the *polis* who are prone to being swayed from the virtuous middle by excessive emotions, Nietzsche's "Foreword" suggests that tragic catharsis, achieved by a sublime, ecstatic form of music, is a necessary remedy and cure for a people subjected to the sublime excesses of war.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Nietzsche seems to suggest that the "German problem" has its origin in nothing other than the passionate excesses of war, in a violence and terror whose magnitude renders them so incomprehensible, so meaningless, senseless, and lacking in reason, that the pathos of politics gives way to the apathy and resignation which Schopenhauer counseled in the face of the Will's insatiable desire. And although Nietzsche's letters from this period clearly indicate that he was "beginning to lose sympathy with the present German war of conquest" for precisely these reasons, he waits until the twenty-first section of *The Birth of Tragedy* to openly thematize the various suggestions first outlined in the "Foreword." Only then does he speak of tragedy's relationship to war, and only then is its relationship to politics—even to the

<sup>9</sup> Richard Wagner, "Beethoven," in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, vol. V, trans. William Ashton Ellis (New York: Broude Brothers, 1966), 77, 93, 103.

<sup>10</sup> This was first of all the case for Nietzsche, who served in the Franco-Prussian War as a medical orderly. He wrote "The Dionysian Worldview" for this reason, and as his letters make clear, the war was a horrifying experience for which he was entirely unprepared. See his letter of 23 November, 1879 to Erwin Rhode, in *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. Christopher Middleton (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), 69-71.

political itself—addressed. There, as the book's finale gets under way, Nietzsche provides a description of tragedy's effect on politics which begins to explain why he would place an "aesthetic problem" "right in the middle of German hopes":

we can learn only from the Greeks what an almost miraculous sudden awakening of tragedy means for the innermost ground of the life of a people [*den innersten Lebensgrund eines Volkes*]. It is the people of the tragic mysteries that fight the battles against the Persians; and the people that fought these wars in turn needs tragedy as a necessary drink of recovery. Who would have supposed that precisely these people, after having been agitated to their very core [*bis in's Innerste*] for several generations by the Dionysian demon, should still have possessed such a uniformly vigorous outpouring of the simplest political feeling [*einfachsten politischen Gefühls*].... (§21)

The analogy Nietzsche constructs here is unmistakable: Just as tragedy enabled the Greeks to recover their feeling for the political, even after the interminable carnage of the Persian Wars, so too would a rebirth of tragedy enable the Germans to recover their feeling for the political after the "terrors and sublimities" of the Franco-Prussian War. But Nietzsche goes still further, finding in the tragic Greeks a feeling for the political and a passion for politics which is so elemental and original that it must not only be judged superlative—"the simplest political feeling [*des einfachsten politischen Gefühls*]"—but the very foundation for politics as such: It makes the tragic Greeks "the 'political men as such' [*die 'politischen Menschen an sich'*]." <sup>11</sup> Here again, Nietzsche owes something to Aristotle. As *The Birth of Tragedy* unfolds, it becomes ever clearer that this outstanding "political feeling" and these outstanding "political men" are the result of a sensibility and a passion for politics which is moderate rather than excessive, and this emphasis on the moderate, the medium, and the mean cannot help but recall the importance which Aristotle's *Politics* assigns to these values. <sup>12</sup> Indeed, just as Aristotle gives tragedy a place in the *polis* because its cathartic purging of the passions returns it to a state of moderation, so too does Nietzsche insist that the moderating effects of tragedy are essential if a people's passion for politics is not to become immoderate, unhealthy, and even pathological.

<sup>11</sup> "Der griechische Staat," in *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. I, 771.

<sup>12</sup> On Nietzsche's readings of Aristotle's *Politics*, see to Chytry, *The Aesthetic State*, 326.



Immoderation, however, results not only from the suspension of the will in the face of the sublime and terrifying excesses of war. At the other extreme lies the danger of total politicization, of a rampant nationalism or a nationalist enthusiasm whose excessiveness can be no less deadly. In contrast to the threat of political nihilism posed by the Franco-Prussian War, the danger which political nationalism poses to "German hopes" has its origins in the "patriotic excitement" which swept across Germany after Bismarck's trouncing of the French forces.<sup>13</sup> This danger is not one of a deadly and annihilating violation of the borders of the state and its soldiers. The danger posed by "patriotic excitement" comes from the opposite extreme: The establishment of the borders of the nation and the identity of its citizens. This danger arises the moment a state is founded, and in Germany this moment—the *Reichsgründung*—came with the conclusion of the war and the subsequent unification of northern and southern Germany under the banner of a single state: *Deutschland*.

With the conclusion of the war and the subsequent founding of the German nation, then, the question of the political arises. Or rather, the question of the "simplest political feeling" arises. For "the political" is neither an entity nor a concept nor an idea; it is, Nietzsche says, a feeling. But he just as quickly admits the insufficiency of this formulation when he goes on to speak of a "political drive [*politischen Triebe*]" and even a "political instinct [*politischen Instinkte*]" (§21). Whatever their differences, each of these manifestations of the political is united in its resistance to the rational elucidation of political life and its theoretical systematization. Not without reason, then, does Nietzsche fail to provide a theory of the political or a political theory in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Indeed, to the consternation of so many readers, he never does write a systematic treatise on politics.<sup>14</sup> The political is too variant and too irrational to allow for its perfect translation into the medium of the concept. These excesses may save it from being fully programmed by philosopher-kings and Socratic theoreticians, but it also makes it into an enormous

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of Nietzsche's views on nationalism, see Carol Diethe, "Nietzsche and Nationalism," *History of European Ideas*, vol. 14, no. 2 (March, 1992), 227-234.

<sup>14</sup> For an explanation of this failure, see Bonnie Honig, "Nietzsche and the Recovery of Responsibility," in *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 73-75.



problem—a "serious German problem," indeed, a problem for modernity as a whole. And since the problem of excess, of too much or too little, of pathology or apathy, of nationalism or nihilism—since this problem is impossible to resolve theoretically, the task of realizing that simplest of political feelings must be approached some other way.

This other way, of course, leads Nietzsche back to the tragic Greeks. It is, Nietzsche says, "only from the Greeks" that we can learn what "tragedy means for the innermost ground of the life of a people [*den innersten Lebensgrund eines Volkes*]" (§21). And the first thing to be learned from the Greeks is that tragedy is not—as Nietzsche mockingly wrote in the "Foreword"—"a readily dispensable ringing of bells accompanying the 'seriousness of existence'." Tragedy strikes at the very core of existence, at its "innermost ground," its "very core [*bis in's Innerste*]," and it moderates, mediates, and attunes the sphere of sensibility to a mood of the middle or a middling mood. Indeed, Nietzsche argues that the effect of tragedy on its spectators is even capable of altering their "form of existence [*Daseinsform*]" (§15, §19), of altering their attunement and retuning it to a midpoint or medium between the extremes of political nihilism and political nationalism. Everything in *The Birth of Tragedy* revolves around this elusive "middle world [*Mittelwelt*]" (§3, §7, §24), this midpoint or medium which constitutes a "third form" (§21) of existence between the extremes of nihilism and nationalism. Everything in *The Birth of Tragedy*, then, revolves around the problem of retuning the political, of moderating its tendency to extremism. But this means something other than avoiding the extremes. It means finding the midpoint or medium where they effect one another, where, as Nietzsche says, they "enter into simultaneous activity." And this problem—the "aesthetic problem" announced in the "Foreword"—constitutes the primordial problem of tragedy: "Perhaps we may touch upon this primordial problem [*Urproblem*] with this question: Which aesthetic effect [*ästhetische Wirkung*] arises when the essentially separated powers of art [*Kunstmächte*], the Apollinian and the Dionysian, enter into simultaneous activity? Or more briefly: How does music behave towards image and concept?" (§16).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Plato tries to answer this question—what is catharsis?—in his *Philebus* (48a); Aristotle takes up the problem in the *Poetics* (1448b 8-19, 1453b 10-14). On the history of this problem as formulated by Aristotle, see Max Kommerell, *Lessing und Aristoteles. Untersuchung über die Theorie der Tragödie* (Frankfurt am Main: 1960), 63-107.

## The Problem of the Extremes: the Apollinian and the Dionysian

Solving this problem and comprehending the effect of tragedy upon human existence depends upon avoiding the extremes of the Apollinian and the Dionysian in order to discover their middle ground, the place where they "enter into simultaneous activity." Indeed, the tragic effect, Nietzsche insists, is nothing other than an experience of the middle. Not only does "Dionysus, the proper hero of the stage and center [*Mittelpunkt*] of the vision" (§8), appear at the middle point of tragic art, but the world of the stage, as the presentation of the satyr chorus's ecstatic visions, is a "world of the middle [*Mittelwelt*]" (§24, §8), neither simply worldly or other-worldly. The absence of tragedy and the tragic attunement, on the other hand, leads to various extreme effects and experiences, resulting not in tragic pathos but in the pathologies of nihilism and nationalism. Avoiding these extremes depends on understanding the effects of what Nietzsche calls the Apollinian and the Dionysian. The concepts of the Apollinian and the Dionysian signify the concrete and historical affective states (*Zustand*) and moods (*Stimmung*) investigated by aesthetics.<sup>16</sup> They are, Nietzsche says, "powers" (*Mächte*), capable of affecting individuals, inducing affects that are at once cognitive, non-subjective, and definitive for human existence.<sup>17</sup> They correspond exactly to the extremes of universality and particularity, and resolving the "the primordial question" of tragedy and understanding its cathartic effect requires first investigating them in turn before turning to their mutual interaction and "simultaneous activity."

The Apollinian sphere is the sphere of particularity and therefore of individuality, and within its jurisdiction, the individual is held sacred and obliged to follow the law of individuation:

Considered as imperative and as giving prescriptions, this divination of

<sup>16</sup> On the Dionysian "*Zustand*" see §5, §6, §8, §9; on the Apollinian "*Zustand*" see §2, §9. For a "an abbreviated survey" of Nietzsche's basic states, including the Dionysian state but excluding the Apollinian state, see Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity*, trans. Charles F. Wallraff and Frederick J. Schmitz (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 339-349.

On the Dionysian "*Stimmung*" see §5, §8; on the Apollinian "*Stimmung*" see §6. On the significance of Nietzsche's understanding of moods see Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. I, 114-26.

<sup>17</sup> On the Dionysian effect see §4, §7; on the Apollinian effect see §2, §4.

individuation knows only One law [*Ein Gesetz*], the individual, that is, the observance of the limits [*Grenzen*] of the individual, *measure* [Maß] in the Hellenic sense. Apollo, as the ethical deity, demands measure of those who are his, and, in order to be able to maintain it, self-knowledge. And so do the demands of "*Know thyself*" and of "*Not too much*" parallel the aesthetic necessity of beauty. (§4)

Under the influence of the Apollinian effect a state of measured rest takes over: In dreams, in the figurative character of sculptural art, in the formal borders of the "conscious" individual and the physical body, in the measuredness of the ethical law, in the measured harmony of beauty, and in the formal frontiers of the state. But it must always be remembered, Nietzsche emphasizes, that the "power [*Macht*]" of the Apollinian "does not

respect the individual" (§2).<sup>18</sup> The paradoxical law of the individual produces not

<sup>18</sup> Neither the Apollinian nor the Dionysian, as expressions of "life," ought to be confused with anthropological understandings of specifically *human* life. Everything in *The Birth of Tragedy* points upwards, over man and over human nature—towards the gods on Mt. Olympus, towards "fate" still higher above them, and, finally, towards the justice of that fate. The "nature of man," on the other hand, is utterly inaccessible. Thus, when Thomas Heilke (*Nietzsche's Tragic Regime: Culture, Aesthetics, and Political Education* [DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998]) approaches *The Birth of Tragedy* from the perspective of a "philosophical anthropology" (11), seeking to discover in Nietzsche's text a "theory of man" (28) which would serve as the basis of "an authoritative (political) account of how men may thrive *in communio*" (28), it is hardly surprising to find the problem still unresolved in his "Conclusion," and the question it raises—"does Nietzsche in any way offer a cogent or even interesting reply to the problem of political legitimacy and authoritative political speech" (180)—not answered satisfactorily, even for Heilke. And there is good reason why such difficulties are encountered: not only does Nietzsche reject Socratic "theory" and with it all accounts of the "human in itself [*der Mensch an sich*]" (§19), but he locates the foundation of political life outside the human being and all anthropological accounts of its "nature." Man is not the measure here and the authority of the human subject is to be delimited. What is authoritative, then, is the Dionysian categorical imperative that eventually emerges in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and its authority rests precisely on the inability of the human being to give an authoritative account of the "human in itself."

Nietzsche's rejection of the anthropological problematic opens up another series of issues far too vast to be more than indicated here. They concern the work of the anthropologist Lévi-Strauss. Like Nietzsche, he is concerned with the structure of myth. Moreover, his texts have consistently taken up the problematic of Nietzsche's own investigation: what is the relationship between the Apollinian and the Dionysian, or, in terminology shared by both Lévi-Strauss and Nietzsche, between myth and music. See *The Raw and the Cooked* trans. J. D. Weightman (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), 14-30; *The Naked Man*, trans. J. D. Weightman (London: Jonathan Cape, 1981), 645-667; *Myth and Meaning* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 34-43. Furthermore, the earliest of these texts opens with a critique of serialist methods of composition and theories of musical signification. Significantly, this movement's greatest theorist, Pierre Boulez, is only the most recent and important theorist of Wagner's "emancipation of dissonance," an emancipation which is not only at the very center of *The Birth of Tragedy*, but which equally constitutes the first attempt at a post-structuralist theory of music without a governing, gravitational center point in the diatonic system of tonal structure. Boulez even conducted *The Ring* cycle at Bayreuth in a famous interpretation, the occasion of which lead to a number of important essays on the significance of Wagner's musical innovations; see *Orientations*, trans. Martin Cooper (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 223-291, esp. 275-6. As if to counter Boulez and with him Nietzsche and Wagner, Lévi-Strauss interprets *The Ring* in *Myth and Meaning* in a section which has as its themes precisely those of *The Birth of Tragedy*; the section—which could have been called "The Apollinian and the Dionysian"—is entitled "Myth and Music." Any evaluation of this complex chain of relations would have to consider Derrida's critique of Lévi-Strauss and structuralism in the name of a Nietzschean play of dissonance. In *De la Grammatologie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967) Derrida's deconstruction of the structuralist project takes as its point of departure Nietzsche's writings on the problematic of "play" (73), only to bring that text to an end with the conclusion that "writing is always atonal" (443). Finally, while it has been often noticed that Derrida's work has done much to delimit the



differences, but sameness—abstract, identifiable unities whose indivisibility is at the basis of mathematically equivalent "individuals." The law, then, is "One" and the same for all, inscribed into the individual as its possibility and limit. Failing to heed the law, the individual—exemplified by Prometheus's "heroic effort" to "stride forth into the universal, in the attempt to transcend the spell of individuation and be the *one* essence of the world" (§9)—is doomed. Rather than universalizing the individual, the acknowledgement of the limit to the individual's absoluteness brings a pre-theoretical and non-philosophical "wisdom" not only into relation with practical activity, but, surprisingly, into a certain correspondence with beauty. Their similarity lies in the parallel and analogous function of measure: In every case, be it the knowledge of wisdom, the ethical law, or the necessity of beauty, measure rules. And since, according to its concept, measure must necessarily show itself and be representable and recognizable, it remains—in the strict sense of the word—an aesthetic phenomenon, hence an effect of the aesthetic language of the Apollinian. But as Apollinian and aesthetic, measure measures its own rule as well, thereby requiring the addition of a line delimiting its own limit: "That delicate line, which the dream image must not overstep lest it effect us pathologically [*pathologisch zu wirken*], failing which the shine [*Schein*] would deceive us as crude reality, must not be absent from the image of Apollo: That measured limitation, that freedom from the wilder emotions, that wise repose [*Ruhe*] of the god of sculpture" (§1). The cognitive quality of the Apollinian state lies in a wisdom which recognizes the illusory character of the individual and the insubstantiality of the epic myth of the heroic self, however seductive its beauty.

The rule of Apollinian measure exerts a valid lawfulness which not only makes possible a knowledge of the self, the ethical law, and beautiful works of art; it is also fundamental to the sphere of politics. Indeed, it is in this region, Nietzsche argues, that the Apollinian effect most clearly shows itself, for it is precisely in the practical realm of the will that rest most easily gives way to fear and anxiety, leading directly to the forgetting of that "delicate line" separating illusion from reality. The effect is uniform: A pathological frenzy to deny the illusory character of all borders, in particular those of the individual and its collective expression, the state. In ancient Greece, Nietzsche writes, the emergence of the Dionysian "effect [*Wirkung*]" (§4)—and this effect always causes the borders

constitutive of identity to tremble—led to the birth of an authoritarianism symptomatic of a forgetfulness of the law. Resistance to the Dionysian knew only one goal: The maintenance of form in which measure alone became the sole value, provoking a pure manifestation of the Apollinian effect:

Everywhere that the Dionysian penetrated, the Apollinian was sublimated and negated. But it is just as certain that wherever the first onslaught [of the Dionysian] was withstood, the authority and majesty of the Delphic god expressed itself stronger and more threatening than ever. I am only able to explain the *Doric* state and Doric art as a permanent military encampment of the Apollinian [*ein fortgesetztes Kriegslager des Apollinischen*]: An art so defiantly unyielding and encompassed with bulwarks, an education so warlike and harsh, and a state so essentially cruel and ruthless [*ein so grausames und rücksichtsloses Staatswesen*] could only exist for any length of time in a persistent resistance to the titanic-barbaric essence of the Dionysian. (§4)

The Doric state and Doric art deserve consideration together to the extent that both are founded upon a more fundamental value: The value of measure.<sup>19</sup> This value, as Nietzsche makes clear, is the political value *par excellence*. Without it, the individual, the state, and even community would be impossible, let alone beautiful works of art. But when the "delicate line" delimiting this value's limit is forgotten, an exemplary demonstration of the complicity between Apollinian art and politics occurs. Since Apollinian art is always beautiful, the complicity manifests itself through a frightening confusion of art and a state whose overriding function has become the maintenance of its own "beautiful illusion [*schöne Schein*]" (§1) through the preservation of its identifying borders. These borders are, however, like all Apollinian measure, merely *Schein*, the illusory brilliance constitutive of beauty. The aestheticization of the political results when the beautiful illusion of the state's borders—whatever their form—becomes so majestic that their apparent authority effects a pathological seductiveness which suspends the will of precisely those individuals the state was to have protected. Aesthetics—here the pleasurable feeling of beauty—becomes the sole criterion of politics, and the illusion becomes total. Here, as Nietzsche writes in a contemporaneous essay on "The Greek State," the "*archetype of the*

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<sup>19</sup> For a further discussion of the complicity between the Doric state and Doric art, see Volker Gerhardt, *Friedrich Nietzsche* (München: C. H. Beck, 1995), 78-79.

state [Urbild des Staates]" reveals itself, and its type is the "*military genius*"—Lycurgus is exemplary—as the "original founder of the state [*ursprünglichen Staatengründer*]." <sup>20</sup>

In contrast to the political consequences of the purely Apollinian effect—pure because its validity (*Geltung*, §21) is elevated to the sole value in the world—the Dionysian effect could not be more antithetical: "This is the first effect of the Dionysian tragedy: The state and society, the chasm between humans as such, gives way to an overpowering feeling of unity [*Einheitsgefühl*], which leads back to the heart of nature" (§7). As the extreme antithesis to the grounding effect of the Apollinian principle of individuation, the Dionysian effect unites individuated entities by upsetting the restfulness of individuation. From the perspective of the individual, such unrest is not simply upsetting; it appears terrifying, even maddening, for it indicates the overcoming of the individual's foundational principle as its borders are set into motion. Despite the exceptional character of such experience, it has a long history. Nietzsche's own discussion departs—as it had in the case of the Apollinian *principium individuationis*—from Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*, the work in which he found that individuating principle's exemplary presentation:

In the same place Schopenhauer has depicted for us the monstrous *horror* which seizes man when he suddenly comes to doubt the cognitive form of appearances because the principle of sufficient reason [*Satz vom Grunde*], in one of its possible figures, appears to suffer an exception [*eine Ausnahme zu erleiden scheint*]. If we add to this horror the blissful ecstasy that rises up from the innermost ground [*innersten Grunde*] of mankind, indeed of nature, with this disintegration of the *principium individuationis*, we glimpse the essence [*Wesen*] of the *Dionysian*, which is brought nearest to us by the analogy of intoxication [*Rausches*]. (§1)

The ecstatic feeling of being liberated from rational grounds is, according to Nietzsche, of particular political significance. If the state founded in 1871 is to have any proper existence and thus be something other than a repetition of a totalizing Socratism, its political form must differentiate itself from all forms of politics which strive towards total stability. Paradoxically, then, "German" political hopes—the realization of a specifically "German" rebirth of Greek political and cultural forms—can only be realized if this new state *delimits*, rather than makes absolute, the validity of its own sphere. Lacking such delimitation, its

<sup>20</sup> "Der griechische Staat," 775.



fundamental value—Apollinian measure—grows to enslaving proportions as Doric pathologies set in. Ancient Rome—"exhausting itself in a consuming chase after worldly power and worldly honor"—is illustrative of just such an unchecked extension of the political: "From out of the unconditioned validity of the political drive [*unbedingten Geltung der politischen Triebe*], it is just as necessary that a people should go the path of the most extreme secularization whose most magnificent but also most terrifying expression is the Roman *imperium*." (§21). Against its own intentions, Roman imperialism, leads not to control and sovereignty. Rather, in its attempt to secure as much ground as possible, its exemplary movement outwards becomes incessant, irresistible, enslaving, and finally, as history attests, self-defeating. The self is lost not only because of the world's enormity in comparison to the individual human or individual state; of greater significance is the confusion which reduces the infinite variety of possible worlds to a single world: The empirical, aesthetic world of the political sphere. It is hardly surprising, then, that such confusion tends toward the unconditional expansion of the fundamental political value to the point of terrifying extremes and passionate dictates: The state becomes an end in itself. Modernity, distant as it may be from ancient Rome, remains under the command of just such dictates. Their command, no less than the Socratic obsession with grounds, has only one effect: "Slavery [*Knechtschaft*]" (§20). Avoiding enslavement requires the liberating yet anti-political motions of the Dionysian, for its force alone resists, indeed, dissolves, the political instinct which strives to realize the illusion of totality: "With every significant spreading of the Dionysian excitement one always traces how the Dionysian liberation [*Lösung*] from the chains of the individual makes itself felt first of all through an injury to the political instincts [*politischen Instinkte*], increased to the point of indifference, yes, even hostility to them; just as certainly, on the other hand, the state-forming Apollo [*staatenbildende Apollo*] is also the genius of the *principium individuationis*, and the state and sense of home cannot live without the affirmation of the individual personality" (§21). Just as the sphere of individuation is not to be absolutized, so too must its antithesis be moderated. Failure to do so would, to be sure, liberate "Germany" from Roman style politics, but it would also bring political life in "Germany" to an end and with it "Germany" itself.



## The Play of Metaphor

Avoiding the extremes of the Apollinian and Dionysian depends on a tragic experience of a "middle world," on a passage between the extremes of total politicization and total nihilism. And determining the structure of that passageway requires explaining how the extremes of Apollinian individuality and Dionysian universality come into contact with one another in the tragic effect to produce a mood of the middle and corresponding mode of politics. Everything rests, then, on answering one question: "Which aesthetic effect arises when the essentially separated powers of art, the Apollinian and the Dionysian, enter into simultaneous activity? Or more briefly: How does music behave towards image and concept?" (§16). In his description of the folk song—and this contains tragedy's basic structure in embryonic form—Nietzsche specifies the character of the relationship of music to image and concept:

In the poetry of the folk song, language is strained to the most intense degree *to imitate music* [die Musik nachzuahmen]: Thus does a new world of poetry begin with Archilochus, a world which contradicts the Homeric one in its deepest fundament. We have thus indicated the only possible relationship between poetry and music, word and tone: The word, the image seeks an expression analogous to music and now suffers the violence of music as such [*einen der Musik analogen Ausdruck and erleidet jetzt die Gewalt der Musik an sich*]. (§6)

By placing analogy at the center of his analysis of tragedy, Nietzsche brings his investigation into relation with one of philosophy's oldest and most powerful themes. Analogy has consistently been employed to comprehend difference under the aspect of the same through the perception of proportional similarities between otherwise differing unities. Analogy is therefore a way of acknowledging differences while nevertheless subsuming them under a larger totality. Originating in the pre-Socratics's efforts to specify mathematical and ontological relations, it is Socrates' employment of the term to found the ideal *polis* in Plato's *Republic* which insured its centrality for future philosophical and political investigations.<sup>21</sup> It not only plays a fundamental role in insuring the success of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, but the use of this figure dominated Scholastic debates over the

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<sup>21</sup> See "Socrates'" analogical presentation of the essence of the Good as the foundation of Being, in the *Republic*, 508a-509b.

problem of the analogy of being.<sup>22</sup> And it is precisely these debates which provided the framework for Schopenhauer's own metaphysics of music.<sup>23</sup> Building on exactly this moment in Schopenhauer's text, Nietzsche enters into the debate. For analogy has also played a decisive role in discussion of tragedy. Aristotle attributes a unique function to analogy in the successful tragedy: It is the mode of diction—different from those of the dithyramb or epic—most appropriate to its specific poetic form. Its appropriateness, however, derives from the fact that analogy is the most general and defining form of metaphor, and since tragedy's diction is metaphorical in form, the essence of tragedy's linguistic form is the analogical metaphor.<sup>24</sup> When Aristotle claims that the ability to create metaphors and perceive analogies is the very mark of genius, thus not simply an attribute of the poet or rhetorician, its decisive significance begins to appear: It is the very possibility of philosophers such as Aristotle writing treatises on subjects as diverse as poetics, rhetoric, and metaphysics.<sup>25</sup> Analogy, metaphor, poetics, and rhetoric, far from challenging the sovereignty of metaphysics, are quite at home in it, even—as the dependence of Aristotelian and Platonic metaphysics upon analogy demonstrate—fundamental to its success.<sup>26</sup>

While Nietzsche's own employment of analogy not only places him squarely within a long tradition to which he is otherwise self-consciously opposed, his further specification of the relationship between music and image deepens this debt when he reveals that the particular form of analogy at work is precisely that attributed by Aristotle's *Poetics* to the

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<sup>22</sup> See Book IV of the *Metaphysics*.

<sup>23</sup> On Schopenhauer's use of scholastic analogies in his philosophy of music see *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung, Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Wolfgang von Löhneysen (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993) vol. I, §52, esp. 367. Nietzsche constructs his explanation of tragic catharsis exclusively on the basis of this section.

<sup>24</sup> See *Poetics*, 1457b1-57b18; 1459a5-59a15; *Rhetoric*, 1410b36.

<sup>25</sup> See *Poetics*, 1459a7-9; *Rhetoric*, 1412a9-13.

<sup>26</sup> On the relationship between metaphysics and metaphor in Aristotle see Derrida's discussion—one largely dominated by Nietzsche's own writings on these issues—in the essay, "la mythologie blanche: la métaphore dans le texte philosophique" in *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1972), 247-324.

proper form of tragedy — metaphor:

That primordial artistic appearance [*künstlerische Urerscheinung*], which we here bring up for the explanation of the chorus of tragedy, is almost offensive according to the contemporary scholarly view on the elementary artistic processes; although nothing can be more agreed upon than that the poet is only a poet to the extent that he sees himself surrounded by figures which live and act before him and into whose innermost essence he sees. We are inclined by a particular weakness of the modern gift, to represent to ourselves the primordial aesthetic phenomenon [*ästhetische Urphänomen*] too complicatedly and abstractly. The metaphor is for the genuine poet not a rhetorical figure but a vicarious image that really floats before him in the place of a concept [*nicht ein rhetorische Figur, sondern, ein stellvertretendes Bild, das ihm wirklich, an Stelle eines Begriffes, vorschwebt*]. (§8)

While Aristotle understands the proper form of tragic diction to involve an analogical metaphor constructed on the basis of a transference of shared properties between pairs of substances similarly related to one another and discerned on the basis of theoretical abilities ultimately philosophical in kind, Nietzsche defines the metaphor anew as a "vicarious image that really floats before the poet in the place of a concept."<sup>27</sup> On the one hand, a "vicarious image" takes the place of a concept, substituting a nondiscursive "image" for a predicated property, Aristotle's *onoma*, the proper name which would have been transferred from one pair of relations to another in order to form the metaphor. On the other hand, the "image" is no longer grounded in the identity of a particular nominal substance open to theoretical perception — the *sine qua non* of Aristotelian ontology — freeing metaphor from its dependence on Aristotelian metaphysics and its concomitant poetics of tragedy. Rather than the nominal transference of metaphor, an image appears which takes the place of Aristotle's proper name. Such place taking is accomplished through the substitution of an image not only for a transferred property, but equally for the very substance to which such a property is attributed. Music, then, is to be imitated by language and image in tragedy through the appearance of metaphorical images and words whose

<sup>27</sup> On Nietzsche and metaphor in *The Birth of Tragedy*, see Anne Tebartz-van Elst, *Ästhetik der Metaphor: Zum Streit zwischen Philosophie und Rhetorik bei Friedrich Nietzsche* (München: Karl Alber, 1995); Detlef Otto, "Die Version der Metapher zwischen Musik und Begriff," in *Centauren-Geburten: Wissenschaft, Kunst und Philosophie beim jungen Nietzsche*, ed. Tilman Borsche, Federico Gerrata, Aldo Venturelli (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1994), 167-190; Anthony Stephens, "Nietzsche und die poetische Metapher," in *Friedrich Nietzsche, Perspektivität und Tiefe*, ed. Walter Gebhard (Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 1982), 79-120.



similarity to music should present at least one of its properties in the medium of "the Apollinian." But music lacks any permanent substance: It never appears phenomenally in space, indeed, "it puts all appearances to shame."<sup>28</sup> The temporality of music and the spatiality of the image prevents the simple creation of music's metaphor through the transference of shared properties between pairs of substances similarly related to one another and demands in its place another form of creation, one which, instead of transferring attributes on the basis of an identical substance and a totalizing rhetorical structure, is forced to substitute a supplement to take the place of music's insubstantiality and failure to appear, namely, a non-rhetorical form of "metaphor" as the "primordial artistic appearance" and "primordial aesthetic phenomenon."

This supplement, as is well known, is the "will." In his analysis of the lyric poet, Nietzsche asks, "as what does music *appear* in the mirror of images and concepts?" (§6). His deceptively simple answer immediately follows: "*Music appears as will*." The substituting, supplementing image, suspended before the eyes of the Apollinian poet as an analogical "metaphor" mimetically similar to music, appears to be the will. By means of a peculiar form of hermeneutics imageless music is brought into relation with the image, and a metaphor—analogically similar to music—somehow appears. But, Nietzsche insists, music cannot possibly be will: It only appears *as will*, *as* "the eternally willing, desiring, longing." "*Music appears as will*": The structure of interpretation at the basis of the creation of the analogical metaphor functions through a pointing away— a "*deuten*" (§6) as both interpreting and pointing in which something is always understood *as* an other. The other is music's other, "for," as Nietzsche writes, "music cannot possibly be, according to its essence, will" (§6). This is because music essentially has no appearance. Rather, it calls

<sup>28</sup> See the indispensable fragment—originally intended for *The Birth of Tragedy*—which has come to be known as "On Music and Words" in *Sämtliche Werke*, VII, 359-369. An unreliable translation by Walter Kaufmann may be found in Carl Dahlhaus's *Between Romanticism and Modernism*, trans. Mary Whittall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 106-116. Exemplary of the translation problems found in this and other works by Nietzsche, in particular *The Birth of Tragedy*, is the rendering of "allgemeinste Erscheinungsform" (361)—"most general form of appearances": i.e., the transcendental condition for the possibility of the experience of appearances, an obvious and extraordinary attempt to rearticulate Kant's and Schopenhauer's Transcendental Aesthetic—as "most general manifestation" (108). Time and again, the historical weight of Nietzsche's very precise language is lost and with it the significance of his argument.



forth an appearance as its supplement. Its incomprehensibility, its lack of presence and failure to appear, provoke the attempt to comprehend it, setting the imagination in motion: "Music necessitated the lyricist to figurative speech [*Bilderrede*]" (§6). Music necessarily appears figuratively, namely, as a *Bilderrede*, a figure of speech whose figure is the analogical metaphor. Such analogical relating, however, does anything but insure the possibility of a simple transference of properties from the medium of music to that of language. For language, and with it the "lyrical eloquence" brought to bear on the content of such language, can do nothing to bring the sense of music "one step closer" (§6). A fundamental disjunction prevents a simple passage from one to the other. However much language may strain itself to imitate music, the mimetic relation between the two lacks the integral passage required to insure the successful synthesis and dialectical resolution of the antithetical relation between the two media. Not integrity and integration between apparently disparate mediums, but the suffering—*erleiden*—of one medium at the hands of the other results when a "unification" of the Apollinian image and the Dionysian music takes place: On the one hand, melody is the enabling condition of musical works and functions as "*the first and the universal* [das Erste und Allgemeine], which, therefore, can suffer in itself several objectifications in several texts [*mehrere Objektivationen, in mehreren Texten, an sich erleiden kann*]" (§6); on the other hand, such texts—epic, lyric, tragic—are subject to a process of disintegration and suffering characteristic of the fundamentally violent and violating movement of passage from music's melodic indeterminacy into a particular textual objectification: "The word, the image seeks an expression analogous to music and now suffers the violence of music as such [*einen der Musik analogen Ausdruck and erleidet jetzt die Gewalt der Musik an sich*]" (§6). "Unification" takes place through the violating disintegration of each signifying medium's integrity; each suffers at the hands of the other as a representational image takes the place of music's non-representability.

No necessary link between music and the will can be found, only a contingent, though altogether necessary, movement in which opposites are linked in a violent and disintegrating process of substitution. The "analogical" "metaphor" securing the synthesizing passage between media is neither analogical, metaphorical, nor synthesizing

in any proper sense. The use of each of these terms remains unjustified from the perspective of a philosophically grounded rhetoric, while the "primordial aesthetic phenomenon" produced through substitution remains, thanks to the process of substitution, itself subreptitious. Contrary to all expectations, but on the basis of this necessary contingency, music's Dionysian effect is interpreted as the *cause* of music rather than its *effect*: Music, the effect of which causes things to vibrate and sets them in motion, is interpreted as will, the ability to set something into motion. This non-Aristotelian mode of transference cannot possibly be metaphoric. Rather, this mode of contingent transference is metonymic. In metonymy—*meta-onoma*—a substitution of one name for another takes place, but not on the basis of the theoretical abilities which enable the creation of totalizing metaphors. Substitution is achieved through the abstraction of an experiential quality—suffering, a mood of unrest as the feeling of being moved by an invisible and incomprehensible power—into an independent essence now said to be the cause of the effect, thereby personifying the affective quality by giving it a will and a causal ability. The spiritualization achieved through personification naturally brings things to life, namely, gives them a will of their own. Nietzsche attributes just such an enlivening function to the non-rhetorical and originary aesthetic phenomenon called "metaphor": "Fundamentally [*Im Grunde*] the aesthetic phenomenon [*ästhetische Phänomen*] is simple; one is a poet when one has the capability to continually see a living play [*lebendiges Spiel*] and to live constantly surrounded by crowds of spirits [*Geisterscharen*]" (§8). The "vicarious image" floating before the poet's Apollinian eye is a "play." The "analogical" "metaphor" serving as a "vicarious image" and taking the place of a concept is not only playful because it floats without a ground to bring its contingent, unstructured movements to rest, nor simply because the image appears to be "alive" and moving without any definite purpose. The image of "play" should represent—analogically, metaphorically, mimetically—music in the medium of the Apollinian, just as it should represent, through a transference of properties, a unification of these antithetical media. But the unification takes place through a substituting and supplementing "as"-structure which leads through the violent medium of "analogical" dissociation, through, in other words, the medium of play itself, the play of ungrounded, metonymic substitutions without any sufficient reason or necessity, a play,

therefore, of signification carried out between signifying media, a play, finally, that can properly come to no end, for it finds no final ground to rest upon. Not without reason then does Nietzsche compare such interpretation—"*Deutung*"—to soothsaying (§1, §8) in which the disclosure of the present is delayed by the very act of supplementing and substituting until a future revelation. For such supplementing and substituting take and hold the place of the other, hold it open, suspending the disclosure of its content indefinitely. When that other turns out to be the "archetype of man [*Urbild des Menschen*]" (§8)—"the true man" (§8)—the significance of tragedy shows itself, for the substituting image—the "metaphorical" image of "play"—is the very image—its primordial archetype, *Ur-bild*—of man's being.

### The Dramatic Play

Ancient Greek tragedy, as drama, puts this "play" on stage in a play about play. Just as the "primordial aesthetic phenomenon" is an image of the violent and disintegrating process of substitution produced by the transformative medium of "analogical" dissociation, so is the "primordial dramatic phenomenon"—tragedy's second formal element—a performance of that process of "play" in which actors play the role presented before their eyes as the "primordial aesthetic phenomenon": "The process [*Prozeß*]" of the tragic chorus is the primordial dramatic phenomenon [*dramatische Urphänomen*]: To see oneself transformed before oneself and now to act as if one really had entered into another body, into another character" (§8). Tragedy is a play about play, the play of disintegration and transformation which performs the archetypically human: Transformation and disintegration, in time, and, finally, to death. While the "primordial image of man"—the arche-type of "the true man"—is an image whose figure is typed out as "*Wille*," Nietzsche's presentation makes the contingency of this particular configuration of letters all too evident. As a term signifying substitution and transformation, it too may be substituted with other names just as easily referring to the traits inscribed in the word "*Wille*": "Satyr," "chorus," "Dionysus," "tragic hero," "Oedipus," "Prometheus." Each of these terms, each substitutable for the other, each signifying the playful process of signification in which appearances are brought into the world, type out a spelling of the typically human's



characters. As characters—the "written traits of nature [*Schriftenzüge der Natur*]" (§8)—they spell out the role to be played on stage and the character to be performed. In each case, however playful the performance, they tell the story of suffering as a drama about the archetypically human and the characteristic process of interpretive inscription essentially determining it. Being human means suffering from individuation, from the feeling of being torn to pieces by a process of individuating inscription which exceeds the individual will. Thus does Dionysus—the figure of the essentially human and so the figure figuring the playful process of inscription, disintegration, and transformation—appear on stage wearing the mask of the tragic hero, a mask bearing all the markings of Apollo, the epic antecedent of the tragic hero. Dionysus can appear in no other form, for no other form of appearance exists:

The one truly real Dionysus appears in a plurality of figures, in the mask of a fighting hero and, as it were, ensnared in the net of the individual will. As the appearing god now speaks and acts, he resembles an erring, striving, suffering individual: And that he *appears* as such with this epic determination and distinctness [*Deutlichkeit*] is the effect [*Wirkung*] of the dream-interpreter Apollo, who interprets [*deutet*] to the chorus its Dionysian state through that parabolic appearance [*gleichnisartigen Erscheinung*]. In truth, however, that hero is the suffering Dionysus of the Mysteries, that god experiencing in itself the suffering of individuation, of whom wonderful myths tell how he, as a boy, had been torn to pieces by the Titans and now in this state is worshiped as Zagreus. Thus it is indicated that this dismemberment, the properly Dionysian *suffering*, is like a transformation into air, water, earth, and fire; that we would therefore have to consider the state of individuation as the source and primordial ground of all suffering, as something objectionable in itself. (§10)

The tragic hero, as the exemplification of the truly human, is the Apollinian figuration not precisely of Dionysus but of Dionysus's suffering. Dionysus is an Apollinian *figure*, and is therefore nothing essential; it is the suffering which—against all expectations—has substance.<sup>29</sup> And tragedy, as an art form, consists in nothing more than the presentation of this the Dionysian state of suffering: "The essence of tragedy can only be interpreted as a manifestation and visualizing of the Dionysian states" (§8), or, as

<sup>29</sup> See the notes Nietzsche devoted to working out the relations between being, becoming, time, suffering, pain, pleasure, sensation, consonance and dissonance in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. VII, 197-209, 213-217. Among the many important sentences contained there is the following: "Das Substantielle ist die Empfindung, das Scheinbare der Leib, die Materie. [*What is substantial is sensation; the body and matter are what is merely apparent/illusory.*]" (203). Suffering is one such sensation, or one class of sensations.



Nietzsche writes elsewhere, as "the Apollinian sensiblizing [*Versinnlichung*] of the Dionysian knowledge and effects" (§14). When the tragic chorus figures its Dionysian state, Dionysus does not appear—as in Aristotelian ontology—as one of the many ways in which the being of the human is schematized and analogically related to being; Dionysus appears as a non-logical and non-schematic figure of the inscriptive process of appearing, a figure in other words, of being figured by the Apollinian process of individuation, by its dissimulatory play—the process of disintegration and transformation to which the chorus is subjected under the Dionysian effects—and resulting fragmentation, disunity and suffering.<sup>30</sup> The appearance of Dionysus in the mask of the tragic hero, then, is the appearance of the process of appearing, of being individuated, hence Dionysus as the god figuring "in itself the suffering of individuation." Dionysus is not a thing, only the suffering which all things are. Tragedy, then, performs a play—the play of "metaphor"—about play, about the appearance of the being of the human as an incessant process of play in which the human being is always subjected to the process of figuration and disfiguration, is thus presented as nothing in itself, indeed, is played out, to the end, to its death.

### Freedom and Commonality

When Nietzsche states, in quasi-programmatic fashion, the "knowledge" "won" through his investigations into the primordial elements of Greek tragedy, he indicates that the tragedy's cathartic effect, like its form, is inhabited by a certain dualism. After a lengthy quotation from Schopenhauer's *World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, to which Nietzsche is by no means entirely faithful, a summation of his research appears:

According to Schopenhauer's doctrine, we thus understand music as the unmediated language [*unmittelbar Sprache*] of the will and feel our fantasy stimulated to figure that invisible and yet so lively world of spirits [*Geisterwelt*] which speaks to us, and to embody this world in an analogical example [*analogen Beispiel*]. On the other hand, image and concept, under the effect of a truly corresponding music, come to an higher significance

<sup>30</sup> On this process of disintegration and its distance from Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will, see Werner Hamacher, "Disgregation of the Will": Nietzsche on the Individual and Individuality," in *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self*, ed. Thomas Heller, Morton Sosna, David Wellbery (Stanford: Stanford University, 1986), 106-139, esp. 114-115.

[*Bedeutsamkeit*]. Dionysian art is wont to exercise two kinds of effects on the Apollinian art faculty: Music excites to the *parabolic intuition* [gleichnisartigen Anschauen] of the Dionysian universality; the music allows the parabolic image to step fourth *in the highest significance*. From these facts, understandable in themselves and not inaccessible to deeper observation, I conclude the ability of music to give birth to *the myth*, that is, the most significant example [*bedeutsamste Exempel*] and precisely the *tragic myth*: To the myth which speaks of the Dionysian knowledge in parables [*Gleichnissen*, likenesses]. (§16)

Tragedy's cathartic effect consists in not one, but two moments. The first of these effects is again understood to be caused—following the strange process of hermeneutic understanding previously encountered—by an illogical and unreasonable substitution of the will for music: Music appears *as will*. And the "analogical example" that results from the Apollinian figuration of the Dionysian music's effects again represents not music as such but a fantastic image substituted for the ghostly echoings of an invisible spirit world. When this spirit world is embodied and made flesh, the individual is born from out of the spirit of music as the archetypal hero and primordial form of the will. So is the invisible once more translated into the sphere of the visible by means of a deceptive substitution in which music as the medium of hermeneutic understanding—seems to be merely a means for the illumination of appearances, thus an instrument through which to view the essence of nature. But music cannot possibly be will.

The first effect of Dionysian music on the Apollinian art faculty—the creation of music's "analogical" appearance—does not take place on the basis of a theoretical ability, nor is the fantasy—the locus of the creative powers of the imagination and home of the Apollinian art faculty—grounded in the transcendental consciousness of the creative subject. The fantastic abilities of the imagination are freed from every form of reasonable ground as music suddenly makes an appearance. This magical moment, when spirits speak and even appear, is a joyous experience of freedom. Not freedom of the will, not freedom defined as subjective causality, but freedom from the order of the present and its fixed limits, its arbitrary divisions, its fashions, along with the alienation, hostility, and subjugation they effect. Work gives way to play in a feeling of freedom—the liberation from every stable ground and from the delimiting borders of individuation which such ground supports. At the conclusion of the first section of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche

presents the process of music's transformation into images and with it an experience of freedom so fundamental as to constitute not only mode of liberation but, if not community, then commonality:

Under the magic of the Dionysian not only is the union between man and man reconstituted: Even nature—alienated, hostile, or subjugated—once more celebrates her festival of reconciliation with her lost son, man. Freely, the earth offers her gifts, and peacefully the beasts of prey of the rocks and desert approach. The wagon of Dionysus is overwhelmed with flowers and garlands: Panthers and tigers stride under its yoke. One transforms Beethoven's "Hymn to Joy" into a painting and the imagination is not left behind when the multitudes sink into the dust, shuddering [*schauervoll*]: So can one near the Dionysian. Now the slave is a free man; now all the rigid, hostile delimitations which need, arbitrariness, or "impudent fashion" have fixed between man and man are broken. Now, with the gospel of harmonious worlds, each feels not only united, reconciled, and fused with his neighbor, but as one, as if the veil of Maya had been torn asunder and now merely fluttered about in tatters before the secretive primordial One [*geheimnisvollen Ur-Einen*]. Singing and dancing man externalizes himself as a member of a higher commonality [*höheren Gemeinsamkeit*]: He has forgotten walking and talking and is on the way to flying up into the air, dancing. Enchantment speaks from out of his gestures. Just as the animals now talk, and the earth gives milk and honey, so too does something supernatural resound from out of him: He feels himself like a god, he himself now walks about so ecstatically and elevated [*erhoben*] as he saw the gods walking in dreams. Man is no more an artist, he has become a work of art." (§1)

No presentation could be more fantastic or scandalous to the scientific standards of modern philology; no presentation could do greater justice to the fantastic process unleashed by the effects of a force exceeding every representational and logical standard. It liberates not only man, but nature and even slaves in a feeling of freedom whose sign is the sensation of shuddering imparted by music's vibrations, vibrations mediating and tuning the listener to an attunement in which the imagination is set into a motion freed from the intentionality of walking and speech acts, thus moving one to a figuration necessarily leading beyond the grounds of any subjective substance and into a position indicative of the originary processes constitutive of man.<sup>31</sup> And so movement takes over: One dances and sings, one participates not in a transcendental substance—what the "*Ur-Einen*" is not—but in an

<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of freedom in *The Birth of Tragedy*, see Christoph Menke, "Die Tragödie und die Freigeister," in *Nach der Postmodern*, ed. Andreas Steffens (Düsseldorf: Bollman Verlag, 1992), 235-264; see also Barbara von Reibnitz, *Ein Kommentar zu Friedrich Nietzsche "Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik" (Kap.1-12)*, 83, 87.



originary mood—what the "*Ur-Einen*" is: Suffering. This mood is indicative of the process of a liberating transcendence, indicative, therefore, of being blissfully taken apart as Apollinian delimitations and oppositional hostilities breakdown. This originary process, neither arbitrary nor fashionable and thus freed from every norm, law, or order of the present, is a necessary one, the necessity of a reconciling, participatory freedom without ground. The reconciliation effected by the transforming effect of Dionysian art is not even exhausted by the deconstitution of the socially constituted hierarchies which include the domination not only of man over man but equally of man over nature; whole worlds otherwise opposed to one another—the Apollinian world of finitude and the Dionysian world of the infinite—are reconciled.

Freedom leaves the order of the present behind along with all representations of the natural. It results in neither the anarchy nor the barbarism of the state of nature, nor is it a result of a naturally constituted political community. Neither anarchy, barbarism, or a *polis* results from the union of the Apollinian and the Dionysian, but a free community of equals participating, as Nietzsche describes the results, in "an orgiastic feeling of freedom" (§21).<sup>32</sup> If that freedom is first of all simply a poetic freedom, it is equally the basis for a fundamental experience of freedom in which one is subject to a process of transformation freed from any mimetic relation to a natural or empirical ground. But it was Schiller, not Nietzsche, who first brought this fact to light in his writings on the function of the chorus in tragedy. In the preface to the *Bride of Messina*,

Schiller battles with the common concept of the natural, against the illusion usually demanded of dramatic poetry. Although the day itself on the theatrical stage is an artificial one [*ein künstlicher*], the architecture only a

<sup>32</sup> The freedom of which Nietzsche speaks here should not be confused with a generalized, barbaric license. In the seventh section of *The Birth of Tragedy* he contrasts the "Dionysian Greeks"—those that went to the theater—with the "Dionysian Barbarians"—those who practiced an unsublimated and terrifying form of freedom. Nietzsche's concept of Dionysian "freedom," which is derived from Schiller, stands in sharp contrast to the bizarre conclusion reached by Silk and Stern in *Nietzsche on Tragedy*. They claim, on the final page of their study (380), that Nietzsche's valorization of the Dionysian really points to a scene from Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*: "two gray women, half naked, with matted hair...were tearing a little child to pieces, tearing it with their hands in savage silence...and devouring the pieces." Nothing in Nietzsche's book approaches cannibalism, and his emphasis on pathos-free moderation makes his position on such matters unambiguous. Silk and Stern's conclusion is, needless to say, indicative of a fatal miscasting of Nietzsche's work, this last one merely the most ludicrous.



symbolic one, and the metrical language bears an ideal character, error still always dominates in the whole: It is not enough, that one merely tolerates as poetic freedom [*poetische Freiheit*] what is actually the essence of all poetry. The introduction of the chorus is the decisive step with which war is openly and honestly declared against every naturalism! (§7)

Nietzsche's investigation into the birth of tragedy departs from natural explanations and wages a war not only against artistic naturalism but against every form of naturalism, particularly those of the pre-political state of nature and the naturalness of political existence. When Nietzsche goes on to write, "this is the first effect of the Dionysian tragedy: [The state and society, the chasm between humans as such, gives way to an overpowering feeling of unity which leads back to the heart of nature" (§7), then the paradoxical logic at work here is evident, for there is no natural path back to nature. Rather than naturalism, the Greeks presented the chorus on stage as a "fictitious *state of nature* [*fingierten Naturzustandes*]" with the chorus playing the roll of the "fictitious *essence of nature* [*fingierte Naturwesen*]" (§7). This honest presentation—"ehrlich," as Nietzsche emphasizes—not only rejects naturalism; it so thoroughly unites the mendacious fictionality of art with the truthfulness of nature—"the first effect of the Dionysian tragedy...leads back to the heart of nature"—that the two become indissociable: Each term depends on the other, neither is purely itself, making "nature" a concept which is always already inscribed by its opposite, art. Such a de-naturalization of the natural de-naturalizes the traditional locations of freedom and community in either a fictitious state of natural innocence or in the political domination of a supposed state of nature. Since the site of the overcoming of this opposition is the transformative effect of the Dionysian upon the Apollinian individual, and since this process is tragedy's only subject matter, tragedy becomes the privileged location of an originary freedom and an originary commonality which temporarily suspends social and political hierarchies, delimits their sphere of validity, and opens up another space—the space of the other.

Shine

The first moment of the tragic effect is an illogical, unreasonable, and free substitution of the will for music—music appears *as will*, the will of the tragic hero as the

mask concealing the figure of the truly tragic subject, Dionysus. The second moment of the tragic effect allows the "analogical example" created by the first effect to shine in its "highest significance." Whether in the form of the tragic chorus's singing or in the music of a Wagnerian music-drama, music seems to lend itself to a greater comprehension of the Apollinian action on the stage: "As if the Dionysian really is in the service of the Apollinian and capable of increasing its effects, yes, as if music were even essentially the art of presenting [*Darstellungskunst*] for an Apollinian content" (§21). This duplicitous "as if" structure enables "the parabolic image to step forth *in the highest significance*" and so increase the effectivity of the Apollinian image.<sup>33</sup> Under the influence of the Dionysian, the tragic listener's "mood [*Stimmung*]" is elevated by the dithyrambic chorus to such a degree that when the tragic hero appears on stage the spectator sees not an actor, but a "trembling image of the god"—Dionysus—which is "translated [*übertrug*]," that is, analogically transferred, onto the masked actor (§8). Not an actor, in fact, not even a "god," but a "ghostly unreality [*geisterhafte Unwirklichkeit*]" (§8) appears—born of the Apollinian dream state—from out of the spirit and ghost, the *Geist*, of music. No image, of course, could possibly be more significant. A second moment, however, completes the Dionysian effect upon the Apollinian, and with this moment the highest goal of art is achieved. At the summit of all of art the tragic effect is realized and the spectral shine of the mythic Apollinian "significance"—its "ghostly unreality"—presents itself:

At the most essential point of all that Apollinian deception is broken through and negated. The drama which, with the help of music, spreads itself out before us with such inwardly illuminated clarity [*Deutlichkeit*] in all of its movements and figures, as if we saw the texture [*Gewebe*] arising on the loom as the shuttle flies up and down, reaches as a whole an effect lying *beyond all Apollinian artistic effects*. In the total effect of tragedy, the Dionysian once more predominates; tragedy ends with a sound which could never ring forth [*tönen*] from the realm of Apollinian art. And thus the Apollinian deception proves to be that which it is—the continuous veiling during the duration of the tragedy of the properly Dionysian effect; but the latter is so powerful that in the end it forces the Apollinian drama itself into a sphere where it begins to speak with Dionysian wisdom and even denies itself and its Apollinian visibility [*Sichtbarkeit*]. Thus the difficult relation of the Apollinian and the Dionysian in tragedy would really be symbolized through the fraternal union of both deities: Dionysus speaks the language of

<sup>33</sup> Jean Luc Nancy has demonstrated how the "as if" structure is an inverted form of ontological realism. See "Dies Irae," in Jean-Francois Lyotard (ed.), *La Faculté de Juger* (Paris: Minuit, 1985), 14. Nietzsche's text is as long commentary upon its structure.

Apollo; Apollo, however, finally speaks the language of Dionysus—whereby the highest goal of tragedy and of art as such is reached. (§21)

As an art *form* tragedy reaches its "highest goal" when the process of metaphorical transference and translation completes itself by breaking apart into a disunity indicative of a lack of similarity, a lack of proportionality, and a lack of resemblance between the two distinct media, a lack which until now appeared as a plenitude of clarity, visibility, and adequation. Not the smooth passage in accordance with the consonant dictates of analogy's logical foundation but a distinctly non-Apollinian dissonance is heard as the unity constitutive of the Apollinian drama is suspended, concluding the process of appearing with the disappearance of the visible. Such fragmentation, decisively characterized by Nietzsche as *Selbstentzweiung* (§22)—"bifurcation" as the auto-dissociation and auto-discord at the center of tragedy—is a manifestation of the unavoidable violence which each medium suffers (*erleidet*) when the translation (*übertragen*) from one medium to the other is made by means of an analogical metaphor. "As a whole," tragedy, the tragic effect, and the "difficult relation" between the media which produce this effect—the *Urproblem*—are all finally realized only when the deceptive veil of the Apollinian is finally negated by concluding the process of appearing with the appearance of the process of appearing itself. However, no higher positivity is revealed—a vain attempt to puncture the veil and effect an apocalyptic appearance of Dionysus as the *Ding an sich* or the primordial Will—rather the Apollinian veil is disclosed *as* veil: "The brightest distinctness [*hellste Deutlichkeit*] of the image did not suffice us: For this appeared just as much to reveal Something as to veil it [*Etwas zu offenbaren als zu verhüllen*]" (§24). The Apollinian "visibility"—*Sichtbarkeit*—and "distinctness"—*Deutlichkeit*—which allow the Dionysian to appear through the process of *Versinnlichung* (sensibilizing), is not the "visibility" of *something*: No particular thing is visible and distinct. Instead, the possibility of visibility itself appears as the *thingliness* of things, the shining *Schein* of their appearing as the possibility not so much of appearances as apparitions.<sup>34</sup> No illusion can remain about the reality or naturalness of

<sup>34</sup> On the concept of "shine" in Nietzsche's philosophy, see Robert Rethy, "*Schein* in Nietzsche's Philosophy," in *Nietzsche and Modern German Thought*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson (London: Routledge, 1991), 59-87.



the "ghostly unreality" of the "movements and figures" of Dionysus. The figures of the divine inhabit a peculiar space of irreality. Neither of this world or another, embodied but not exactly a body, the figures of this space live in the clouds, atop Mt. Olympus. Not only does the architecture of the dramatic scene in Greek tragedy appear in the form of a "luminous image of clouds [*leuchtendes Wolkenbild*]" in which the indistinct, cloudy image of Dionysus appears, but even the figure of Apollo appears—in the penultimate paragraph of Nietzsche's text—"veiled in a cloud [*in einen Wolk gehüllt*]" (§25), its sunny radiance reduced to a shadowy indistinctness.

The tragic loss of presence effected by the fundamental heterogeneity of tragedy's formal elements also defines its content: *The tragic*. This phenomenon has always been known as catharsis, and Nietzsche defines it as the essentially tragic—"the primordial phenomenon of the tragic [*das Urphänomen des Tragischen*]" (§22)—making it, as Aristotle does, the very essence of *the tragic effect*. But Nietzsche, unlike Aristotle, does not understand the telos of tragedy's cathartic effect as a pleasurable purification of the painful emotions of pity and terror—referred to by Nietzsche as a "pathological-moral process" (§22)—a purification which ought to habituate the citizens of the *polis* in the correct emotional responses required by the state.<sup>35</sup> Rather than subordinating tragedy to the ends of politics, Nietzsche insists that tragedy's cathartic effect acts as a suspension of those dictates, in the process delimiting the validity of the Apollinian world of politics by holding it open. As the precise analog to the "*stellvertretendes Bild*" of the "primordial aesthetic phenomenon," the tragic effect is a "*stellvertretendes Wirkung*," a "place-holding effect" (§22). Tragedy's place-holding, supplementing effect—for art is a "supplement [*Supplement*]" (§24) to nature—is an addition which, by taking away, paradoxically adds something: The thought of the other. A supplement to the supplementary image of the Apollinian, the second moment of the tragic effect negates the "*stellvertretendes Bild*," effecting a breakdown in the passage from the unrepresentable to its "metaphorical"

supplement, thereby disclosing the supplement *as* supplement—as the not-natural, the

<sup>35</sup> See *Poetics*, 49b25-28; *Politics*, VIII, 5.1339b42-1340a27 and 7.1341b32-1342a18. Nietzsche does not wholly reject the Aristotelian concern with pity and terror, but he confines them to the sphere of the Apollinian elements of tragedy. So delimited, they are irrelevant to and negated by tragedy's specifically Dionysian element and Dionysian effects with which it concludes.



unrealistic, and the anti-mimetic. The metaphor, the vicarious image allowing Dionysus to appear in the Apollinian figure of the hero, finally speaks against itself, denies itself and disfigures itself, thus holding the place of the other—the natural, the real, the true—open, suspending its representation and with it Apollinian dictates of total politicization. The limit to the Apollinian—"that delicate line...that measured limitation"—is inscribed in the formal structure of tragedy as its content, the tragic, and as that limit makes itself known, presence is lost: "The *tragic myth* leads the world of appearances to its limits [*an die Grenze*] where it denies itself" (§22).

### Operatic Work

The Socratic founding of theoretical philosophy, with its disregard for theory's limits and concomitant inauguration of metaphysics, also laid the basis for a political form constitutively incapable of comprehending the tragic limits of its own enterprise. In modernity the same form of politics appears as an analogous manifestation of the Roman *imperium* with its barbarous form of nationalism. But precisely because this political form rests on an aesthetic illusion—the beautiful illusion of Apollinian measure—its aesthetic forms are also politicized. Nietzsche discovers the exemplary form of politicized aesthetics and aestheticized politics in modernity's first unique art form—opera. But he had already discovered its characteristic alterations of tragedy and their consequences for the tragic effect in the "tragedies" of Euripides. While the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles de-instrumentalize music by liberating it from the ends of the drama, a liberation which suspends the action and its epic tension during the "pathos" of the "great rhetorical-lyrical scenes" (§12), Euripides' dramas effect a "revolution in public language [*Umschwung der öffentlichen Sprache*]" (§11) which subjects language's flights into music to the everyday criterion of instrumental communication with its canon of immediate comprehensibility. In short, tragedy's art is theorized and its effect intellectualized. "Cool, paradoxical *thoughts*" replace the Apollinian intuition of appearances *as* appearances, Dionysian ecstasy gives way to "fiery *affects*," and the tragic effect is transformed from an affirmation of the loss of presence and suspension of the present into a "stimulating uncertainty" as the intellect desires "to know what is to happen now and afterward" (§12). Euripides' rationalist

method creates a desire to know, confuses art with discursive communication, and fails to suspend the mechanical flow of time between "now and afterward." When the results turn out to be "*thoughts*" and "*affects*" which are "imitated as realistically as possible" (§12), the confusion between art and nature, between the artificial and the historically given, occurs. The ground is set now for the confusion of politics—of the nature of its participants and the nature of the state—with art—a means of representation which is just that: Art, artifice, and artificial.

In the New Attic Dithyramb and in modern opera, Euripides' "linguistic revolution" (§11) is not only still in effect, the consequences are even more pronounced. Euripides' "revolution [*Umschwung*]" turns the music of his predecessors' "great rhetorical-lyrical scenes" into an instrument for representing the everyday and the "natural," effectively presenting the historically specific as the universal, in the process enslaving his audience to the particular form of the real and the natural with which they are presented. Just as Euripides sets out to secure his "political hopes" (§11) through innovations appealing to the popular desire for immediate comprehensibility, so are the effects of the New Attic Dithyramb and modern opera inescapably linked to politics. And just as Euripides instrumentalizes music and makes it a means for presenting a strictly Apollinian drama—a poeticized epic—so too is the relation between music and image, between the Dionysian and the Apollinian, fundamentally reconfigured by the New Attic Dithyramb and modern opera. The alteration necessarily effects the basic structure of tragedy which Nietzsche had so painstakingly analyzed. Rather than music being translated into an image only for that image to be destroyed in the end as its inadequacy to music is presented, music is now reduced to a means for presenting images. With the reversal of the analogy music appears as image, as a tone painting, a mere copy of appearances—as a battle or a stormy sea. The process of mimetic duplication "bridging" the inherent untranslatability of music and image now altered, the tragic effect is no longer liberating. In accordance with the reversal of the analogy, the reformulation of the mode of mimesis, and the repairing of the unbridgeable disjunction previously inhabiting them, the liberating effect of music, of tragedy, and of the music-drama is itself reversed and enslavement to the given results:

In this New Dithyramb, music is, in an outrageous manner, made into an

imitative counterfeit of appearances, for example, of a battle or a stormy sea, and it has consequently been utterly robbed of its myth-creating power. For if it seeks to arouse our delight only by forcing us to seek after external analogies [*äußerliche Analogien*] between an occurrence of life and of nature and certain rhythmic figures and characteristic sounds of music. If our understanding is to be satisfied by the knowledge of these analogies, so are we reduced to an attunement [*Stimmung*] in which conception of the mythical has become impossible; for myth wants to be received intuitively [*anschaulich empfunden*] as a singular example [*einziges Exempel*] of a universality and truth towering up into infinity. (§ 17)

Contrary to the mood of moderation effected by Aeschylian and Sophoclean tragedy, the particular attunement effected by the New Attic Dithyramb is neither creative nor receptive. Music is reduced to miming appearances. No transcendence of the given takes place, no activity occurs, only the incapacitating confusion of Apollinian shine with truth and universality, the precise opposite of the liberatory mood of the tragic effect. The fantasy blankly registers the given, duplicates the natural, and repeats the past. It even denies its repetitive instantiation of an arbitrary configuration of cloudy appearances and asserts itself as a positivistic "understanding" and "knowledge." The "understanding" achieved thanks to the "analogical" correlation of music to mere appearances holds the fantasy under arrest: "Our fantasy is arrested [*Phantasie...festgehalten wird*] by these [analogical] superficialities" (§ 17). Music, finally, is "reduced to being a slave to appearances [*zur Sklavin der Erscheinungen*]" (§ 17). So enslaved, the illusion becomes total.

It is, however, with the birth of modernity and particularly its unique aesthetic form that Nietzsche finds the effects of tragedy's decline most evident. With the birth of opera in the 1600s in Italy, a development taking place under the influence of the revived interest in Greek culture and Greek tragedy, the advocates of the new genre—their work asserting itself as an authentic recreation and renaissance of ancient tragedy—transformed, radicalized, and formalized the principles already at work in Euripides and the New Attic Dithyramb. In the process they rejected the principles of church music and its great exemplar—the "ineffably sublime and sacred [*unaussprechbar erhabene und heilige*]" music of Palestrina (§ 19). In sharp contrast to the "unspeakably" sublime character of Palestrina's Dionysian harmonies—his music's "*un-aus-sprech-bar*" character—the advocates of opera demanded that music be, above all, speakable, "*sprech-*



*bar*" — comprehensible, communicative, servile. To this end new means of musical expression were formulated. The resulting principles — the recitative and the *stilo rappresentativo* — made possible the clear, discursive communication which speech should afford. For opera, contrary to the play at the center of tragedy, is work — dramatic work. The *opus* of *opera* is the work of narration laboring to communicate itself. Its means are the two principle forms of narrative: The recitative and the *stilo rappresentativo*. The recitative recites, repeating aloud what has been memorized, intending it to be understood. Not the sublime, but the story line of the drama — its epic *mythos* — is communicated, and it is not sung, but declaimed, using every available rhetorical means to excite an effect. Its style — the *stilo rappresentativo* — is, then, representational, *rappresentativo*.<sup>36</sup> These principles of narration — an impure and contradictory mixture of epic and lyric modes of delivery — are a form of a protest against the church. In contrast to the church's polyphonic and non-communicative music, the principles of opera must be seen as an attempt to enable the communication of an image of man. Not just any image of the human will do; the originary image of the human is to be put on stage and narrated. Its *logos* is to be understood. The formal principles of opera should make such representation possible, and these same principles should insure that the originary and good nature of man's speech is heard — clearly and distinctly. However little such representational style has to do with the tragic effect — the very breakdown of communication in the expression of the incommunicable — such inadequacies are not perceived by the advocates of opera, for opera is an art form whose origin lies not in ancient Greece, but in the fulfillment of an extra-aesthetic, indeed, political end specific to modernity:

*But this was not the opinion of the inventors of the recitative:* They themselves believed, and with them their age, that the secret of antique music had been solved with the *stilo rappresentativo*, from out of which alone the monstrous effect of an Orpheus, an Amphion, and even of Greek tragedy is explained. The new style was accepted as the reawakening of the most effective music [*wirkungsvollsten Musik*], of ancient Greek music: Indeed, in accordance with the universal and popular conception of the Homeric world as the *primordial world* [*Urwelt*], one could abandon oneself to the dream of having descended once more into the paradisiacal beginnings of humanity, where music necessarily also must have had that

<sup>36</sup> On *stilo rappresentativo*, see Theodor Adorno's brief but suggestive remark on its relationship to music, language, and intentionality in *Quasi una Fantasia*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Verso: New York, 1994), 3.



unsurpassed purity, power, and innocence of which the poets, in their pastoral plays, knew to tell so touchingly. Here we see into the innermost development of this really proper modern species of art [*recht eigentlich modernen Kunstgattung*], the opera: Here a powerful need forcibly gains for itself an art, but it is a need of an unaesthetic variety: The longing for the idyll, the faith in the primordial, prehistoric existence [*urvorzeitliche Existenz*] of the artistic and good man. The recitative was regarded as the rediscovered language of that primordial man [*Urmensch*]; opera as the refound land of that idyllically or heroic good creature, who simultaneously in all of its actions follows a natural drive to art, who, whatever it has to say, sings at least a little, in order to, with the slightest rousing of the feelings, immediately sing with full voice [*voller Stimme*]. (§19)

Opera presents the "full voice" of an original, primordial, and prehistoric humanity. And yet, oddly, it is the art form most proper to modernity; indeed, it has only existed in modernity. But with the rediscovery of the primordial *logos* of the primordial man at the primordial and prehistoric origin of humanity what appears on the operatic stage is not a full, idyllic and idle voice, but a laborious process of narration in which music's purity—"music necessarily also must have had that unsurpassed purity"—is subjected to technical procedures which not only put it to work in the service of historical narration, but which lead it directly back to an authoritative text whose authority rests on a profound confusion: In the *stilo rappresentativo* "the music is regarded as the servant, the text the master, where music is compared with the body, the text with the soul" (§19). Rather than the ghostly appearance of a hero from out of the spirit of music, an appearance which leaves the illusion of presence behind, the enslavement of music to the quite visible and substantial materiality of the written text reinforces the authority of the visible word. Since the *stilo rappresentativo* is a style of representing appearances, nothing else is left to music but, "as a slave to appearances [*Sklavin der Erscheinungen*], to imitate the formal essence of appearances and in the play of lines and proportions rouse an external delight" (§19). This "most effective music," then, is slavish and effects slavery: It serves the ends of humanity by abandoning one to the "dream" of the primordial origin of the good *logos* with its "full voice," making its effect, in sharp contrast to the tragic effect, pacific: Art is here "an empty and distracting trend in amusement" (§19).

Opera has as its ends the fulfillment of extra-aesthetic—"unästhetischer"—needs. However, "good" these ends may be, they remain external to and distinct from the ends of

art, indeed, they have their origin in a "half-moral sphere [*einer halb moralischen Sphäre*]" (§19). Art cannot positively represent the being of humanity; rather, it fabricates it. Art cannot represent an original past and an original place: Its time and space are the present, its representations sheer artifice. Representations of an original humanity, in an original place, at the paradisiacal origin of the world inevitably *falsify*—art is artifice and artificial—and, when its artistry is denied, mendacious. Opera is one such art form. Its mendacity lies in its constitutive instrumentalism: Opera, and particularly its musical element, serves the end of extra-aesthetic needs. Art no longer an end in itself, it becomes a means to the representational ends of an extra-aesthetic need. Not only are these ends said to be "half" ethical—the "good" in humanity is the ethical issue—they are also highly politicized. Art serves the ends of opposing religious authority by asserting—putting on stage—the image of the "good" human born anew by the spirit of Renaissance humanism:

It is a matter of indifference to us that the humanists of the time combated the old ecclesiastical representation of man as corrupt and lost with this newly created picture [*Bild*] of the paradisiacal artist: So that opera is to be understood as the opposition dogma of the good man, with which, at the same time, a means of consolation was found against that pessimism which, owing to the frightful uncertainties of all circumstances, most strongly attracted precisely the most serious minded of that time. It suffices us to have recognized how the proper magic and therewith the genesis of this new art form lies in the satisfaction of an entirely unaesthetic need, in the optimistic glorification of the human in itself [*des Menschen an sich*], in the conception of the primordial human [*Urmensch*] as the human which is good and artistic by nature: A principle of the opera that has gradually changed into a threatening and upsetting *demand* which, in the face of the socialist movements of the present, we cannot ignore any longer. The "good primordial human [*Der gute Urmensch*]" wants his rights [*Rechte*]: What paradisiacal prospects! (§19)

To the church's enthusiastic assertion of one particular representation of man, humanism opposes another image of the human being: More precisely, an image of the being of the human, the "*Menschen an sich*." Thus do the operatic humanists give up the medium of scholastic argumentation—the concept giving representations their significance—and settle on the artistic image, the *Bild*. The alteration of the medium of knowledge reflects the present age's misunderstanding of presence. As the scholastics' towering intellectual edifices begin to crumble and with them their attempts to prove god's existence, "frightful uncertainties" arise in their place, awakening a desire most readily fulfilled by transposing

god's goodness and artistry into the very essence of the human being, a task most easily achieved by the readily available means of art. A new picture was drawn up, a dramatic text written and staged, and the opposition suddenly had something to stand upon: A reborn human being "in itself" good and artistic, freely creating its good future. It ought not be surprising when this future turns out to be "socialist" in kind, for the very principle from which opera originates—"the satisfaction of an entirely unaesthetic need in the optimistic glorification of the human in itself"—is found at the center of the socialist project, only to be satisfied by the very same means: Like the *opus* of opera, socialism also puts itself to work, indeed, perhaps nothing is more valued by "the socialist movements of the present," Nietzsche writes, than the "dignity of work" (§18). In opera, no less than in socialist doctrine, work is the means for realizing—on stage and in society—the same end: "The human in itself." But just that is utterly inaccessible. Socialism's ontological and epistemological foundations rest on a confusion of media resulting in a confused form of cognition. Oppositional movements are forced to turn to artistic media and their artifice when the conceptual media of cognition turn out to be lacking or insufficient. In this way, politics turn into aesthetics and aesthetics into politics. In both cases—the aesthetics of opera and the politics of socialism—the instrument of opposition and the means to the future's "paradisiacal prospects" is the same: The work and labor of self-narration and self-dramatization in which the good appears to realize itself finally and fully with the mechanical regularity of the Euripidean "*deus ex machina*" (§12, §14, §18). While the industrialization of culture at work here—by means of a repeatable mechanics, divine intervention is effected—insures a happy telos to the end of history's drama, and while this same end reproduces itself with a peculiarly mechanical regularity, the only thing established by such repetitions is the ritualistic and ineffectual character of its doctrinal "dogma." Indeed, the opposition's tendency to repetition of its "dogma" is already inscribed within the structure of its doctrine: Its artifice arose out of an ontological need and gave rise to an oppositional politics which asserted its adequation to the real: It was right. Since this rightness rests on an epistemological foundation no more stable than the ability to doubt god's authority, art must provide the ground for the missing foundation. If the foundation is to be solid, it cannot, of course, be filled with fissures and chasms. It can



take only one form: The beautiful image which is whole, harmonious, and full of presence, said to already exist within the human being and require only hard work for its future revelation through hard work. Here, as always, being right and having rights (*Rechte*) mean only one thing: Being beautiful, being able to create a whole, harmonious, good artwork, and, in the end, being one. Opera and its naturalist, creaturely aesthetic set the process in motion; socialism and socialist realism finished it.

But the dignity of humanism and socialist humanism cannot be confined to one form of representation, for the principle itself—dramatic self-narration—can be readily employed as a means to very different ends. Indeed, if socialism represents the fundamental possibility of a reunion of the species through collective labor, the other basic possibility is found in the division of the species into individualized unites with self-generating narratives. The two structural narrative possibilities of epic *mythos*—on the one hand, that of collective society, on the other, that of the collected, liberal individual—are united, however, by the same rhythmic chant: Rights dignify. And in both cases the recitative of these two political movements' mantra—distinctly anti-Dionysian in its ritualized rhythms and consonant harmonies—concludes to identical effect: Rather than the tragic loss of presence, the glowing and seductive beauty of the word "right," spoken with a "full voice," effects the same restful passivity with which one abandons oneself "to the dream of having descended once more into the paradisiacal beginnings of humanity." Such origins, no longer overtly theological, refer not to a lost past, but to an inner presence which insures dignity. In modernity the "beautifully seductive and calming words of the 'dignity of the human' and the dignity of work" (§18) arise as a means of consolation. However "beautiful" their slogans may be, both liberalism—the "dignity of the human"—and socialism—"the dignity of work"—remain a confused aestheticization of the political which ends by calming everyone down.

#### "The Law of Eternal Justice"

Everything in *The Birth of Tragedy* moves toward the middle. Nowhere is this more evident than when Nietzsche characterizes the most basic relation of all—"the primordial relationship between the thing in itself and appearance": "Just as tragedy, with

its metaphysical consolation [*Troste*], points towards the eternal life of this kernel of existence through the continuous foundering of appearances, so does the symbolism of the satyr chorus already speak of this primordial relationship between the thing in itself and appearance [*Urverhältnis zwischen Ding an sich und Erscheinung*] (§8).<sup>37</sup> The emphasis ought not be placed on "the thing in itself" or "appearance," for neither, as Nietzsche emphasizes, is primordial. Rather, the "relationship between" them is originary. And if this is so, it is because the "thing in itself" is not at all "in itself," let alone a "thing."<sup>38</sup> In *The Birth of Tragedy* the "thing in itself" has a name—Dionysus—"the god which experiences the suffering of individuation in itself" [*die Leiden der Individuation an sich erfahrende Gott*] (§10). Against all expectations, the "thing in itself" is outside of itself, inscribed by and suffering from individuation. Rather than being a source of causality like Schopenhauer's "thing in itself"—the substantial Will—Nietzsche's "thing in itself" is thoroughly passive suffering. Nor then, can it be thought substantial for, subjected as it is to suffering, it is, as myth has it, "torn to pieces by the Titans" (§10). Dismembered by individuation rather than its source, overcoming this state of suffering is only possible by entering into the space "between" them. From out of that space individuation arises, and with it the sufferings of Dionysus. Passing through the medium between them, on the other hand, suspends the individuated subject and with it the sufferings of Dionysus. And the experience of the medium is itself the achievement of justice:

In so far as the subject is an artist, it is already released from its individual will and has become, as it were, a medium [*Medium*] through which the

<sup>37</sup> Walter Kaufmann badly mistranslates this sentence when he makes "bei dem fortwährenden Untergange der Erscheinungen" say "which abides through the perpetual destruction of appearances." Nietzsche writes the *opposite*: "abiding" appears nowhere in the text. One cannot go on, as Kaufmann does, to then claim that "Here Nietzsche returns to Schopenhauer's perspective," for, as will become clear, Nietzsche's statement is a rejection of Schopenhauer's hyposticization of an eternal will (see *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann [New York: Vintage, 1967], 62, note #2).

<sup>38</sup> The same must be said of Nietzsche's "metaphysics," for it is thoroughly contaminated by its figurative opposite: "metaphor." First of all, Nietzsche's "metaphysics" is not even demonstrated: it is an "*Annahme*," an "assumption," neither deduced nor demonstrated, its value consisting in its descriptive, not demonstrative, character. For a thorough interpretation of this problem, see Michel Haar, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, trans. Michael Gendre (Albany: State University of New York, 1996); see also Lutz Ellrich, "Rhetorik und Metaphysik," in *Nietzsche-Studien*, no. 23 (1994), 241-272.

one truly being subject celebrates its redemption in shine. For above all it must be clear to us, for our humiliation *and* exaltation [*Erniedrigung und Erhöhung*], that the entire comedy of art is not performed for us, perhaps for our betterment or education; indeed, we are just as little the proper creators of that art world: To be sure, we may suppose of ourselves that we are even images and artistic projections for that same creator, and we have our highest dignity [*höchste Würde*] in the meaning [*Bedeutung*] of art works—for only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* is existence and the world eternally justified [*denn nur als ästhetisches Phänomen ist Dasein und die Welt ewig gerechtfertigt*—while of course our consciousness about our meaning is scarcely different from that which the soldiers painted on canvas have of the battle presented on it. (§6)

In so far as the subject is an artist—and everyone who attends a tragedy is an artist—the illusion of the "individual" is overcome, and an experience of the medium between the "individual" and the "one truly being subject" results. While the basic political and artistic forms of modernity rest on an amphibole which transposes elements of the Apollinian into the region of the Dionysian in order to make the essence of the human being appear, tragedy discloses the appearance of the individual to be inessential and derivative. And if the individual is granted dignity and rights by modern political movements on the basis of a Socratic *theoria* which attributes arid, lifeless, and enslaving "conceptual hallucinations [*Begriffs-Halluzinationen*]" to its essence, then tragedy grants dignity to the subject by elevating it over such hallucinations: "Dignity can only be spoken of there where the individual completely transcends itself [*völlig über sich hinaus geht*]." <sup>39</sup> The dignity achieved under the confused gaze of *theoria*, on the other hand, is neither right nor dignified. Rather, it reflects a confusion: *Schein* has not been clarified as shine. The effect of this subreptitious confusion—in contrast to the tragic effect—is the barbarism of the Doric state, of Roman nationalism, and, to be sure, of certain developments which would take place in the "German" state long after Nietzsche's death.

The first moment of justice—the trail of the "aesthetic phenomenon," of shine—performs the process of critical clarification. Its effect lowers the human: Dignity is not located in the conceptual cloak veiling the deceptive character of shine which seems to insure the human being's significance. The exposure of the veil with the lifting of the cloak—the tragic hero's attempt to become "the *one* essence of the world" ends up only in

<sup>39</sup> "Der griechische Staat," 765.



suffering (§9)—effects a feeling of humiliation (*Erniedrigung*). Anything else ends up seduced by illusion. The cathartic purification of illusion—seeing shine as shine—delimits the validity of the sphere of Apollinian appearances, sharply distinguishing it from any possible "in itself." In the process, it destroys the beautiful "images" mechanically produced by opera's work of self-narration. But in the second moment of justification the human being ends up in *Erhöhung*, an exalted state of elevation. With the overcoming of the illusion of the individual's substantiality, the subject is elevated above it. In so far as "we" appear in the world, "we" are neither the "proper creators" of that appearance, nor are its ends "for us." While Euripidean drama and modern opera return to the origin and instrumentalize music in order to transparently communicate the essence of that appearance, the process of aesthetic justification is concerned exclusively with the medium between origin and end. Neither origin nor end, those who experiencing the tragic become a pure means, their origin inaccessible and their end not simply withdrawn, but suspended and left open-ended. As instrumentalism and projects of self-narration—the good purposes of "betterment or education" "for us"—are suspended, the illusion of immediacy gives way to a medial experience: "The *tragic myth* leads the world of appearances to its limits [*an die Grenze*] where it denies itself" (§22).

However horrifying this process may be, the catharsis it effects—the very presentation and experience of justice—shows no traces of resignation. In the first moment of justice the hero is subjected to a suffering which figures death, presenting the hubris of the individual will and a radical form of humiliation. In the second moment, however, a strange, cathartic pleasure arises and a command prescribes a mode of action. This moment—Apollo "finally speaks the language of Dionysus, whereby the highest goal of tragedy and of art as such is reached"—gives an imperative which results when the "law of eternal justice" (§25) speaks:

The metaphysical joy in the tragic is a translation of the instinctive, unconscious Dionysian wisdom into the language of images: The hero, the highest appearance of the will, is negated for our pleasure, because he is only appearance, and the eternal life of the will is not touched by his annihilation. "We believe in eternal life," cries tragedy; while music is the immediate idea of this life. Plastic art has an entirely different aim: Here Apollo overcomes the suffering of the individual through the radiant glorification of the *eternity of appearances*; here beauty triumphs over the

suffering inherent in life; pain is, in a certain sense, eliminated by lies from the features of nature. In Dionysian art and its tragic symbolism the same nature calls to us with its true undissembled voice [*Stimme*]: 'Be like I am [*Seid wie ich bin*]! Under the ceaseless change of appearances the eternally creative primordial mother, eternally impelling to existence, eternally satisfying itself on this change of appearances!' (§16)

The categorical imperative concluding the tragic effect commands justice. This *Stimme* (voice), unlike the "full voice" of opera, brings tragedy to a close by neither revealing a being nor disclosing a presence. The result, then, breaks open the present order, suspending the illusion of totality, and this, Nietzsche insists, is just. For what it opens up to is the "Other [*Anderes*]" (§23) and "another world [*anderen Welt*]" (§17). Opening up to the other, to a reborn Dionysus who has not yet arrived, to the possibility that there is something more beyond the present order—each of these possibilities brings one into accordance with the law, not simply the Apollinian law, but the law of the law, the measureless law of justice which delimits the Apollinian sphere of the individual lest it become unjust and "petrify into an Egyptian rigidity and coldness" (§9).<sup>40</sup> Again and again Nietzsche's text turns upon this moment, variously describing it as "negation," "annihilation," "foundering," "breaking-up," "bifurcation," "disharmony," and "dissonance." In every case it signals tragic catharsis with its "place-holding effect [*stellvertretendes Wirkung*]" (§22), and each time it "redeems us from the greedy impulse after this existence, and with an admonishing hand reminds us of another being [*ein anderes Sein*]" (§21).

The purifying imperative of justice is the voice which finally effects the mood specific to the tragic effect and a tragic culture. Tragedy's cathartic effect limits the world of phenomenality, opening up, rather than reinforcing, the world of appearances, for they are, only *Schein*, only a veil, only a myth. The limit to illusion—"lest it effect us pathologically, failing which the shine would deceive us as crude reality"—moderates the extremes, delimiting them by indicating what is extreme, what oversteps, thus, what is fatal and brings about the hero's downfall. And that effect also has an effect on the drive to

<sup>40</sup> On the relationship between "justice" and the Apollinian, see Dennis King Keenen, "Moving in the Margin of Justice: Nietzsche's Reading of Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound," in *The Fate of the New Nietzsche*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson and Howard Caygill (Averbury: Aldershot Press, 1993), 251-263. See also Peter Sloterdijk, *Thinker on Stage: Nietzsche's Materialism*, 80-85.

politics. Nietzsche contends that Greece—seen as the analog to post-war "Germany"—provides the very model of a moderation located between the extremes. Even after the bloody war with Persia, indeed, precisely after it, the Greeks neither sunk into apathetic, nihilistic resignation in the face of the war's horrifying abyss of suffering, nor did they fall prey to the pathological nationalism embodied in Roman imperial politics:

When we ask by means of which remedy [*Heilmittel*] it was possible for the Greeks during their great period, in spite of the extraordinary strength of their Dionysian and political drives [*dionysischen und politischen Triebe*], not to exhaust themselves in either ecstatic brooding or in a consuming chase after worldly power and worldly honor, but rather were able to reach that splendid mixture which resembles a noble wine whose attunement is simultaneously fiery and contemplative [*zugleich befeuernder und beschaulich stimmender Wein*], so must we be mindful of the tremendous violence of *tragedy* which stimulates, purifies, and discharges the whole life of the people [*der ungeheuren, das ganze Volksleben erregenden, reinigenden und entladenden Gewalt der Tragödie*]; we will first intimate its highest value when it confronts us, as it did the Greeks, as the quintessence of all prophylactic powers of healing, as the mediator ruling [*waltende Mittlerin*] between the strongest and in themselves most fatal qualities of a people. (§21)

Tragedy is a highest value because its cathartic violence mediates between the extremes of absolute immanence and absolute transcendence, effecting an attunement indicative of a form of existence and corresponding politics which lie between the excesses of Roman imperial politics and the ecstatic fatalism of Indian Buddhism. Lying between the extremes, this is the mood of the middle effected by "the mediator [*Mittlerin*]" — "the law of eternal justice" which insures that the two extremes of the Apollinian and the Dionysian "unfold their powers in rigorous, reciprocal proportion [*strenger wechselseitiger Proportion*]" (§25). The corresponding attunement, the mood of moderation—simultaneously sober and drunk—results as the tragic effect acting as a means to health that rules over all extremes. These extremes are the logical extension of the pure forms of the Apollinian and the Dionysian. When the effect specific to either of these "drives"—the "Dionysian and political drives"—is unchecked and allowed to manifest its pure, extreme form, the political results are either the utter suspension of the political in "ecstatic brooding" or the measureless extension of the political in a destructive "chase after worldly power and worldly honor." The particular attunement of this "splendid mixture" of sober ecstasy—its



*Stimmung*—is an effect of the imperative, the *Stimme* (voice) commanding a process of self-overcoming. Such critical clarification is, then, the very essence of justice and the only path open to "Germany's" future. Why the "aesthetic problem" of catharsis would lie, as Nietzsche wrote in the "Foreword," "right in the middle of German hopes" is now apparent. For the tragic effect is the passageway, the "way to health [*Heilmittel*]," which places one—an individual, a people, a nation, a culture—in "the middle," effecting that "simplest political feeling" (§21) which lies between the extremes of the purely Apollinian and purely Dionysian. This middling, but by no means ordinary, politics would characterize the non-nationalist nation as well as the particular community which was nevertheless impartial. Conforming to neither the particularity of all things Apollinian, nor to the strict universality of the Dionysian, "Germany" would be a particular nation whose particularity was not its own but the effect of its other, and that other—the universal, Dionysos—would be inscribed in the body of this singular nation as its cultural idiom, its form of existence, its way of life, its passions themselves. Its dissonant, discordant, and open-ended attunement would be the sure sign of a rebirth of tragedy. The tragedy, of course—at least this is how it is often referred to—was that tragedy never was reborn. In its place the aestheticized politics so carefully analyzed by Nietzsche triumphed.

CHAPTER III  
LEGISLATING THE SOCIAL CONTRACT: NIETZSCHE'S "ON TRUTH AND  
LIE IN THE EXTRA-MORAL SENSE"

The education of the ancient man customarily culminates in rhetoric: It is the highest activity of the well-educated political man—a very surprising thought for us!

—Nietzsche, "Presentation of Ancient Rhetoric"

Legislating Truth

In a letter to his friend Erwin Rhode, written shortly after the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche describes his plans for a second book, the so-called *Philosophenbuch* (*Philosopher's Book*).<sup>1</sup> It will be, he says, a "companion piece" to *The Birth of Tragedy*.<sup>2</sup> Although Nietzsche wrote only two sections of the companion—"On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense" and *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*—each develops the themes articulated in his first book, and both can be read as confirmation of his statement to Rhode.<sup>3</sup> Like their predecessor, each intervenes in the struggle characterized by *The Birth of Tragedy* as an "eternal conflict [*ewigen Kampf*] between the theoretical and the tragic view of the world" (§ 17), a contest pitting Socrates and the representatives of Platonic philosophy against the rhetorician and the artist to

<sup>1</sup> The title is not Nietzsche's own. It was given to the collection of notes and writings which he intended to turn into a book by Ernst Holzer and August Horneffer, the editors of the tenth volume of Nietzsche's first collected works, the so-called *Großoktavausgabe*. For a discussion of the titles Nietzsche considered, see Daniel Breazca's useful introduction to his translation of these notes and writings in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1992), xviii-xxiii.

<sup>2</sup> *Sämtliche Briefe, Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), vol. 4, 132.

<sup>3</sup> On the history of the text see Breazca, *Philosophy and Truth*, xviii-xxii; for an interpretation of Nietzsche's reasons for failing to complete the book see xlviii-xlix.

determine who will legislate the linguistic conventions governing the political community.<sup>4</sup> Just as Nietzsche had done in *The Birth of Tragedy*, he again devotes his efforts in the *Philosophenbuch* to clarifying the ethical and political effects of these conventions on the life of the nation. And yet, though there can be no question that the *Philosophenbuch* is indeed a "companion piece" to *The Birth of Tragedy*, this companionship is marked by an important and unmistakable difference. For *The Birth of Tragedy* never addresses the problem of legislation directly, focusing instead on its effects, and not until Nietzsche writes the essay which was to serve as the analytic core of the *Philosophenbuch* does he devote himself exclusively to the task of disclosing the logic and structure of legislative act producing those effects.

That essay — "On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense" — has emerged as one of Nietzsche's most important and influential texts.<sup>5</sup> It has been read and reread in recent years, resulting in a powerful series of interpretations centering on the essay's insights into the "eternal conflict" between philosophy and rhetoric.<sup>6</sup> These readings have come at a cost,

<sup>4</sup> Jürgen Habermas's *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (trans. Frederick Lawrence [Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1987]) marks the most recent stage of the conflict. See the attack on Nietzsche and Derrida in the "Excursus on Leveling the Genre Distinction between Philosophy and Literature" (185-210).

<sup>5</sup> "Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne" ("On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense") in *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe (KSA)*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), I, 875-890. Translations from the German are my own. Citations of the essay will be given in the body of the text, the German page number first, followed by the corresponding page in Breazeale's translation in *Philosophy and Truth*, 79-94. A translation of the essay also appears in *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), edited, translated, and introduced by Sander L. Gilman, Carole Blair, David J. Parent, 246-257.

<sup>6</sup> See Jacques Derrida's "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Allen Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982), 207-271; Sarah Kofman, "Metaphorical Architectures," in *Looking After Nietzsche*, trans. Peter T. Conner and Mira Kamdar (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 89-112; Paul de Man, "Rhetoric of Tropes (Nietzsche)" in *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 103-118; J. Hillis Miller, "Dismembering and Disremembering in Nietzsche's 'On Truth and Lie in a Nonmoral Sense'" in *boundary 2*, 9 (Spring/Fall 1981), 41-54. Alexander Nehamas's description of the text as "immensely overestimated" appears to have more to do with his effort to valorize Nietzsche's late work than with any real objection to the essay, for he offers none (see *Nietzsche, Life as Literature* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1985], 246, note 6). This evaluation is particularly odd given Nehamas's interest in the literary character of Nietzsche's writing.



however, for while they have done much to illuminate the essay's indispensable insights into rhetoric's relation to philosophical "truth," they have deflected attention away from the essay's second fundamental theme: The role of rhetoric in moral and political life.<sup>7</sup> To be sure, "On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense" polemicizes against "Socratism" by demonstrating the impossibility of freeing philosophical "truth" and literal speech from their entanglement in rhetoric's tropes and figures, but its polemic does not stop there. Nietzsche extends it—into the spheres of morality and politics—by investigating the effects of the philosopher's "truth" on morality and politics. His demonstration of the impossibility of purifying philosophical "truth" from its entanglement with rhetoric, then, is by no means the end of the story; rather, it serves as the foundation needed to illuminate a peculiar legislative ability which rhetoric alone possesses, an ability, moreover, whose effects are as much political and moral as they are epistemological. Rhetoric, Nietzsche argues, has power, even the power to legislate laws and imperatives prescribing what is to be done, and this power, he insists, is operative in both political and moral life. Its moral character is already hinted at in the essay's title; its political import, on the other hand, emerges as Nietzsche's investigation into this strange legislative ability finds itself drawn into a debate with the political philosophers over one of the most difficult and persistent issues in all of modern political philosophy: The legislation of the social contract and the founding of the political community.

It is no accident that Nietzsche turns to the problems of legislation and foundings in "On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense." He dictated the essay to von Gersdorff in an atmosphere permeated by the hopes raised in the wake of the German founding of 1871. But the essay shares none of the optimism for the *Reichsgründung* so apparent in *The Birth of Tragedy*. The philological community's hostile response to the book, the absence of any

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<sup>7</sup> Even those authors interested in Nietzsche's political thought have neglected to investigate the essay. Keith Ansell-Pearson's *An Introduction to Nietzsche as a Political Thinker* (New York: Cambridge University, 1994) makes no mention of it. The same is true of Peter Bergmann's fine work, *Nietzsche, "the Last Antipolitical German"* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987). Mark Warren, on the other hand, recognizes the coexistence of two distinct themes in the essay and contemplates the "different account" which would result if one were to focus on the role of rhetoric in "human relations" (see *Nietzsche and Political Thought* [Cambridge: MIT, 1988], 76). The present essay is an attempt to provide such an account.

genuine signs of a rebirth of Greek tragedy, and the intensification of the "drive to nationalism [*Nationaltriebe*]" (§21) in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War and *Reichsgründung* all brought an end to the hopes expressed in Nietzsche's first book.<sup>8</sup> In response to these developments, "On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense" tells a fable, a well-known fable, and Nietzsche is neither the first nor the last to employ it.<sup>9</sup> But he tells it differently. He sticks to its major themes—a fabulous moment of legislation takes place, the war of all against all is brought to an end, peace is established and a political community founded, and the life of the individual is preserved—but as he develops these themes, he employs them in order to comment on the successes and failures of the *Reichsgründung*. And this commentary is not only directed at the German founding. Nietzsche develops his points by joining a discussion which extends back to the beginnings of modernity. His own essay is clearly a contribution to its long and contentious history. The discussion's participants include Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Benjamin Constant, and

<sup>8</sup> Even earlier Nietzsche expressed doubts about the German nation and Bismarck. They extend back at least to November 1870, when he described the Prussian forces as an "extremely dangerous power." See *Briefe*, vol. 3, 155. As the dangerous consequences of the Reich's power politics became increasingly clear to Nietzsche, so too do his criticisms of the German state and Bismarck. See for instance his comments in *Briefe*, vol. 3, 164 (12 December, 1870), 279 (28 January, 1872). Nor are his comments more favorable in his notebooks. There Nietzsche describes the modern nation state as "a barbaric crudity in comparison with the city-state [*Stadt-Staat*]" because it rests on the "laughable" desire "to see the nation as a visible mechanical unity, equipped with a glorious governmental apparatus and military pomp." See *KSA* VII, 147, 174.

<sup>9</sup> On the essay's fabulous character, see Andrzej Warminski, "Towards a Fabulous Reading: Nietzsche's 'On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense,'" *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 15.2 (1991). Bonnie Honig draws attention to the purposes of the essay's fable in *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1993), 43. Of course, Nietzsche will again employ the genre of the fable to discuss the problem of "truth" in his famous genealogy of metaphysics entitled "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable (The History of an Error)" (see *KSA*, VI, 80-81). On the role of fables in Nietzsche's work with reference to this fable in particular, see Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "The Fable," trans. Hugh Silverman, in *The Subject of Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota), 1-13. On the structure of the fable in general, see Jacques Derrida's reading of Francis Ponge's *Fable* in "Psyche: Inventions of the Other" in *Reading de Man Reading*, ed. Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1989), 25-65. On the role of fables in foundings, see Derrida's "Declaration of Independence," *New Political Science* 15 (1986). For the origin of Nietzsche's own fable, see another brief essay composed for the *Philosophenbuch*, "On the Pathos of Truth," translated in *Philosophy and Truth*, 61-66.

Schopenhauer, and one of the central problems of modern political philosophy—the origin and character of the social contract—lies at the center of their debate.<sup>10</sup>

Nietzsche's own contribution to the debate consists in his efforts to think the philosophical problem of "truth" and the political and moral problem of legislation together rather than in opposition to one another. In order to carry out the task, he transposes Schopenhauer's theory of legislation into the sphere of "truth." Just as, according to Schopenhauer, an act of legislation founds the state by establishing the duties and rights of its members, so too does the legislative act establishing "truth" found society by instituting certain duties—telling the "truth" and keeping one's promise—as well as certain benefits—membership in the community and freedom from the pain of punishment and banishment.<sup>11</sup> And just as Schopenhauer had demonstrated the unavoidable moral dimension of the legislative act at the basis of political life by pointing to the duties imposed by the contract, so too does the legislative act distinguishing a "true" use of language from its mendacious counterpart establish, as the title of Nietzsche's essay calls it, a society's "moral sense"—the imperative commanding a "truthful" use of language. The fable which results from this displacement of the logic of legislation into the sphere of "truth" revolves around the original moment of lawlessness and the original act of lawmaking at the basis of the social contract. As Nietzsche tells it, this moment, the primordial political moment

<sup>10</sup> Nietzsche first approaches the problem through Kant's polemical essay "Über ein vermeintes Recht aus Menschenliebe zu lügen" ("On a Supposed Right to Lie Based on Philanthropy"). There Kant argues against the liberal French political philosopher Benjamin Constant over the role of "truth" and lying in social life. Against Constant's claim—"if one takes the duty to speak the truth singly and unconditionally, it would make every society impossible"—Nietzsche sides with Kant and makes telling the truth the necessary condition of society's existence. Against Kant, he assigns an entirely new value and function to "truth" and "truth" telling. For Nietzsche's comments on Kant and Constant see *KSA* VII, 622, 705, and Klaus-Uwe Fischer's discussion of Nietzsche's reading of their debate in "Vom Grundsatz der Pflicht: ein Zitat" in *Nietzsche-Studien* #14, 426-427.

<sup>11</sup> Schopenhauer's doctrine of the state synthesizes the competing theories of the social contract articulated by Hobbes and Kant. Accordingly, the state is a product, as Hobbes had argued, of a "common contract [*gemeinsamen Vertrag*]," while the "doctrine of state [*Staatslehre*]," as Kant had argued against Hobbes, is a matter of law. Schopenhauer, however, rejects Kant's attempt to bring that law into accordance with the moral law, though he does, to be sure, acknowledge its moral dimension. Politics, according to Schopenhauer, or the "doctrine of state," is nothing more or less than the doctrine of lawmaking—the "doctrine of legislation [*Lehre von der Gesetzgebung*]" (*Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993] I, §62).



marking the transition from war to peace, from the Franco-Prussian War to the legislative act founding the German state, achieves the same end which has always motivated the legislation of social contracts—preserving the individual. But in his account, the peace treaty that results and the duties it establishes are less a matter of determining specific rights and obligations than of establishing collective control over the power of language—*through the legislation of truth*:

Insofar as the individual wants to preserve himself against other individuals, he will use his intellect in the natural state of things primarily for dissimulation: But at the same time, however, because man, out of necessity and boredom, wants to exist socially and in a herd-like manner [*heerdenweise*], he needs a peace agreement and strives to banish from the world at least the crudest forms of the *bellum omnium contra omnes*. But this peace agreement brings something with it which looks like the first step toward acquiring that puzzling drive for truth [*Wahrheitstriebes*]. Namely, what from now on should be the "truth" is fixed, that is, a uniformly valid and binding designation [*Bezeichnung*] of things is invented [*erfunden*], and the legislation of language also gives the first laws of truth [*und die Gesetzgebung der Sprache giebt auch die ersten Gesetze der Wahrheit*]: For the contrast between truth and lie arises here for the first time; the liar uses the valid designations, the words, in order to make the unreal appear real—he says, for example, "I am rich," when the proper designation for this state would be precisely "poor." He misuses fixed conventions through arbitrary substitutions or even reversals of names. If he does this in a selfish and moreover harmful manner, society will cease to trust him and will thereby shut him out. (877-878, 81)

Nietzsche's presentation transforms the logic of the social contract by displacing its foundational moment into the sphere of language.<sup>12</sup> In his account, language and legislation are so thoroughly united that the act of law-giving producing the social contract is transformed into an act of legislation which establishes the linguistic conventions governing

<sup>12</sup> On the displacement of the contract into the sphere of language, see H. A. Reyburn in collaboration with H. E. Henderks and J. G. Taylor, *Nietzsche* (London: MacMillan and Company, 1948), 190. Bernard Pautrat describes the character of this displaced contract with precision when he writes, "ce contrat social est un contrat de langue" (*Versions du soleil: figures et système de Nietzsche* [Paris: Seuil, 1971], 221). See also Henning Ottmann, *Philosophie und Politik bei Nietzsche* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1987), 114; Thomas Heilke, *Nietzsche's Tragic Regime: Culture, Aesthetics, and Political Education* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998), 144-146.

Nietzsche's displacement of the social contract into the sphere of language can easily be seen as a response to the first systematic text on the relationship between language and contracts: Plato's *Cratylus*. Each of the topics Nietzsche's essay takes up—language, linguistic legislation, and contractual agreements—has its origins there, and each of Nietzsche's treatments of these topics ought to be seen in the context of his critique of "Socratism."

a society's signifying practices.<sup>13</sup> The binding power of the social contract is accordingly displaced and disseminated throughout society's linguistic conventions, endowing the language of convention with the authority and power associated with every contract. Yet the contractual character of language's "fixed conventions" is by no means out in the open—far from it, for it is derived from nothing written down or consciously adopted. Once the social contract is displaced into the sphere of language, it assumes an unwritten, unacknowledged, and unconscious form. It is neither drawn up nor signed, yet its existence is demonstrated whenever the violators of convention are subjected to the power which contracts have always employed to insure their preservation—punishment. Whoever violates the rules governing the use of language is expelled from the community and "shut out" of society. Expulsion is necessary because "liars"—this is the conventional term for these rule breakers—pose a threat to the maintenance of social harmony and the preservation of the "peace agreement." When they lie, they break the peace treaty suspending the war of all against all, violate the contract at its basis, and endanger life itself.

The real threat to life, however, comes not from liars. Nietzsche points to a more serious problem lodged within the structure of social convention, and its resolution becomes the central task of the essay. The difficulties involved in such a resolution are hardly betrayed by the simplicity with which the problem can be stated: Social convention conflicts with the life of the individual, and conventional language violates the singularity of that life. Nietzsche locates the origin of the conflict and the contradictions it produces in the peculiar structure of legislation which ends the *bellum omnium contra omnes*. That structure is unique, even unparalleled, for according to his presentation, it lacks something no act of legislation can do without: A legislator. To be sure, a "peace agreement" is achieved, "but" the agreement "brings something with it [*Dieser Freundesschluss bringt aber etwas mit sich*]," and that "something" is neither willed nor legislated nor agreed

<sup>13</sup> The significance of this transformation is perhaps best measured by the extent to which it has, through a vast and hopelessly entangled chain of influence, placed the problem of "society" and its practices at the center of contemporary debates in political philosophy. To cite one of many possible example, see Claude Lefort's essay "The Question of Democracy" in *Democracy and Political Theory*, trans. David Macey (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 9-20, esp. 11-12.

upon. No individual or society ever legislated the language of "truth," the language of "uniformly binding and valid designations." At the origin of society, then, there is agreement *but no legislator*: Everyone agrees to the terms, yet the terms are not their own.<sup>14</sup> No one legislated them, and yet legislation took place—"the legislation of language [*Gesetzgebung der Sprache*]." <sup>15</sup> In this case, language is sovereign: It gives the "laws of truth [*Gesetze der Wahrheit*]," and the members of society accordingly lose their claim to sovereignty. Yet the lack of human legislators and absence of integral individuals does not prevent the law from achieving the desired end of preserving the life of the individual. Its conventions are preservative through and through, for the language of convention is indeed contractual: Although no one legislated it, everyone is bound by it.<sup>16</sup> And as long as everyone remains bound to its laws, its preservative effects continue to operate. They do so, however, at a grave cost, for they imprison man within a thoroughly contingent and accidental linguistic convention. Indeed, they differ from the "walls of prison [*Gefängniswänden*]" (883, 86) in form but not effect. However much the language of convention may appear to offer shelter to the individual and respite from the threats of others, its laws inevitably violate the specificity of the individual, imprison without charges or trial, and render the "peace agreement" self-defeating.

### "A Mobile Army"

If anything characterizes social life according to Nietzsche's fable more than the peculiar structure of the legislative act establishing its linguistic conventions—though everyone is a party to the convention, no one legislates it; though everyone agrees to the

<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche had commented upon this strange situation in "On the Origin of Language" (1869-70): "Nations [*Völker*] are silent about the origin of language: they could not think of the world, gods, and man without it." See *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language*, 210. For the original, see *Gesammelte Werke* (Musanionausgabe), vol. 5, 469.

<sup>15</sup> For an attempt to link this passage to the role of language in general in Nietzsche's thinking see Daniel Breazeale's comments in his introduction to *Philosophy and Truth*, xxx.

<sup>16</sup> In "On the Origin of Language," "all earlier naive standpoints [concerning the origin of language] are rejected" (210, 468). Among them Nietzsche includes the theses that language is the product of a "contract" or a "consensus" (210, 468).



terms of the convention, the terms are not their own; though not a contract, it is nevertheless binding—it is the collective forgetting of each of these paradoxes. In each case, the peculiar role of language in social life is forgotten. The effects of this forgetting, symptomatic of the victory of "Socratism" in Nietzsche's "eternal conflict," imprison man within language's artifices and society's conventions and reduce the intellect to precisely the same state effected by Euripides' rationalized tragedies in *The Birth of Tragedy*: "Slavery" (888, 90). Far from setting one free, "truth," at least according to Nietzsche's famously metaphorical description of it, is more like an occupying force governing a conquered territory.<sup>17</sup>

The majority of Nietzsche's essay is devoted to demonstrating the ordering ability of this "truth," and it does so by illuminating how the legislation of "truth" is, against all expectations, capable of commanding and organizing society, turning it into an occupied territory ruled by a mobile army which maintains order and keeps the peace. This demonstration, however, is carried out for the sake of another, far more pressing task: Liberating the individual from its enslavement to this occupying force. Nietzsche performs two operations in an effort to realize this end: On the one hand, his investigation into the structure of legislation leads to the articulation of an entirely new mode of legislation and an entirely new form of "truth," both essential to the resolution of the social contract's contradictory structure; on the other hand, nothing new can emerge until the structure of legislation is laid bare along with "truth's" ability to command and organize society. This second task reaches its decisive moment when, having thoroughly reinscribed the problem of legislation within a linguistic context dominated by the question of "truth's" relationship to rhetoric, Nietzsche gives a highly rhetorical definition of "truth":

What then is truth? A mobile army [*bewegliches Heer*] of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a nation [*Volk*] to be canonical and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions; they are metaphors which have become worn out and have been

<sup>17</sup> A "politics of truth" is set in motion here. Michel Foucault pursues this line of thinking, calling for "a new politics of truth" by referring to "the importance of Nietzsche." See "Truth and Power" in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 133.

drained of their sensuous power [*sinnlich kraftlos*], coins which have lost their image [*Bild*] and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins. (880-1, 84)

"Truth," Nietzsche insists, is rhetorical. A proper, literal, and "true" language does not exist which can be contrasted with an improper, figurative, and fictional language constructed on its foundations, for these foundations are themselves figurative.<sup>18</sup> And this figurative foundation, Nietzsche writes, exerts an influence over the nation. Its metaphors and metonymies become "canonical and binding." "Truth"—a mobile army of metaphors of metonymies—binds the nation together with its figures. In the wake of a total war, then, language mobilizes its forces, passing from one thing to another, conquering the territory between them and establishing martial law wherever it goes. The peace treaty at the basis of the nation, on the other hand, is in turn dictated by the "laws of truth." This agreement is binding, canonical, and contractual, and it makes rhetoric the foundation of the nation.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche is not the first to make this claim, although his has been the most influential. In his "Presentation of Ancient Rhetoric," he quotes Jean Paul's claim that "each language is a dictionary of faded metaphors" (see *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language*, 53). Gustav Gerber's 1872 work *Die Sprache als Kunst (Language as Art)* is often credited with being the source of many of Nietzsche's ideas about rhetoric. On his reading of Gerber see Anthoine Meijers, "Gustav Gerber und Friedrich Nietzsche," *Nietzsche-Studien*, 17 (1988) and Anthoine Meijers and Martin Stingelin, "Konkordanz zu den wörtlichen Abschriften und Übernahmen von Beispielen und Zitaten aus Gustav Gerber: Die Sprache Als Kunst Bromberg 1871 in Nietzsches Rhetorik-Vorlesung und in 'Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne'," *Nietzsche-Studien*, 17 (1988). Despite the obvious importance of Gerber's work for Nietzsche, it is by no means clear that his investigation into rhetoric ought to be described as a decisive "detour" from the issues addressed in his earlier work. The problem of rhetoric was already at the center of *The Birth of Tragedy* (see §8 on the role of metaphor in tragedy) before Nietzsche had encountered Gerber's work. On the "detour" see Lacoue-Labarthe's influential essay "The Detour" in *The Subject of Philosophy*, 14-36. For a careful attempt to demonstrate how Nietzsche's adoption of Gerber's tropological model of language is less a break or detour than an extension of his earlier investigations into the nature, origin, and development of language, see Claudia Crawford's important work, *The Beginnings of Nietzsche's Theory of Language* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1988), 199-220. Unfortunately, Crawford nowhere accounts for Nietzsche's use of metaphor and analogy in *The Birth of Tragedy*. When these figures appear again in the *Philosophenbuch* and lectures on rhetoric, Crawford claims that Nietzsche has adopted them from Gerber's tropological model of language (215) in order to explain insights which he had arrived at long ago.

<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of the role of rhetoric in political theorists' presentations of the original contract F. R. Ankersmit's *Aesthetic Politics. Political Philosophy Beyond Fact and Value* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996). See particularly chapter 5, "Politics and Metaphor" (254-293) on the role of rhetoric in Plato, Hobbes, Rawls, and others.

Under these conditions, rhetoric is sovereign, rhetoric legislates, and rhetoric retains all the power of a mobile army.

Nietzsche is not, however, the first to recognize rhetoric's power in political life. In his much discussed lecture course on ancient rhetoric, presented at the University of Basel during the winter semester of 1872-73, he indicated how the problem of rhetoric impinges upon the sphere of politics by reminding his students of Aristotle's acknowledgement of rhetoric's power, its *dynamis*: "The power [*Kraft*] to discover and to make operative that which works and impresses, with respect to each thing, a power which Aristotle calls rhetoric, is, at the same time, the essence of language."<sup>20</sup> Of course, language is also the very possibility of political life for Aristotle, yet he never claims that rhetoric is the essence of language, and he consistently subordinates rhetoric to logic and ethics, even making it their "offshoot" in an effort to render it useless to demagogues.<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche, by contrast, insists on the rhetorical character of all language and elevates rhetoric to "the highest activity of the well-educated political man."<sup>22</sup> But while his lectures allude to the well-known centrality of rhetoric to political life, and while they unite Aristotle's two fundamental determinations of the essence of the human being—*zoon politikon* and *zoon logon echon*—they never broach the possibility that rhetoric's tropes might metamorphose into a peculiar species of military troops. Nor do they ever intimate that the rhetorical core of "truth" might in fact be more like a mobile army governing society than a philosophical absolute. Only in "On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense" does Nietzsche make these expansive claims. Indeed, in this essay he no longer attributes rhetoric's power to demagogues, sophists, or well-educated political men, figuring it instead as a political force

<sup>20</sup> "Presentation of Ancient Rhetoric," 21. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Book 1, Chapter 2. On the controversy surrounding the dating of the course see the editor's introduction to *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language*, ix-xi. For an account of the lecture course by one of the two students who attended, see *Begegnungen mit Nietzsche*, Sander L. Gilman (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1985), 111-112.

<sup>21</sup> *Rhetoric*, Book 1, Chapters 8, 2; *Politics* 1305 a.

<sup>22</sup> "Presentation of Ancient Rhetoric," 3.



in its own right: A mobile army.<sup>23</sup> Rhetoric is able to mobilize its forces the moment it is forgotten, and the moment it is forgotten, language's persuasive force begins to act like an army, securing the space between words and things, legislating their proper relation, and exerting—or rather enforcing—a peaceful, ordering, and finally deadening influence over society.

Nietzsche's definition of "truth" says as much when it curiously links the themes of metaphor and metonymy to the problem of human relations: "What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of human relations [*menschlichen Relationen*] which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a nation to be canonical and binding." The human relations Nietzsche speaks of here are not, at least not at first, the relations between human beings. Rather, the problem of "truth" is a problem of human relations because the question of "truth" has typically been posed in terms of the relation of humans to things. That relation has always involved a structure of adequation or correspondence between subjects and objects, between words and the world, between thought and what is thought, or between a perception and the perceived. Yet each of these relations is, Nietzsche claims, also inescapably rhetorical. "Truth" cannot escape rhetoric because its structure of adequation or correspondence depends upon the possibility of a transference—from an object to a subject—and that possibility invariably leads back to the sphere of rhetoric. For rhetoric's tropes are created precisely through transference—the transference of words from one object to another in the creation a new, figurative meaning. Nietzsche's decisive innovation lies in his displacement of rhetoric's structure of transference into the sphere of "truth" where the question is less one of relating two objects to one another than of relating, through the creation of a structure of correspondence or adequation, an object and a subject. In "On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense" as well as in the other major section of the *Philosophenbuch*—*Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the*

<sup>23</sup> Paul de Man offers an interpretation of the power of this "mobile army" in "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric," in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia, 1984), 242-3. On Nietzsche's affinity with and return to sophism, see Reihard Löw, *Nietzsche: Sophist und Erzieher. Philosophische Untersuchungen zum systematischen Ort von Friedrich Nietzsches Denken* (Weinheim: Acta humaniora, 1984), esp. 34-40.

*Greeks*—Nietzsche insists that the rhetorician relates things to man rather than to other objects: "The sculptor of language [*Sprachbildner*]," he writes, "designates only the relation of things to man" (879, 82).<sup>24</sup> And according to his definition of "truth"—a "mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms"—that relation is first of all structured according to the logic of metaphor: "The sculptor of language designates only the relation of things to man, and for expressing their relations he lays hold of the boldest metaphors." No trope is better suited to relate things to man than metaphor, for its meaning is precisely that of transference. Metaphors transfer (*meta-phora*) meaning from one place to another; they ferry (*phora*) meaning over (*meta*) the space separating two linguistic unities. But even here Nietzsche expands the function traditionally attributed to metaphor, for he fails to restrict the use of metaphor to simple transferences between linguistic unities. His displacement of rhetoric into the sphere of "truth" results, then, in the generalization of the structure of metaphor across the whole of human experience. All experience, Nietzsche insists, involves a transference, an *Übertragung* (879, 82), whether in the form of an intuition, a perception, or a cognition.<sup>25</sup>

Nietzsche's definition of "truth" does not, however, stop by identifying it with metaphor: "What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors [and] metonymies." "Truth" has its origin in metaphor—the effect of a transference—but only with the conversion of the metaphor into a metonymy—a source of transcendent causality—is the process of

<sup>24</sup> See also *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, §11, and Nietzsche's discussion in "Presentation of Ancient Rhetoric," 23. Lacoue-Labarthe provides an illuminating interpretation of this relation in "The Detour," 23-4.

<sup>25</sup> On this alteration, see Alan Schrift, *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation*, (New York: Routledge, 1990), 125-6. When Anne Tebertz-van Elst claims that this alteration violates the structure of metaphor as it has been traditionally conceived, she is entirely correct, but when she claims that it has no validity by referring to the definition of metaphor articulated by Max Black's *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy*, she demonstrates an unwillingness to read Nietzsche's text and the challenges it poses to the Aristotelian concept of metaphor. Her insistent reliance upon the criteria of Paul Ricoeur to explicate Nietzsche's text does little to help matters, because Nietzsche does not employ those criteria himself. See *Ästhetik der Metaphor: zum Streit zwischen Philosophie und Rhetorik bei Friedrich Nietzsche* (Freiburg/München: Verlag Karl Alber, 1994), 144.

origination completed.<sup>26</sup> The clarity of this two step process has been so obscured by the essay's mode of presentation that it has gone entirely unnoticed, for while Nietzsche gives two examples of words which have been converted into "true" concepts by means of

<sup>26</sup> Nietzsche's privileging of the operations of metaphor and metonymy in his definition of "true" language anticipates the discoveries of structural linguistics, particularly the influential work of Roman Jakobson on the foundational roles of metaphor and metonymy in language. See "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," in Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1956). Paul de Man has also drawn attention to Nietzsche's anticipation of twentieth-century linguistics by pointing to Gérard Genette's thoughts on contemporary rhetoric (see "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric," 240). Ronald Hayman sees an anticipation of Saussure's linguistics in Nietzsche's presentation of the structure of language: "the insistence that language cannot connect the subject to the object points forward to Saussure's principle that language is form, not substance" (*Nietzsche: A Critical Life* [New York: Oxford University, 1980], 164). Henri Lefebvre describes Nietzsche's discussion of metaphor and metonymy as an investigation into the two figures of speech which Saussurian inspired linguists locate at the level of metalanguage (see *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith [Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1991], 137-139). J. P. Stern, by contrast, is mistaken when he writes that Nietzsche "does not anticipate Saussure's insight" into language ("Nietzsche and the Idea of Metaphor" in *Nietzsche—Imagery and Thought*, ed. Malcolm Pasley [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978], 73) and "does not contribute significantly to twentieth-century linguistic thinking because he does not anticipate the discovers on which it is founded" (*Nietzsche* [Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1978], 141). When he goes on to argue that Nietzsche thinks he has overcome "Saussure's view of language as a self-contained system or structure" (141) by calling that structure "a mere convention" he is certainly correct, but to infer from this that Nietzsche fails to recognize that "any system or structure...imposes stability upon its constitutive elements" (141) overlooks the decisive role which he attributes to metaphor and metonymy in structuring a society's linguistic conventions and forms of thinking. When Stern then claims that Nietzsche similarly "ignored the positive aspects of the rule of custom and law" (141) in so far as they—like Saussurian linguistics—stabilize isolated insights and truths by relating them to one another, he forgets that Nietzsche always rejects the *bellum omnium contra omnes* in favor of the stability offered by social and cultural life. Nietzsche neither rejects custom nor law, only their petrification into something like Saussure's structuralism or the naive attempt to avoid them altogether. In "Nietzsche and the Idea of Metaphor," after giving an elucidation of the role of language in "On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense," Stern again asserts that Nietzsche is fundamentally hostile to and uninterested in the stabilizing effect of rules, laws, and institutions, and then generalizes these phenomena under "the sphere of association" (72). As ought to be clear by now, "On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense" is nothing if not an extended investigation into how people associate with one another once war is brought to an end and a peace agreement formulated. Finally, since Stern is unable to see the relationship between Nietzsche's investigations into rhetoric and twentieth-century linguistics, it ought to be noted that he is not helped by his inability to read Nietzsche's definition of "truth." Although he quotes it in "Nietzsche and the Idea of Metaphor" (70) and in his *Nietzsche* (136), as well as in his book with M. S. Silk, *Nietzsche on Tragedy* ([New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984], 339), in each case that definition—"a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms"—is truncated to one and the same element—metaphor. The role of metonymy simply drops out without explanation or comment.



metonymy—the "leaf," "honesty"—his antipathy towards abstract, theoretical argumentation prevents him from identifying those examples as presentations of the metonymic production of "truth." He simply gives a definition of "truth" and proceeds to give examples. It is a strategy which has led interpreters of the essay to fail to differentiate between the various moments involved in the creation of "truth," and this failure has in turn resulted in a simple conflation of "truth" with figurative discourse. The effect has been a failure to recognize Nietzsche's efforts to think the problem of "truth" and the organization of a society's discursive practices together, and this failure has led to a concomitant depoliticization of the essay. If, however, one refers to Nietzsche's definition of metonymy in his lectures on ancient rhetoric—"the substitution of cause and effect"—then the essay's examples of the production of "true" concepts become perfectly clear.<sup>27</sup> And what they exemplify is the production of a causal power which, Nietzsche will go on to argue, exerts itself at the very core of social relations:

Every concept arises from the equating of the non-equatable [*Gleichsetzen des Nicht-Gleichen*]. Just as it is certain that one leaf is never totally the same as another, so it is certain that the concept "leaf" is formed by arbitrarily discarding these individual differences and by forgetting the distinguishing aspects. This awakens the idea [*Vorstellung*] that, in addition to the leaves, there exists in nature the "leaf": The primordial form [*Urform*] according to which all of the leaves were perhaps woven, sketched, measured, colored, curled, and painted—but by incompetent hands, so that no specimen has turned out to be a correct, trustworthy, and faithful likeness of the primordial form. We call a person "honest," and then ask "why has this person behaved so honestly today?" Our usual answer is, "on account of his honesty." Honesty! This in turn means that the leaf is the cause of the leaves. We know nothing whatsoever about an essential quality called "honesty": But we do know of countless individualized and consequently unequal actions which we equate by omitting the aspects in which they are unequal and which we now designate [*bezeichnen*] as "honest" actions. Finally we formulate from them a *qualitas occulta* which has the name "honesty." (880, 83)

No trope better demonstrates the similarity between the rhetorical core of "truth" and a mobile army than metonymy, because none invents power so easily as it does. When rhetoric mobilizes its forces individual differences are arbitrarily discarded, things which

<sup>27</sup> "Presentation of Ancient Rhetoric," 59. For a useful attempt to interpret Nietzsche's examples by referring them back to his "Presentation of Ancient Rhetoric" see Wayne Klein's *Nietzsche and the Promise of Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York, 1997), 56-95.

are not equatable with one another are equated and subsumed under the same concept, the distinguishing aspects of entities are entirely forgotten, and a transcendent power is created which brings things into being like a divine legislator. So powerful is the mobile army at work in such creations, so easily are "we" persuaded by its impressive forces, that "we" altogether fail to notice our own role in this annihilation of difference. If "truth's" mobile army secures the space between concepts and things and legislates the laws which make the peaceful intercourse of society possible, then this achievement is accomplished through the total mobilization of every member of society in a military campaign which absolutely eliminates difference. Under the influence of rhetoric's power, then, "we" equate things which are not equal, "we" eliminate the space of difference lying between things, and "we" produce the powerful abstractions attributed with the power of causality—the "honesty" which *causes* one to be honest, "the leaf" which *creates* individual leaves. It is this "we" then, which expresses itself in the relations of exchange involved in the creation of these abstractions, and it is the activity of this "we"—unconscious and unacknowledged—which causes Nietzsche to in turn characterize these relations as "human relations" in his definition of "truth"—"human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred and embellished." Intensification, transference, and embellishment, then, result in the creation of abstract powers which humans relate to as esoteric objects with a *qualitas occulta* (occult quality). These esoteric powers are concepts which have been elevated by means of rhetoric to a primordial form—Nietzsche's target here, as always, is Platonism—whose power rests solely on the rhetorical operation which brought them into being. It is even at work in Kant's "mysterious X" (879, 83), the unfathomable thing in itself beyond human understanding, figured as an abstract source of causality behind the world of appearances.

Once Nietzsche has tracked down the origin of this powerful source of causality, he is in a position to begin tracing its effects on social life. And these effects are not difficult to locate. Kant's "mysterious X," no less than the *qualitas occulta*, form the basis of a secret society with certain mystery rites and ritualistic practices. However secretive the power may be around which they are organized, those rites and practices—what Nietzsche simply calls social "convention"—have been under constant discussion throughout modernity.

They originate in the conclusion of the *bellum omnium contra omnes* and the establishment of peace. According to Nietzsche's genealogy, these discursive practices—telling the "truth" and keeping one's promise—consist in using the "valid designations" (877-878, 81), that is, practicing the rites of society which are in themselves, as Nietzsche's definition of "truth" spells out, "canonical and binding"—a matter of law, indeed, of canon law and its religious authority. Concepts then, despite, or rather, because of their anthropomorphic origin, achieve a heavenly authority which no people can do without: "Just as the Romans and Etruscans cut up the heavens with rigid mathematical lines and confined a god within each of the spaces thereby delimited, as within a *templum*, so too does every people have a similarly mathematically divided conceptual heaven above themselves and henceforth understands by the demand of "truth" that each conceptual god be sought only in *its* sphere" (882, 85). Just as the Romans and Etruscans turned the heavens into a petrified series of divisions, each serving as a temple for the worship of a divine power, so too does every people live under a transcendent system of conceptual divisions whose divine authority insures that those divisions are respected, maintained, and reinforced by its practices. Metonymic substitutions produce a conceptual heaven of abstractions whose universality and transcendental validity guide rational action with the force of an imperative within a highly differentiated hierarchy of social relations. "As a 'rational' being," Nietzsche writes, man

places his acting under the domination of abstractions [*Herrschaft of Abstractionen*]: He no longer tolerates being carried away by sudden impressions, by intuitions [*Anschauungen*]; he universalizes [*verallgemeinert*] all these impressions first into less colored, cooler concepts, in order to bind the course of his life and acting to them. Everything which makes man stand out against the animal depends upon this ability to volatilize the intuitive metaphor into a schema, thus, to dissolve an image into a concept; something is possible, namely, in the region of those schemata which would never succeed under the intuitive first impressions: The constructing [*aufzubauen*] of a pyramidal order according to castes and degrees [*Kasten und Graden*], the creating of a new world of laws, privileges, subordinations, boundary determinations [*Gränzbestimmungen*], which now confronts that other intuitive world of first impressions as the more solid, more universal, better known, more human, and therefore as regulating and imperative [*Festere, Allgemeinere, Bekanntere, Menschlichere und daher als das Regulirende und Imperativische*]. (881-2, 84)



Just as Nietzsche had argued in *The Birth of Tragedy* that the death of tragedy involved a transformation of the Apollinian ability to produce metaphors into the rational abilities of the logical schematism, and just as he will again argue in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* that "the concept of being"—"the coldest, emptiest concept of all"—was produced by Parmenides's subordination of the imagination to the task of schematizing reality, so too does he insist in "On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense" on the decisive importance of the shift from a metaphoric and intuitive mode of cognition to one which is entirely schematic.<sup>28</sup> The movement from metaphor to schema, from metaphor to metonymic concept, is a shift from the singular and concrete to the universal and abstract by means of metonymy. This same shift characterizes the movement from the war of individuals to the peace of society. The structure of that society is produced by the transformation of metaphors into universally valid and abstract concepts—schemata—which guide practical life and tell what ought to be done. They determine, in other words, a society's "moral sense," for they provide it with the *imperatives* governing its practices. Following these imperatives and using the valid designations for things—the concepts demanded by the law—insures the reproduction of the social structure, and just as those concepts impose themselves from on high thanks to the hierarchical relationship which they have with the world of the individual and concrete, so too is that social structure one of hierarchical relations—"a pyramidal order according to castes and degrees," a "world of laws, privileges, subordinations, boundary determinations." The unspoken contract at the basis of society exemplifies itself, then, in one's sense of duty to the "laws of truth"—feeling the law's imperatives and carrying them out. In the end, Nietzsche's essay discloses "truth" to be a feeling, and the possibility of feeling the law, of being passionate about it and passive towards it, finally brings to light the pathological core of the moral law governing society. The pathos of a society's ethos is nothing other than its "moral sense":

We still do not know where the drive to truth [*Trieb zur Wahrheit*] comes from: For so far we have only heard about the duty [*Verpflichtung*] to be truthful which society poses in order to exist; that is, to use the usual metaphors or expressed morally: The duty to lie according to fixed

<sup>28</sup> *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 14; *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. Marianne Cowan (Chicago, Gateway: 1962), § 11.

convention, to lie collectively [*schaarenweise*] in a style binding for all [*in einem für alle verbindlichen Stile*]. But man forgets all this: He therefore lies unconsciously in the designated manner [*bezeichneten Weise*] and according to century-old habits—and precisely *through this unconsciousness*, through this forgetting, he comes to the feeling of truth [*Gefühl der Wahrheit*]. Being obliged to the feeling [*An dem Gefühl verpflichtet zu sein*] to designate [*zu bezeichnen*] one thing as "red," another as "cold," a third as "mute," a moral impulse awakens which refers to truth [*eine moralische auf Wahrheit sich beziehende Regung*]: From out of the contrast with the liar, who no one trusts, who all exclude, mankind demonstrates [*demonstrirt sich der Mensch*] the venerability, reliability, and utility of the truth. (881, 84)

Once the rhetorical origins of "truth" are forgotten, so too is the sensuous, persuasive power of rhetoric's figures. But neither that power nor the pathos it produces cease to exist. Rather, "truth's" pathos makes itself felt in duty—the duty to "truth," to designate one thing as "red" and another as "cold," yet another as "mute." Without anyone's conscious knowledge, then, "truth's" rhetorical core exerts a persuasive power in the form of a *feeling*—the feeling which arises from contrasting oneself with the liar "who no one trusts, who all exclude."<sup>29</sup> Feeling constitutes the sensuous nature of Nietzsche's "moral" sense, making it a *sensus communis*, a commonality of sense, and a contractual agreement of sense. And the overriding sense of this feeling is fear—fear of losing one's membership within society and therefore one's self. It makes telling the "truth" an imperative and reduces the creative capacities of the imagination to a state of passivity. And yet precisely because self-preservation amounts to preserving a "fixed convention," its members simultaneously sacrifice themselves to it. Telling the "truth," then, or lying "in the designated manner," preserves convention, but the fixity of that convention and its universal validity purifies it of any relation to the singularity of the lives it ought to preserve. Preservation, then, ends up preserving what is left over of the individual's life once it is reduced to an abstract universal, and the total elimination of the individual, the unequal, and the absolutely different produces only one thing—ashes. Just as Nietzsche had attacked Roman culture in *The Birth of Tragedy* for the leveling effects it had on life, so too does he cite its burial practices for the exemplary way in which they demonstrate

<sup>29</sup> On the pathos of rhetoric and the persuasiveness of all language see "Presentation of Ancient Rhetoric" (131, 21-2) and the short essay written for the *Philosophenbuch*, "On the Pathos of Truth," (in *Philosophy and Truth*, 61-66).

how life is preserved within the "pyramidal order" of castes, privileges, subordinations, and boundary determinations produced by fixing the conceptual relations governing social relations: "The great structure [*Bau*] of concepts displays the rigid regularity of a Roman columbarium" (882, 85). The structure of society may take the form of a pyramid, but what it preserves does not even attain the substantiality of the mummified corpse. Rather, the ashes of the dead are all that is stored in the Roman columbarium, ashes from which every trace of individuality has been destroyed.<sup>30</sup>

### The True Lie

Nietzsche's investigation into the linguistic structure of social convention displaces the logic of the social contract into the sphere of language. By investigating the unspoken, unwritten, and unconscious contract which results from this displacement, he cuts the Gordian knot responsible for the nation's aporetic character—the structure of legislation at the basis of a society's linguistic conventions. While the first section of the essay discloses this problem by demonstrating how social life fails to preserve the life of the individual and even promotes a form of living death, the essay's second section attempts to resolve, or at least respond to, the social contract's contradictory and aporetic structure. For that contract—unspoken, unwritten, and entirely unconscious—is aporetic, and the effects of that aporia reverberate throughout the totality of social life. An impasse arises because a peace agreement is required to preserve the life of the individual from the threats posed by the war of all against all, yet the terms stipulated by that agreement and the practices governing its conventions expunge every trace of individuality from individual experience. This aporia, an aporia which no society, no contract, and no convention can avoid, always places the social totality and its universally valid linguistic practices in violent conflict with the specificity and singularity of everything that society ought to preserve and all that those practices ought to comprehend. It is itself a manifestation of the eternal conflict between the advocates of reason and "truth" and the practitioners of a rhetoric no longer governed by philosophy's theories. So long as that conflict is decided in favor of the rule of reason, a

<sup>30</sup> On the metaphors of the pyramid and columbarium, see Sarah Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, trans. Duncan Large (Stanford: Stanford University, 1993), 66-7.



legislative structure is preserved which insures the predictable, continuous, and mechanical subsumption of particular subjects and objects under a universally valid social convention—a national "style" "binding for all."

Resolving, or at least responding to this contradictory state of affairs is only possible if a middle ground can be found, a space lying between pure universality and pure individuality. A middle ground would serve as, if not the mediator ending the conflict between them, then at least the medium bringing them into contact with one another. Only on this condition would the inadequacy, incorrectness, and lack of correspondence between these two poles be resolved, and only then would the contract and the convention it supports fulfill their purpose: Preserving the individual. But in order to achieve that end, the inadequacy, incorrectness, and lack of correspondence between the socially sanctioned linguistic conventions and the objects they attempt to grasp must first be remembered. Indeed, Nietzsche places all of his hopes on the possibility of remembering what has been forgotten, insisting that the only thing needed for the discovery of a passage way through the aporetic impasse is an act of remembering—remembering the inadequacy, incorrectness, and lack of correspondence between the socially sanctioned linguistic conventions and the objects they attempt to grasp. All that is needed, in other words, is to remember that "truth" is a matter of adequacy, correctness, and correspondence, an adequacy, correctness, and correspondence *between* a subject and an object, *between* thought and the world, *between* a concept and what it designates, *between* a perception and the perceived. Remembering "truth" then—what its structure demands and requires—recalls something forgotten: The space *between* each of these relations, a space which thwarts the certainty of every attempt to pass correctly from one side of the relation to the other, a space which only rhetoric—a rhetoric no longer governed by philosophy and its values—is able to cross.<sup>31</sup> And passing from one side to the other is tantamount to passing a law, for the laws of "truth" are established by securing and colonizing the space between words and things. Remembering this space, remembering the space between

<sup>31</sup> The problem of anamnesis had already been broached in a letter to Paul Deussen several years earlier. There Nietzsche insists that anamnesis is the only basis of "the correct philosophy of every singular being [*Die rechte Philosophie jedes Einzelnen*]." See *Briefe*, III, 81 (December 19, 1869).

subjects and objects, between thought and the world, between a concept and what it designates, between a perception and the perceived—remembering each of these spaces, each of which must be crossed adequately and correctly if a "true" correspondence is to be established between them, recalls a certain middle sphere, and this sphere lies at the center of the legislative act. Just as the whole of *The Birth of Tragedy* turned upon a "world of the middle [*Mittelwelt*]" (§24, §8) where justice ruled, so too does Nietzsche recall a certain middle sphere in "On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense" in order to resolve the inadequacy—and the injustice—of the social contract:

Only by forgetting the primordial world of metaphor can one live with any repose, security, and consistency: Only by means of the petrification and coagulation of a mass of images which originally streamed forth from the primordial faculty of the human fantasy [*Urvermögen menschlicher Phantasie*] like a fiery liquid, only in the invincible faith that *this sun, this window, this table* is a truth in itself, in short, only by forgetting that he himself is an *artistically creating* subject [*künstlerisch schaffendes Subjekt*], does man live in any repose, security, and consistency. If but for an instant he could escape from the prison walls [*Gefängniswänden*] of this faith, his "self consciousness" would be immediately destroyed. It is even a difficult thing for him to admit to himself that the insect or the bird perceives an entirely different world from the one that man does, and that the question of which of these perceptions of the world is the more correct [*richtigen*] one is quite senseless, for this would have to have been decided previously in accordance with the criterion of the *correct perception*, which means in accordance with a criterion which is *not available*. But in any case it seems to me that "correct perception"—which would mean "the adequate expression of an object in the subject"—is a contradictory impossibility. For between two absolutely different spheres such as subject and object there is no causality, no correctness, no expression, but at most an *aesthetic* relation [*ästhetisches Verhalten*]: I mean a suggestive transference, a stammering translation into a completely foreign language [*eine andeutende Übertragung, eine nachstammelnde Übersetzung in eine ganz fremde Sprache*]. To that end, in any case, a freely poeticizing and freely inventive middle sphere and middle power [*einer frei dichtende und frei erfindenden Mittel-Sphäre und Mittelkraft*] is required. (884, 86)<sup>32</sup>

No passage in Nietzsche's essay more clearly presents the origin of the social contract's contradictory and aporetic structure, and no passage identifies the source of the contract's failure so precisely: "Contradictory impossibility." It is impossible, indeed,

<sup>32</sup> Michel Foucault, working from somewhat different premises, makes this middle sphere the object of his research in *The Order of Things* (trans. unidentified collective [New York: Vintage, 1973]). The text ends by returning to Nietzsche and the problem of language (382-387), and it begins by announcing the object of study: a "middle region which liberates order itself" (xxi)—the much discussed *episteme* investigated by "archaeology."

contradictory to attempt to overcoming the space which lies between the spheres of subject and object, for that space, Nietzsche insists, is one of *absolute difference*—"between two absolutely different spheres [*zwei absolut verschiedenen Sphären*] such as subject and object there is no causality, no correctness, no expression." And yet, even if absolute difference is unbridgeable, passage through it nevertheless takes place. Indeed, it takes place all the time. Nietzsche even has a name for the ability capable of bridging the spheres, and it is by no means an unconventional one. Following a tradition at least as old as Aristotle's theory of the imagination (*phantasia*) as an intermediary between the sensible world of perception and the supersensible world of thought, the same tradition Kant takes up when he places the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) at the center of his critical philosophy as the faculty mediating between sensibility and understanding, Nietzsche locates the ability to bridge absolute difference in something not unlike the imagination. And like that tradition, he places it in the middle, as a "middle power" capable of bridging the gap between the empirical, sensuous world of objects and the subjective world of thought, understanding, and concepts.<sup>33</sup> But he radically breaks with tradition when he *frees* this "middle power" from the production and reproduction of abstract concepts—schemata—created in order to subsume the world of objects under universally binding categories. Indeed, once he has broken with tradition, he no longer uses the name he inherited from Kant—the imagination—to designate this "primordial faculty." Instead Nietzsche returns that faculty to its "primordial" status as "fantasy [*Phantasie*]," and once the "imagination" is demoted to the level of "fantasy," it neither functions as a producer of Kant's universally valid schemata nor does it subsume particular objects under those

<sup>33</sup> In "Nietzsche and the Idea of Metaphor," J. P. Stern draws attention to this "intermediary between two modes of thinking" (79), one oriented towards the abstract and general, the other towards the individual and particular, but he fails to see its affinities with the Kantian imagination (see also Stern's similar comments in *Nietzsche*, 145). He goes on to praise it as Nietzsche's "greatest achievement" (80) and a much needed challenge to "the absurd dichotomy of 'scientific *versus* 'imaginative,' or again the antithesis between 'concept' and 'metaphor', 'abstract' and 'concrete'" (80-81). But when he suggests that Nietzsche failed to link this greatest of achievements to the "the sphere of association" out of his "disdain" for that sphere, he fails to remember that Nietzsche derives these insights from an investigation of the role which language plays in social convention (80).



schemata.<sup>34</sup> Once absolute difference is recalled and a correct and adequate passageway between the spheres is no longer guaranteed by the law, subsumption gives way to an entirely different mode of relation and a new form of legislation. That relation is no longer a question of the correctness or adequation of the relation between different spheres, for the question can no longer be answered with any certainty. It cannot, Nietzsche writes, be "decided," because the "criterion" needed to decide the correctness or incorrectness of the relation between the spheres does not exist. The mere existence of a convention, on the other hand, "guarantees absolutely nothing about its necessity and exclusive justification [*Berechtigung*]" (884, 87). With the justification of the clearcut difference between "truth" and "lie" so thoroughly problematized, "On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense" turns into an essay not simply "on" (*über*) the distinction between "truth" and "lie" and the act of legislation establishing it. In the end, the essay winds up in the space between them, or, as the first word in the essay's title indicates, "over" (*Über*) them. And the moment that opposition is transcended, the essay is no longer bound to the law which legislated it and the moral imperative it imposes. At this moment, the most decisive moment in the essay, Nietzsche finds a way of eluding the law and entering into the sphere of the "extra-moral."

With the discovery of this undecidable, "extra-moral" sphere, an entirely new form of legislation takes over. Whereas the "true" terms of the social convention had been legislated in that fabulous moment after the war, a moment during which language alone spoke, and while "truth's" laws dictated from then on the continuous repetition of that act of legislation whenever language was used, every use of language which takes place after Nietzsche's discovery of an "extra-moral" sphere is forced to respond to the absolute inability to insure a correspondence between words and things. From now on, every use of

<sup>34</sup> It is often pointed out that Nietzsche's essay transforms Kantian philosophy by historicizing the sphere of the transcendental and translating it into the terms of rhetoric. Philippe Laeoue-Labarthe ("The Detour," 25) and, to a lesser extent, Arthur Danto (*Nietzsche as Philosopher* [New York: MacMillan, 1967], 40) both point to this transformation. But neither of them notices Nietzsche's engagement with the lynch pin of the Kantian system—the imagination. This turn to imagination anticipates the work of two of Kant's best readers, Martin Heidegger and Jean-Luc Nancy, both of whom discover a certain freedom in the space it occupies. See Heidegger's *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) and Nancy's *The Experience of Freedom*, trans. Bridget McDonald (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

language aimed at a thing must itself invoke a certain legislative power, a power which played no conscious role in the legislative act founding society. That power—"freely poeticizing and freely inventive"—lies in the creative abilities of the fantasy. Once this "faculty" is recognized as the means for bridging the distance between subjects and objects, and once the absolute difference between them is acknowledged, then the mechanical creation of a relationship of correspondence gives way to the creative attempt to correspond to the singularity of each and every experience, to "the singular and entirely individual original experience [*einmalige ganz und gar individualisirte Urerlebniss*]" (879, 83) of every intuition. Rather than imposing a universal concept on a particular intuition in order to disclose its significance, legislation now proceeds from the particular to the universal, and proceeding in this direction, it is now "guided by intuitions rather than concepts" (888, 90). Lacking the certainty of adequation and unable to appeal to convention with any sort of "justification," one now "speaks in nothing but forbidden [*verbotenen*] metaphors and in unheard-of combinations of concepts [*Begriffsfügungen*] in order at least to correspond creatively [*schöpferisch zu entsprechen*] to the impression of the powerful present intuition through the shattering and mocking [*Zertrümmern and Verhöhnern*] of the old conceptual limits [*Begriffsschranken*]" (889, 90).<sup>35</sup> Such shattering and mocking brings the correspondence theory of truth to an end. Nietzsche replaces it with a call "to correspond creatively" to the singular and incomparable character of every experience by using language in new, fantastic, ways. Using language anew, using language creatively, requires the powers of the fantasy to be brought into play and the irreducible space of freedom between words and things recalled.

With this recollection, however, comes something frightening—legislative powers capable of opposing the rule of an irrational form of reason just as easily as they mock the laws of an untruthful mode of "truth." Having already discovered the "frightful powers

<sup>35</sup> J. Hillis Miller rightly identifies these "forbidden metaphors and unheard-of combinations of concepts" as examples of the "abusive" rhetorical figure known as catachresis. See "Dismembering and Disremembering in Nietzsche's 'On Truth and Lie in a Nonmoral Sense,'" 45, 47, 49. For the significance of catachresis in relationship to philosophical theories of rhetoric see the essay by Jacques Derrida which takes "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense" as its point of departure—"White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," in *Margins of Philosophy*.

[*furchtbare Mächte*]" of the fantasy and the ungovernable sphere of absolute difference, Nietzsche now puts them into play in order to "oppose scientific truth with completely other types of 'truths' [*ganz anders geartete 'Wahrheiten'*]" (886, 88). Rather than working under the command of "truth's" mobile army, these "'truths'" free society from its occupying forces. In order to accomplish this liberating end, they reinvoked the power of rhetoric and speak in "forbidden metaphors and unheard of combinations of concepts." Whereas the originary act of legislation led to an agreement over "truth" which no one legislated but all agreed to, Nietzsche's discovery, or better, his recollection, of those frightful powers capable of opposing the conventional understanding of "truth," puts the legislative power back into the hands of society's members, enabling them, indeed forcing them, to rewrite the contract on their own. Far from being an act of willful and subjective nominalism, such legislation is a unique and necessary attempt to correspond creatively to the singularity of experience with a freely enacted decision. Only the creative response and the unique decision—not the use of hardened and congealed metaphors—has any chance of doing justice to that singularity. And far from simply replacing one convention with another, the "'truths'" produced by Nietzsche's legislators are entirely unconventional. For they are neither simply "true" nor simply "lies." They are, rather, true lies, what Nietzsche variously refers to throughout the *Philosophenbuch* as the "necessary-lie" [*Noth-Lüge*]" and the "free-lie" [*Frei-Lüge*]"<sup>36</sup> These lies call attention to their artifice and affirm their artistic character. And to the extent that they are artful, Nietzsche insists, they are a unique and unprecedented form of "truthful illusion," for "art treats *illusion as illusion*; therefore it

<sup>36</sup> KSA VII, 622. See also Breazcale, 96-7.



does not wish to deceive; it *is true*."<sup>37</sup> If this form of "truth" does justice to singularity, it is because it remembers absolute difference and all that remains foreign to any social contract and social convention. Indeed, it remembers the foreigner, "the singular and entirely individual," and it remembers that such singularity always speaks in a "foreign language" (884, 86).

Nietzsche's essay ends by opening up a passageway for a "completely foreign language" and for everything that remains foreign to a contract. By ending here, he can't help but introduce a certain disorder into the "peace" of social life, for every opening of the social contract breaks with its conventions by refusing to be governed by the deadening power of its laws. And yet this opening cannot do without those conventions and laws either. Just as there is no pure, unmediated access to the Dionysian in *The Birth of Tragedy*, there is no unmediated access to the "completely foreign" either. The language of convention may not be a "true" language, but it is the only language available. If that convention is to be opened up and held open, then the aporetic disjunction between the absolutely foreign and the utterly conventional, between the singular individual and the social totality, requires resolution. While the language of convention stands in the way of such a resolution, an opening exists in the rules governing its use. Indeed, Nietzsche's essay is nothing other than an extended meditation on those rules, a meditation which demonstrates above all how they preclude every mediation between convention and the unconventional by subordinating the latter to the former through the petrification of various rhetorical formations. But Nietzsche's essay also demonstrates the possibility of speaking in "forbidden metaphors," in metaphors which break with the rules of convention and put

<sup>37</sup> *Philosophy and Truth*, 96-7. This positive form of "truth" could just as easily be called a "negative knowledge of error." See Paul de Man's "Anthropomorphism and Trope in Lyric" (242) for such a characterization. It cannot be claimed, however, as de Man does, that this form of "truth" is an attempt to "stop the turn towards error," for Nietzsche's essay makes no such claim. See his "Rhetoric of Tropes (Nietzsche)" in *Allegories of Reading*, 113. Like de Man's attempt to show how the essay deconstructs itself by falling into contradictions Nietzsche is supposedly unaware of, J. Hillis Miller's efforts to demonstrate that it is "incoherent" and "self-dismantling" ("Dismembering and Disremembering in Nietzsche's 'On Truth and Lie in a Nonmoral Sense,'" 51) can only succeed by claiming that Nietzsche somehow overlooked the rhetorical dimension of his own text. Since Nietzsche everywhere couches his presentation in explicitly rhetorical terms—nowhere more so than in his definition of "truth" as a "mobile army"—such claims remain unconvincing.

those rules to use in the service of the unconventional. One can, for instance, as Nietzsche demonstrates, "designate the stream as the moving path which carries man where he would otherwise walk" (888, 90). This designation does not obey the rule of "truth." Rather, "it throws metaphors into confusion and displaces the boundary stones of abstractions" (888, 90). And by doing so, it changes the rules of the game. Those rules govern the intellect enslaved to the "drive for truth," insuring that it obeys convention by handling concepts like dice, "using every die as it is designated, counting its spots accurately, forming the right rubrics and never violating the order of castes and sequence of class rank" (882, 85). Nietzsche, by contrast, alters the rules of the game and opens it up to the free play of the fantasy: "This drive continuously confuses the rubrics and cells of the concepts due to the fact that it sets forth new transferences, metaphors, metonymies; it continually shows the desire to form the present world of the waking man so colorful, irregular, lacking in results and coherence, charming, and eternally new as the world of dreams" (887, 89). Setting forth "eternally new" transferences, metaphors, metonymies is precisely what convention dictates against, yet it is the only possible response to the absolutely foreign and new which can be justified. While following the law repeats convention to the point of reducing the individual to ashes, passing through the sphere of absolute difference responds to the advent of the foreigner by simultaneously repeating and transforming convention through the invention of new transferences, metaphors, and metonymies. The terms remain the same, but their meaning is transformed by altering their syntactical and rhetorical relationship to one another. Nietzsche's ability to "designate the stream as the moving path which carries man where he would otherwise walk" puts an end to solid ground of reason and the simple intentionality of walking. Indeed, it legislates the meaning of "man" anew by respecting the rules of convention that first created a rational world to be strolled through with security. But this form of singular legislation respects those rules by demonstrating the fragile structure of the world they create, just as it creates the very condition to which it refers: A stream which carries man through life. Most peculiar of all, then, this mode of legislation creates the conditions which justify its creations, leaving everything different and nothing the same. The new, the different, and the excluded suddenly enter into social life, not in order to be assimilated by its conventions, but to

change those conventions once and for all, and to do so in a manner which justifies the existence of something that never existed before and was previously outlawed: A stream, for instance, which carries man through life. This mode of legislation uses the rules of convention against themselves and opens them up to the freedom it was designed to exclude, and this freedom creates new conceptual relations and new designations which together demonstrate the intellect's liberation through a playful performance: "That monstrous framework [*Gebälk*] and planking of concepts to which the needy man clings throughout his life in order to save himself is nothing but a scaffolding [*Gerüst*] and play thing [*Spielzeug*] for the boldest feats [*Kunststücke*] of the liberated [*freigewordenen*] intellect: And when he smashes this framework to pieces, throws it into confusion, ironically puts it back together, pairing the most alien things and separating the closest, it is revealed that it does not need these makeshifts of neediness" (888, 90).

The liberated intellect, the intellect which passes through the sphere of freedom and legislates anew, deciding on its own, no longer needs convention to guide it.<sup>38</sup> Legislating anew, it perpetually reinvents convention, and only this incessant inventing, this always deciding anew, suffices to resolve the contradictory structure of that convention. For only then is the universality of the contract at its basis sufficiently brought into play with the singularity of the individuals who agree to it. Only then are those individuals really legislators and participants, and only then are these legislators liberated enough to freely respond to the singularity of experience and the sphere of absolute difference. So long as the process of legislation continues, life is no longer measured against a nonexistent measure with transcendent validity—convention, "truth"—and so it is no longer subjected to the "distortion [*Verzerrung*]" (888, 90) which every fixed convention invariably effects. Rather than suffering the distorting and deadening effects of a fixed and sedentary life, these legislators revel in play and "dissimulation [*Verstellung*]" (888, 90)—in free and *necessary* lies—and this mode of being, this form of life, constitutes for Nietzsche the only

<sup>38</sup> But nor is it guided by its own pure autonomy. Rather, the intellect is subjected to the play of the sphere of freedom, what Paul de Man, following Roland Barthes, aptly characterizes as "la libération du signifiant." See his comments in *Allegories of Reading*, 114-115.



possible *good life*. Once the intellect is freed from the distorting and deaden effects of petrified convention, it "copies human life, but takes it for a good thing" (888, 90).

Copying life, reproducing it creatively, or dissimulating it with free and necessary lies—each of these acts amounts to the same thing, and each legislates from an extra-moral sphere which knows nothing but the good life. Each of these free speech acts knows nothing of a transcendent "truth" in whose light life would appear wanting, imperfect, untruthful, and evil. And knowing nothing of this higher sphere of "truth," the individual can, indeed, must live a life of true lies, a life in which the mendacity of convention is acknowledged, affirmed, even embraced. Not only is such honesty a condition of the good life, but it is an absolute requirement for living together with foreigners and making peace with everything that remains foreign to conventionality. For the good life, the life of free and necessary lies, recognizes the limits of convention, opens up to a "foreign language," and responds to its call. If a certain mendacity and deceptiveness inevitably marks this response, it is an acknowledgement of the impossibility of a truly adequate response and a truly adequate decision. So long as this impossibility is acknowledged, the response may involve a certain deceptiveness, but it "deceives without *injuring* [*ohne zu schaden*]" (888, 90). No longer deceiving itself about the difficulty of responding, this form of response genuinely respects the foreignness of the foreigner. And the foreigner lies not only beyond the bounds of convention and outside the reach of any social contract; something of the foreigner persists at the very center of every social contract and every social convention. No language is capable of grasping the individual at the heart of society, and no language can guarantee that it is adequate to "the singular and entirely individual." Making peace with foreigners, then, not only means that the social contract must be perpetually legislated anew in an endless effort to accommodate the foreigner. It also means making peace with ourselves, with the inability to grasp the self perfectly and put ourselves on stable ground once and for all. It means accepting that the human being is carried through life on something no more stable, unchanging, or solid than a stream—the stream of time. Affirming this absence of transcendentals, this lack of eternal foundations, this want, in short, of "truth," means affirming the foreigner who always haunts the individual, both within society and without. Only then is the good life possible, only then is the promise of

living together no longer empty, and only "then, as in a dream, is everything possible in every moment" (887, 89). This utopian dream has perhaps been implicit in every thought of the social contract and in every attempt to formulate a form of association and mode of being-together worthy of political philosophy's original goal—the good life. Nietzsche was certainly never an orthodox political philosopher, but this is the lesson which concludes his education in rhetoric. It was a lesson intended for the German nation, but no "free" society can avoid it.

CHAPTER IV  
NIETZSCHE'S PRACTICE OF WARFARE: DAVID STRAUSS THE  
CONFESSOR AND THE WRITER

Culture and the state—one should not deceive oneself over this—are antagonists: The "culture-state" ["*Cultur-Staat*"] is merely a modern idea.

—Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

"Great Politics"

In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche insists upon the importance of "David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer," the first of his four *Untimely Meditations*.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to the hostile reception which greeted the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy* a year and a half earlier, this first attempt at cultural criticism was, from the vantage point of a man concluding his authorship, an "extraordinary success."<sup>2</sup> Its "success" lies as much in Karl Hillebrand's judgement that it was the "best polemical text ever written in German" as it does in the storm of protest which it elicited upon publication.<sup>3</sup> For the essay was intended to be "offensive" (§11), to provoke a public which had already made up its mind and rendered its judgement on the cultural significance of a military victory. If the essay's polemical style had an "indescribable impact" on public opinion, if it provoked debate where there had been none, if it resulted in a series of "insanely hostile" newspaper reviews, then these responses were sure signs of success and guarantors of the essay's

<sup>1</sup> "David Strauss der Bekenner und der Schriftsteller," in *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), I, 157-242. All references to Nietzsche's writings will be to this edition. Translations from the German are my own. Citations will be given in the body of the text in accordance with the essay's numbered divisions. A translation of the text printed in the *Kritische Studienausgabe* may be found in *Unfashionable Observations*, trans. Richard T. Grey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> *Ecce Homo*, "The Untimely Ones," §2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



significance—the polemic had hit its target, it "had touched the sore spot of a victorious nation," it had moved the public.<sup>4</sup>

But Nietzsche also gives another reason for the essay's importance, one which has less to do with its reception than the evolution of his own concept of politics. In this brief polemic, he says, something unheard-of finds a voice and makes itself known for the first time: "An entirely *new* mode of free spiritedness [*eine ganz neue Art Freigeisterei*]." <sup>5</sup> Nietzsche attributes the newness of this free spirit to its willingness, everywhere evident in "David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer," to use language freely, to engage in polemics, to write in an "offensive" style and make use, as he puts it, of an "unconditional freedom of speech [*unbedingten Redefreiheit*]." <sup>6</sup> And this conditionless freedom of speech, this freedom to draw the sword, to enter into a duel and attack with the pen—this freedom is not just new in its spiritedness; it is also the first sign in Nietzsche's oeuvre of a new "concept of politics [*Begriff Politik*]": "*Great politics* [*grosse Politik*]." <sup>7</sup>

In contrast to the sickly "*petty politics* [*kleinen Politik*]" of European nationalism or the *Realpolitik* that dominated the German *Reich* in the postwar period, "great politics" is a

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<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Briefe, Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli andazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), vol. 4, 157; *Ecce Homo*, "The Untimely Ones," §2. For a discussion of the letter, see Richard T. Grey's "Translator's Afterword," *Unfashionable Observations*, 399-400.

<sup>5</sup> *Ecce Homo*, "The Untimely Ones," §2.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., "Why I am Destiny," §1.

"war of spirits [*Geisterkrieg*]," a "battle [*Kampf*] against the lies of the millennia."<sup>8</sup> It eschews positivistic definitions of politics as much as it does power politics, waging its struggles outside of the institutions of parliament and independently of established political parties and entrenched political positions. "Great politics" carries out its offensives in language. It politicizes its prose and makes it "offensive." It writes in an "offensive" style and puts into practice a theory of polemics and linguistic warfare.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps more than any other writer, Nietzsche employs a style which is polemical, offensive, oppositional, and antagonistic.<sup>10</sup> Although the new mode of spiritual warfare embodied in this combative style is only conceptualized in his later writings, its highly sublimated form of struggle can

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., "Why I am Destiny," §1; "The Case of Wagner," §2. On the relationship between Nietzsche's "war of spirits" and the first *Untimely Meditation*, see Karl Löwith, *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche. Der revolutionäre Bruch im Denken des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Vienna: Europa-Verlag, 1941), 326-329. On the metaphor of war in Nietzsche's texts, see Leslie Paul Thiele, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul: A Study of Heroic Individualism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 18-20. For a characterization of its spiritual and mental character, see Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1985), 28-29. On "great politics," see Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity*, trans. Charles Wallraff and Frederick Schmitz (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1997), 249-284; Peter Bergmann, *Nietzsche, "the Last Antipolitical German"* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 161-165; Keith Ansell-Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as a Political Thinker* (New York: Cambridge University, 1994), 147-162; Henning Ottmann, *Philosophie und Politik bei Nietzsche* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1987), 239-282; Karl Brose, *Nietzsche: Geschichtsphilosoph, Politiker und Soziologe* (Essen: Die Blau Eule, 1994), 74-151; Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 54-58. Excepting Löwith's brief comments, none of these discussions take Nietzsche's comments in *Ecce Homo* seriously, and each overlooks the importance of the first *Untimely Meditation* for the development of Nietzsche's concept of "great politics."

<sup>9</sup> On the relation of style to "great politics," see Alan Schrift, *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation: Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction* (New York: Routledge), 159-160. For a discussion of style in Nietzsche's final polemics which departs from his earliest investigations into the Greeks, see Claudia Crawford's fine essay, "Nietzsche's Psychology and Rhetoric of Redemption: Dionysus versus the Crucified," in *Nietzsche and Depth Psychology*, ed. Jacob Golomb, Weaver Santaniello, Ronald Lehrer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 271-294.

<sup>10</sup> The titles of Nietzsche's books are instructive: *The Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic [Eine Streitschrift]*; *Twilight of the Idols, or How to Philosophize with a Hammer*; *The Anti-Christ*; *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*. The polemical character of many of his other texts is implicit in their titles: *Untimely Meditations*; *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*; *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudice of Morality*; *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*.

already be seen at work in the "eternal battle [*ewigen Kampf*] between the *theoretical* and the *tragic view of the world*" at the center of *The Birth of Tragedy* (§17), just as it can be seen at work in his attack on certain mendacious concepts of "truth" in "On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense." But it is only in the warlike series of essays gathered together under the title *Untimely Meditations* that Nietzsche makes the polemic and its agonistic code of conduct his primary mode of political struggle.<sup>11</sup> Its first essay wages war on a book by David Strauss, but Nietzsche insists that his attack has less to do with personal animosity or an aggressive *ressentiment* than with a "practice of warfare [*Kriegs-Praxis*]" which attacks problems rather than persons: "I never attack persons; I merely avail myself of the person as of a strong magnifying glass that allows one to make visible a general but creeping and elusive calamity. Thus I attacked David Strauss—more precisely, the success of a senile book with the 'cultured' people of Germany: I caught this culture in the act."<sup>12</sup> And what Nietzsche caught it in the act of was its own decline and degeneration into a form of barbarism whose signs are magnified as much by Strauss's book as they are by the book's success with the German public.

If Nietzsche's attack on Strauss really does represent his first attempt at "great politics"—and everything in *Ecce Homo* indicates that it does—it is not difficult to

<sup>11</sup> On the use of polemics and its affinity with the *agon*, see J. P. Stern, "Introduction," *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), x-xiv. For Nietzsche's own discussion of the *agon*'s political import, see "Homer's Wettkampf," *Sämtliche Werke*, I, 783-792. See also Robert John Ackermann, *Nietzsche: A Frenzied Look* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1990), 27-42; Bergmann, *Nietzsche*, "the Last Antipolitical German," 1-5; Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1964), 113-115. On the origin of Nietzsche's use of polemics, see Ronald Hayman, *Nietzsche: A Critical Life* (New York: Oxford University, 1980), 161. For Nietzsche's own characterization of the successful polemic, see his letter of 25 October, 1872, in *Sämtliche Briefe*, IV, 71.

<sup>12</sup> *Ecce Homo*, "Why I am so Wise," 7. This statement finds support in Nietzsche's letter to Gersdorff, written 11 February, 1874, six months after the publication of his essay. He writes there: "Yesterday at Ludwigsburg they buried David Strauss. I very much hope that I did not sadden his last months, and that he died without knowing anything about me. It's rather on my mind." See *Sämtliche Briefe*, vol. 4, 200. It should be recalled that Strauss's *Life of Jesus* (1835) profoundly influenced Nietzsche as a student in Bonn and contributed to his rejection of Christianity. See Curt Paul Janz, *Nietzsche* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1978), I, 146; Werner Ross, *Der ängstliche Adler. Friedrich Nietzsches Leben* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1994), 156; Horst Althaus, *Friedrich Nietzsche* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1993), 76.



understand why he turns to a new concept of politics at precisely this moment. A year and a half earlier, Nietzsche could still hope that Wagner's revolutionary music dramas would bathe the ears of Germany with tragedy's cathartic dithyramb, giving birth to a form of politics that would signal a recovery from the modern sickness of nationalism and the reemergence of the great political contests familiar to the Greeks. But in the wake of the hostile reception *The Birth of Tragedy* received, to say nothing of the jingoism and flag-waving that followed Germany's victory in the Franco-Prussian War, the basis for the young philologist's hopes foundered as the nation's passion for politics—what Nietzsche's first book calls "the political"—grew to measureless proportions as it succumbed to a pathological form of nationalist self-glorification.

Nietzsche's first attempt to resolve this problem appears in the essay written contemporaneously with the first *Untimely Meditation*—"On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense." The essay investigates the *Reichsgründung* through a consideration of the mechanisms at work in the legislation of any social contract, showing how the act of founding a nation always depends upon a prior linguistic contract which endows the language of convention with an authority and a power so persuasive that social life takes on qualities conventionally reserved for the description of prison life. When Nietzsche ends the essay by speculating on the role which a genuine culture might play in reversing this process, he raises a topic which will be central to every one of his future writings.

Indeed, "David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer" picks up where these brief speculations on culture leave off. But rather than simply speculating on the role which culture might play in reversing the authoritarian tendencies of political foundings, Nietzsche now attempts to understand the power of a peculiar form of "culture" in the newly founded, postwar *Reich*. To this extent his polemic is an extended meditation on the relationship between culture and politics at a particular moment in history, and as his meditation progresses, as he looks closer and closer at the role of "culture" in the newly founded *Reich*, he notices something peculiar: These two phenomena—culture and politics, *Geist* and *Reich*, spirit and state—appear ever more difficult to differentiate. Their concepts become ever less distinct, ever less clear, until finally one of them—the "concept of culture" (§1)—disappears altogether and the two begin to merge. What they merge into is a

peculiar form of cultural politics, or perhaps a new form of politicized culture—it is difficult to tell which once the distinctions between these two spheres begin to blur. But whichever it is—and they may very well be the same—this merging together, this blending and mixing of previously distinct phenomena and previously distinct spheres—all of this, Nietzsche insists, characterizes developments which are by no means confined to the postwar *Reich*. Indeed, these developments are characteristic of something so new, so all pervasive and so characteristically modern, that they signal the emergence of "the 'modern as such' [*das 'Moderne an sich'*]" (§1). The "modern as such": The loss of distinctions, the confusion of qualities, the mixing of styles, the obliteration of individual differences, the emergence of chaos—each of these developments characterizes modern Germany, each is reflected in the distinctly "modern idea" of the "'culture-state' [*'Cultur-Staat'*]," and each signals the collapse of the distinction between culture and the state, the German *Geist* (spirit) and the German *Reich*.<sup>13</sup> This is the "new phenomenon" which characterizes the age, and it makes "the state the guiding star of cultivation [*Bildung*]."<sup>14</sup>

Whereas everything about the age tends towards a certain nihilism, towards the annihilation of differences and even "diversity" (§2), Nietzsche's polemic attempts to clarify, conceptualize, and correctly name these new developments. It attempts to counter the drive towards systematicity, uniformity, and meaninglessness by driving a wedge between culture and the state, by wrenching the "*Kulturstaat*" apart in order to clarify the concepts it unites under the mantle of the imperious nation-state. This process of conceptual

<sup>13</sup> *Twilight of the Idols*, "What the Germans Lack," §4. Nietzsche had already rejected the elevation of the "modern state" to the "'culture-state' [*'Kulturstaat'*]" in his 1872 lectures "On the Future of our Educational Institutions" by disclosing its Hegelian premise. In his third lecture he states, "it would perhaps be no exaggeration to say that, in the subordination of all strivings for cultivation [*Bildungsbestrebungen*] to the ends of state, Prussia has appropriated, with success, the principle and useful heirloom of the Hegelian philosophy, whose apotheosis of the state [*Apotheose des Staats*] certainly reaches its summit in this subordination." See "Über die Zukunft unsere Bildungsanstalten" in *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, I, 706, 708. A translation of the lectures may be found in *On the Future of our Educational Institutions; Homer and Classical Philology*, trans. J. M. Kennedy (New York: MacMillan Company, 1911). On the new *Reich*'s *Kulturstaat* and *Kulturkampf*, see Bergmann, *Nietzsche, "the Last Antipolitical German,"* 95-97; Gordon Craig, *Germany 1866-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 69-78.

<sup>14</sup> "Über die Zukunft unsere Bildungsanstalten," 710 (trans. 90).

clarification is already underway in the essay's opening pages. There Nietzsche describes the relationship between a peculiar form of German "culture" and the new, victorious *Reich* in order to distinguish as clearly as possible between those qualities which led to victory in the Franco-Prussian War and those which serve German culture and the German spirit:

Strict military discipline, natural courage and perseverance, superiority of leadership, unity and obedience among the led—in short, qualities that have nothing to do with culture—brought us victory over enemies who lacked the most important of these qualities; one can only wonder that what now calls itself "culture" in Germany [*was sich jetzt in Deutschland "Kultur" nennt*] contributed so little to hampering these military demands and its great success, perhaps only because this thing [*Etwas*] that calls itself culture considered it more advantageous this time to demonstrate its subservience to these demands. However, if one allows it to flourish and proliferate, if one pampers it with the flattering delusion that it has been victorious, then it has the power, as I have maintained, to extirpate the German spirit—and who knows whether once this has occurred we will still be able to accomplish anything with what remains of the German body! (§1)

The militarization of "culture," its reduction to a means for realizing the demands of warfare, for disciplining the body and training it to obey commands and follow the leader—none of this has anything to do with Nietzsche's concept of culture, nor does a military victory have anything in common with his notion of cultural superiority.<sup>15</sup> Just as the Macedonians' victories over the Greeks demonstrated only stricter discipline and greater obedience—moral qualities, not cultural virtues—so too does Germany's victory over France demonstrate only the superiority of their officers and armies in the conducting of warfare. And if Germany's victory is analogous in importance to the Macedonians'—this is the analogy Nietzsche goes on to make—then the confusion of superior military might with cultural superiority discloses not the triumph of German culture over French culture but a blurring of spheres which ought to remain distinct and a mixing of values which are in reality opposed to one another. When this blurring and mixing manifests itself in the "subservience" of the sphere of culture to the demands of military leaders, when the sphere

<sup>15</sup> On the relation of culture to militarism in Nietzsche's thinking and its uselessness to National Socialism, see Georges Bataille, "Nietzsche and National Socialism," in *On Nietzsche*, trans. Bruce Boone (New York: Paragon House, 1992), 171. On the confusion of the *Reich's* military ambitions with Germany's cultural achievements, see R. J. Hollingdale, *Nietzsche* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 19-20. For an analysis of the military victory which concludes with a discussion of Nietzsche's insights, see Gordon Craig, *Germany 1866-1945*, 34-37. See also Nicholas Martin, *Nietzsche and Schiller: Untimely Aesthetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 7-8.



of "culture" begins to value values which have nothing in common with its concept—obedience, strict discipline, following leaders—then culture, or "something that calls itself culture," is transformed into a weapon in a military campaign and an instrument in the service of the ends of empire. In each case, culture, or "something that calls itself culture," is reduced to an instrument of politics, the military, and the *Reich*. And once the cultural sphere becomes a space where political power can be exercised, military virtues inculcated, and the objectives of the *Reich* realized, then "culture"—or "something that calls itself culture"—emerges as a sphere where a distinctly modern form of power can be exercised and a distinctly modern form of politics put into practice.

Nietzsche locates the distinctiveness of this form of power in its ineluctable negativity, a negativity which shares nothing in common with the qualities so often taken to define power: Ability, capability, and possibility. In contrast to positive, productive manifestations of power, the form of power which manifests itself in the cultural sphere of the post-war *Reich* tends towards the very opposite: A militaristic aggression ending in negation, abolition, and annihilation, each of which Nietzsche captures with the word "extirpation." This "thing that calls itself culture," "if one allows it to flourish and proliferate, if one pampers it with the flattering delusion that it has been victorious, then it has the power," Nietzsche says, "to extirpate the German spirit." Extirpation—the death of spirit (*Geist*) and onset of mindless (*geistlos*) nationalism—would result from the abolition of the distinction between culture and politics, *Geist* and *Reich*, freedom and militarism. And if these distinctions are abolished, Nietzsche insists, then Germany's military victory will be transformed into "a total defeat: *Into the defeat—indeed, the extirpation—of the German Geist in favor of the 'German Reich'*" (§1). Confusing empire with spirit, rendering politics indissociable from the ends of the imperious nation-state, subordinating the spirit of the nation to the ends of nationalism and its culture to the *Reich*—neither the "modern" *Reich* nor its military forces are capable of resolving these problems, for their origin is "modern" politics itself. No wonder, then, that Nietzsche turns to a new "concept

of politics" and a new practice of cultural warfare in the first *Untimely Meditation*. It is necessitated by the times themselves.<sup>16</sup>

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Nietzsche puts his new, untimely form of warfare into practice in "David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer." The essay wages war, but the battle it fights is not against a foreign culture or a foreign army. This "battle [*Kampf*]" is waged against an "inner enemy" (§1), and the object at the center of the conflict is the concept of culture itself. "Culture" becomes a locus of conflict and a field of battle the moment it is politicized, nationalized, and put in service of ends unrelated to its own. Whether this process takes the form of the militarization of "culture" or its subordination to the ends of a *Reich* matters little—the same results ensue, and the identical problems emerges: Distinctions break down, confusion sets in, and misunderstanding takes over. And no more significant misunderstanding emerges in the postwar *Reich* than the confusion of a military victory with a cultural triumph. It threatens spirit with its annihilation and the nation with the mindlessness that takes over whenever power is accumulated for power's sake. Clarifying this confusion and resolving the problems it poses requires drawing distinctions, demarcating spheres, and differentiating concepts. The first step in this process has already been seen: Nietzsche distinguishes as sharply as possible between military virtues and genuine culture, between the German *Reich* and German spirit. Once this distinction is in place, he proceeds to examine the relationship between French culture and German "culture" at war's end. That relationship, he says, appears no different than it did before the war: French culture still persists. Indeed, not only does it still persist, but German "culture" remains as dependent upon it as ever. Not only do the French "have a genuine culture," but it is from them, Nietzsche insists, that the "Germans have hitherto copied everything" (§1). Not only did the Germans not defeat French culture with their military superiority, not only does Germany lack a genuine culture, but the Germans, to the extent that they possess a culture at all, copy it from their neighbors—and poorly at that. And if German culture did not defeat

<sup>16</sup> On the problems which modernity poses to politics for Nietzsche, see Daniel Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 43-47; Keith Ansell-Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as a Political Thinker*, 83-97; Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 73-74.

French culture, if Germany lacks a culture of its own and even borrows from the French, why, despite the unoriginality of this copying, imitating, and reproducing, does the German public persist in confusing a military victory with a cultural triumph?

More than anything else, the dispute between Nietzsche and his enemies revolves around this question and the misunderstanding at its source. That misunderstanding manifests itself as much in the public's opinions about its "cultural" superiority as it does in opinionators who tell the public what it wants to hear. Countering confusion, misunderstanding, and opinion, on the other hand, requires not only a certain free spiritedness and freedom of speech capable of using language without regard to the imperatives dictating, commanding, and ordering opinion and convention. Free spiritedness and free speech are insufficient to the extent that they substitute one opinion for another, one convention with another. As always, Nietzsche aims for more than just opinion and convention, and in the first *Untimely Meditation* nothing short of the proper name will do. One must name names, one must draw distinctions and differentiates between concepts if a successful campaign is to be waged against a highly militarized public. And the first thing to be named, the first "thing" to be identified, unmasked, and conceptualized, is, Nietzsche writes, "this thing that calls itself culture [*dieses Kultur sich nennende Etwas*]" (§1). For this "thing that calls itself culture" is "culture" only in the most nominal sense of the word. Indeed, it is the modern phenomenon of nominalism, the loss of proper names, correct concepts, and meaningful words, which lies at the origin of the misunderstanding. Resolving it and winning the war against this "thing," this "inner enemy," depends as much upon disclosing the mechanisms working to conceal its true identity as it does upon naming the rulers whose power is at work in its concealment. Nietzsche pens the problem and names the power responsible for it at the opening of the essay's second section:

How is it yet possible that among the cultivated Germans the greatest contentment prevails, a contentment that, since that last war, has shown itself ready to break out in arrogant jubilation and to wax triumphant? We live under the illusion of having a genuine culture: The monstrous contrast between this contented, indeed, triumphant faith and the obvious defect it conceals appears to be noticed by only the rare few. For all those who opine with public opinion [*mit der öffentlichen Meinung meint*] have bound their eyes and plugged their ears—that contrast simply ought not to be there.



How is this possible? What force [*Kraft*] is so powerful [*mächtig*] that it can prescribe such an "ought not" [*ein solches "Soll nicht" vorzuschreiben*]? Which species of human being must have come to rule [*zur Herrschaft*] in Germany that it can forbid, or at least hinder, the expression of such strong and simple feelings? I will name this power [*Macht*], this species of human being, by its name [*bei Namen nennen*]<sup>17</sup>—they are the *cultivated philistines* [*Bildungsphilister*].

In this paradoxical portrait of postwar Germany, it is not the politicians who are in power, nor do they guide public opinion. The "power" which rules Germany in the wake of the *Reichsgründung*, Nietzsche says, is a species of human being whose proper name is the cultivated philistine. This distinctly modern phenomenon is not simply a matter of philistinism, of an indifference, disdain, or even opposition to culture. The "cultivated philistine" must be differentiated from the philistine, for this species of human being is so little opposed to culture that it takes itself to be the only one who possesses it. The cultivated philistine knows what culture is, and it is certain in its judgement. And knowing what culture is, the cultivated philistine assumes a certain power—the power to name, to use language as it will, and this means the power to "call itself [*sich nennt*]" something it is not: "Culture." This power, Nietzsche discovers, is exercised in ethical prescriptions that take the form of an imperative. Just as everything in "On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense" turns upon a certain "moral sense" at the heart of society which makes itself felt in an imperative commanding the "truthful" use of language, and just as this imperative exerts a power over society which is in truth neither ethical nor truthful, so too does everything in "David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer" revolve around an ethical imperative at the heart of the post-war *Reich* which lacks an ethical basis but nevertheless functions as a form of power capable of dictating what one "ought not" feel, think, or say.<sup>17</sup> In the aftermath of the war, public opinion and its opinionators dictate that one "ought not" speak of the monstrous incongruity between the illusion of culture and the real thing.

Whereas in "On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense," Nietzsche had referred the origin of a similar form of power to a mythical, even unconscious, social contract, he now locates this distinctly modern form of power, this power to name the real and bring it into existence, with those who control language and the dissemination of opinion in the

<sup>17</sup> See "Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne," *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, I, 881-2.

public sphere—the "journalists," the "fabricators [*Fabrikanten*] of novels, tragedies, poems and histories" (§1). Indeed, these opinionators appear so united in their beliefs, their control of language appears so centralized, that the question of conspiracy becomes unavoidable. And not only does Nietzsche pose this possibility and speak of a "homogeneous group" which "seems to have conspired to take control [*zu bemächtigen*] of the modern human being's hours of idleness and meditation—his 'cultural moments'," but he goes on to identify the method employed to achieve this control: They "anesthetize him by means of the printed page [*durch bedrucktes Papier zu betäuben*]" (§1). The power of the word, of language, and power over the word and language, the power to control its use, to print what one wants—this is the power of any "homogeneous group" which controls the printing presses, and this same power is required for any attempt "to control" public opinion. If Nietzsche discovers a form of control and power in the mechanisms of the modern media, if he sees the potential to "anesthetize [*betäuben*]" the individual by means of the printed page, it is because the incessant flow of printed pages does not simply stun, deafen, numb, and stupefy the modern human being—it is even capable of deadening the spirit and killing off life. Each of these possibilities is inscribed in the word "*betäuben*," and each of these meanings emerges in the course of Nietzsche's essay as he examines his conspirators. Indeed, not only do they emerge, but they emerge to conspire against the conspirators themselves. For their conspiracy is one in appearance only. These journalists, writers, and publishers only "seem [*scheint*]" to have formed a conspiracy. In actuality they fabricate their narrative of cultural triumph in good faith, in a "triumphant faith" which renders them just as anesthetized to feeling the monstrous contrast between genuine culture and its fabricated imitation as anyone else.

It is not enough, then, simply to name names. Nietzsche must also bring this "triumphant faith" into conceptual clarity. For the power of the cultivated philistine rests on "faith" alone, and so long as that "faith" persists, so long as it resists rational comprehension and conceptual elucidation, the power of this "faith" will continue to exercise power over its believers. So long as that power persists, the cultivated philistine will continue to have "faith"—"faith" in his judgements, "faith" in his ability to judge, and, above all, "faith" in the supremacy of these judgements. For so firmly and fanatically do

the cultivated philistines believe in their power to judge, that they feel themselves to be not just an entirely trustworthy court of judgement, but even a supreme court. The "cultivated philistine," Nietzsche says, has become "the supreme judge [*obersten Richters*] of all German cultural problems" (§2). The cultivated philistine holds court and adjudicates over problems of culture in Germany. And the specificity and historical originality of these adjudicators, of these judges, lies in the particular effect which their faith has on their judgements. In every case, and in good, even triumphant, faith, these judges err in their decision. Indeed, they err because of their "faith," because of their confusion of faith with genuine knowledge, real concepts, and rational thought. Whenever knowledge, concepts, and reason are renounced in favor of faith, judgement is bound to err. Or so Nietzsche says. Judging judgement, judging the judges, assuming a still more supreme position of judgement—each of these tasks is fraught with difficulties, for each requires the invocation of a measure, a criterion, or a concept if its own judgements and decisions are to be justified in turn. Every attempt to provide such guarantors, however, invariably regresses into endless questions about the criterion employed to guarantee their correctness, while avoiding the question of criterion, on the other hand, only leaves the problem unresolved and open to the whims of public opinion and its opinionators. This problem, the simultaneous need for and absence of a criterion by which one might adjudicate over problems of culture, forms the impasse haunting every sentence of Nietzsche's essay. Every sentence is an attempt to come to terms with it, and nowhere more so than when Nietzsche mourns the loss of the one concept which could bring the confusion at war's end to a close through the clarification of the judges' errors in judgement. That confusion derives "from the fact that in Germany the pure concept of culture [*der reine Begriff der Kultur*] has been lost" (§1). Nietzsche never says where that concept might be found, but the definition he discovers locked within it leaves little doubt about its Greek origins. "Culture"—this is the definition Nietzsche gives—"is above all the unity of artistic style expressed in all the manifestations of a people's life [*Kulture ist vor allem Einheit des*



*künstlerischen Stiles in allen Lebensäußerungen eines Volkes*]" (§1).<sup>18</sup> When he then contrasts this definition of genuine culture with "barbarism," it becomes clear that it is the Greeks, the people who first contrasted themselves with the barbarians, who provide the criterion against which Germany's artistic accomplishments must be measured. Measured against this criterion, what passes for culture in Germany looks like the very opposite of genuine culture. Measured against this criterion, the real name for what calls itself "culture" in Germany is "barbarism." "Barbarism" — the very opposite of "culture" — is the "absence of style [*Stillosigkeit*] or the chaotic confusion of all styles" (§1). And once style becomes the criterion for distinguishing between culture and barbarism, the problem of style moves to the forefront of Nietzsche's essay.

### The Problem of Style

Everything in the first *Untimely Meditation* revolves around the problem of style, and no topic has received more attention in recent years among Nietzsche's readers than this one.<sup>19</sup> It comes as something of a surprise, then, to discover that Nietzsche's most direct, extensive, and wide ranging discussion of the topic occurs in a text which has received as little attention as "David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer."<sup>20</sup> The unfashionableness of the essay's treatment of the topic — its relentless critique of cultural philistinism — may have something to do with this, but whatever the reasons, the essay

<sup>18</sup> In Daniel Breazeale's "Introduction" to his translation of Nietzsche's early notes and fragments, he attributes Nietzsche's definition of culture to Goethe rather than the Greeks. But as these notes and fragments demonstrate, Nietzsche's various discussions of culture constantly refer to the Greeks, and it is the Greeks, not Goethe, who provide the measure for each of these discussions. See *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1992), xxiii-xxv.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979); Alan Schrift, *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation: Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction*; Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*; Sarah Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, trans. Duncan Large (Stanford: Stanford University, 1993). None of these authors provide a sustained reading of "David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer."

<sup>20</sup> Robert Ackermann's ground breaking work stands alone as the only sustained investigation of the essay. See his *Nietzsche: A Frenzied Look*, 27-42.

cannot easily be ignored or dismissed as a product of juvenilia. One reason for this has already been seen: "David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer" is Nietzsche's first attempt at "great politics," at a politics confined by neither the imperatives of the nation-state nor the nationalism so characteristic of modern politics. The essay's efforts to come to terms with the topic of style, on the other hand, set the stage for each of his later discussions of the problem. When, for instance, Nietzsche takes up *The Case of Wagner* in one of his last polemics and condemns the composer's decadence, he does so because his music lacks style—it is all effect, drama, and theater, nothing more than the "chaos" of barbarism (*The Case of Wagner*, §7-§8). By contrast, when Nietzsche insists in the *Gay Science* that just "One thing is needful—'To give style' to one's character," he defines that task as the achievement of "One taste [*Ein Geschmack*]," emphasizing in turn the relative unimportance of the distinction between "good or bad" style (§290). And when Nietzsche takes up the topic in *Ecce Homo*, he puts all the emphasis—as he does in so many other late texts—on the tempo, rhythm, and gesture needed to achieve stylistic unity, coherence, and communicability, again pushing the question of good style and bad style to the side, this time by dismissing the concept of "good style as such [*Guter Stil an sich*]" as mere idealism ("Why I Write Such Good Books," §4).

This last point is by no means absent from "David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer." Indeed, the essay's distinction between genuine culture and philistine barbarism depends entirely upon a rejection of the concept of "good style." For that distinction is by no means synonymous with the distinction between good style and bad. On the contrary, the distinction between culture and barbarism is measured against the criterion of style alone. "True culture," Nietzsche insists, "presupposes only a unity of style [*Einheit des Stiles*]" (§2). Style alone, good, bad, or degenerate, is the defining feature of every culture, he says, for "even a bad and degenerate culture cannot be conceived as anything other" (§2) than a stylistic unity. It is on the basis of this criterion, then, that Nietzsche distinguishes between culture and barbarism, and the success or failure of the essay depends upon his ability to clarify, differentiate, and justify that criterion. And this means more than simply distinguishing between style and its absence. For the distinction between culture and barbarism, between style and stylelessness, is itself a distinction between different forms of

unity. Both culture and barbarism, Nietzsche says, are forms of unity. They constitute two different and opposed ways of conceiving of the unity at the basis of a people, a nation, or a community. Confusing one with the other, judging barbarism to be culture, results from a failure to distinguish between these two different structural possibilities. Defending the distinction between culture and barbarism, on the other hand, depends upon distinguishing these two forms of unity as sharply as possible.

The nature of that distinction is already indicated when Nietzsche defines culture as a "unity of style," for by making style and its unity his criterion, he avoids reducing the question of culture's definition to a problem of its content. More than anything else, style has always been defined as the opposite of content. The problem of distinguishing between culture and barbarism, then, is not a question of evaluating the content of one culture against another in order to determine their relative worth. To this extent, Nietzsche's discussion also avoids the problem of cultural nationalism, of having to evaluate the differences between national cultures. And for the same reason it avoids the perennial problem of culture's location, for if culture is defined only by the criterion of stylistic unity, no limits are placed on its sphere—the possibility of culture exists wherever there is human life. Clothes, rooms, houses, city streets, fashionable shops, concerts halls, theaters, museums, public institutions, the norms of social intercourse, the manners and movements of people—each of these, Nietzsche says, is a manifestation of culture, and each embodies a style, a particular way of manifesting itself, a particular form of unity. This unity, he makes clear, is not the same thing as an identity. Far from reducing a people, a nation, or a community to a homogeneous collective, to a mass or a herd, the stylistic unity which Nietzsche insists upon is a matter of plurality, of multiplicity, indeed, of a plurality and a multiplicity which are not just plural and multiple, not just more of the same or the same thing multiplied several times over. This plurality and multiplicity is characterized instead by an essentially diversity, a "diversity" which has been "brought together into the harmony of a single style [*die zur Harmonie Eines Stiles zusammenlaufende*



*Mannigfaltigkeit*]" (§2).<sup>21</sup> Rather than eliminating diversity, the stylistic unity at the basis of culture is the very condition under which diversity can come into being in the first place. Indeed, it is even the necessary condition for the flourishing of diversity, multiplicity, and variety. Diversity, multiplicity, and variety are only recognizable on the basis of a stylistic coherence, a formal unity, a shared context, and a communal horizon. To be sure, any style, form, context, or horizon is never more than one among many—there are always cultures, never culture—but no people, nation, or community, indeed, no individual, can ever appear in the world, can ever be differentiated and become different, except by means of a style, form, context, or horizon. So far is style from being an inessential addition, a mere ornament, superficial and peripheral, that substantive differences are only possible on the basis of a stylistic context. Indeed, so little is it a secondary addition to the "real" thing, the "real" substance, or the "real" person, that the differences between them are only recognizable on the basis of the unity style affords. If Nietzsche focuses on style rather than content, then, it is only because the content of a culture and the style in which it manifests itself are indissociable.<sup>22</sup> And this unity is the very opposite of the unity at work in barbarism.

Barbarism—the "absence of style"—is characterized not by a unity of style but by a uniformity which, lacking style, fails to recognize difference and even remains indifferent towards it. And the first and most serious form of difference to go unrecognized is "the difference between the philistine and its opposite" (§2). Unable to recognize difference, the cultivated philistine falls back on identity, uniformity, sameness, and convention. Each of these contributes to the confusion of barbarism and culture, and each contributes—or "probably" contributes—to the judgement which manifests this confusion:

The confusion that reigns in the deluded mind of the cultivated philistine probably derives from the fact that, finding everywhere people cast from the same mold as himself [*gleichförmige Gepräge seiner selbst wiederfindet*], he infers from this uniform stamp [*gleichförmigen Gepräge*] of all

<sup>21</sup> On the Nietzsche's concept of "diversity," see Daniel Breazcale, *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's*, xxiii-xxv; Leslie Paul Thiele, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul: A Study of Heroic Individualism*, 62-65.

<sup>22</sup> On the inseparability of style and content, see Ackermann, *Nietzsche: A Frenzied Look*, 28-35.

"cultivated persons" the stylistic unity of German cultivation—in short, a culture. He perceives around him nothing but identical [*gleiche*] needs and similar views; wherever he goes he is immediately embraced by the bound of silent convention about many things, especially with regard to matters of religion and art: This impressive uniformity [*Gleichartigkeit*], this *tutti unisono* that, though unsummoned, nevertheless breaks out immediately, seduces him into believing that a culture holds sway here (§2).

So impressed is the cultivated philistine by the uniformity found everywhere, by this "*tutti unisono*," this "everyone in unison," so imposing is this sameness, that the cultivated philistine makes a mistaken judgement—the cultivated philistine infers, in the face of an impressive and imposing homogeneity found everywhere around him, the existence of the stylistic unity characteristic of genuine culture. But this conclusion is inferred on the basis of a confusion: The absence of the diversity which characterizes genuine culture is taken to be evidence of a stylistic unity. An absence of diversity, however, constitutes not a uniformity of style but *uniformity plain and simple*: Everyone holds the same views, everyone has the same needs, everyone believes in the same conventions, everyone, in short, is like everyone else—the same. And once everyone is cast from the "same mold [*gleichförmige Gepräge*]," difference as such falls by the wayside. Rather than constituting a diverse culture, then, the form of unity characteristic of barbarism forms a "system," indeed, a "systematic and ruling philistinism [*systematische und zur Herrschaft gebrachte Philisterei*]" (§2). The power of the philistines, their ability to rule, consists in the ability to systematically eliminate difference by subjecting all aspects of life to the same mold. Everyone and everything bears the same stamp, everyone and everything is fabricated according to the same mold, and this mold, this stamp, are so zealously defended and so carefully guarded, that they are—or might as well be—"patented [*patentierten*]" (§2). Holding the patent to their mold, the philistines insure the uniformity of their products, and having insured that nothing will exist that is not mechanically producible and reproducible, the philistines are able to insure that they will remain in power through the exclusion and negation of genuinely productive artistic forms and genuine demands for a true style. Exclusion and negation, then, insure uniformity and constitute the unity of the philistine's system—its "mold"—and the "unity of that mold [*Einheit des Gepräges*]" which so monotonously strikes us about every cultivated person in present-day Germany becomes a

unity only on the basis of the conscious or unconscious exclusion and negation of all artistically productive forms and demands for a true style" (§2).

This is the negativity peculiar to the distinctly modern form of power embodied in the cultivated philistine—the power to prevent the production of new artistic forms and to exclude every demand for a true style. Rather than possessing culture, let alone producing it, the cultivated philistine mistakes culture for what negates it. And proceeding systematically, the cultivated philistine "eventually obtains a coherent system of such negations, a system of nonculture [*Nicht-Kultur*] to which one might actually be able to concede a certain 'stylistic unity'—assuming that it makes any sense at all to speak of stylized barbarism" (§2).<sup>23</sup> It is this systematic negation of everything that would contribute to a true culture which finally makes the cultivated philistine Nietzsche's "enemy," for the cultivated philistine is himself the enemy of everything which would oppose him. Everything that fails to conform to his "mold" is viewed as hostile and as a threat to his power. And whenever anything is encountered that fails to conform to the philistine's system, the cultivated philistine "wards off, negates, withdraws, plugs his ears, looks away" (§2). The cultivated philistine can not bear to hear of anyone else speak, nor can the cultivated philistine stand the sight of anything other than himself. Whatever and whoever differs becomes the object of "hate" and "enmity" (§2), and hating his enemies, the cultivated philistine spends all his time crippling, numbing, and dissolving every attempt to create a genuinely "diverse" culture. Hating his enemies, the cultivated philistine remains confined by his own narrowness and limits and seeks only to defend them and his power. For the cultivated philistine is certain that he knows what culture is, and this certainty in the correctness of his judgement is so little doubted that it constitutes an unshakable "faith"—the "new faith."

<sup>23</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno take Nietzsche's definition of barbarism as their point of departure for their analysis of the "culture industry." See *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1990), 136.



## The "New Faith"

"David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer" is a polemic against the "new faith"—the philistine's unshakable "faith" in its "culture" and the philistine's unshakable "faith" in its right to rule over matters of culture. Bringing the rule of the philistines to an end—"for they are our rulers [*die Herrschenden*]" (§2)—and successfully resisting the particular form of power they possess—for they "hold the reigns of power [*Macht*]" (§2)—is less a matter of opposing genuine culture to philistinism than of allowing philistinism to confess to its stylistic and conceptual incoherence. To be sure, the first *Untimely Meditation* is oppositional, even offensive. It is polemical and "warlike" in its defense of the distinction between "culture" and "barbarism." But defending that distinction and waging an effective campaign against the ruling powers in Germany depends less upon engaging in a war of words and a battle of opinions than upon an ability to listen and to hear.<sup>24</sup> "We must listen," Nietzsche says, "if" the cultivated philistine "offers" a confession (§2), for it is only in such a confession that the barbarism of the cultivated philistine can be heard. Only the cultivated philistine can demonstrate the incoherence and stylelessness of "what now calls itself 'culture' in Germany," and if such a demonstration is lacking, if no confession is made, if no evidence of its "faith" is given, then perhaps it is because the cultivated philistine has committed no sin and has nothing to confess. Or perhaps it is because the confession is one of "faith" alone—and Nietzsche does not exclude the possibility that a something like "faith" may be necessary for the German spirit. Whichever it may be, however, the issue can only be decided on the basis of a confession, and Nietzsche hears one in an enormously popular book by David Strauss. David Strauss—a "typical philistine" (§2)—offers a confession in the form of best-seller entitled *The Old Faith and the New: A Confession* (1872).<sup>25</sup> "David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer," on the other hand, is Nietzsche's account of Strauss's confession. Nietzsche listens as attentively as possible as Strauss confesses his "faith." Indeed, he listens so attentively that

<sup>24</sup> On the warlike character of the first *Untimely Meditation*, see Nietzsche's comments in *Ecce Homo*, "The Untimely Ones," §1-2.

<sup>25</sup> In just three months, the book—*The Old Faith and the New: A Confession* (1872)—had gone into four printings. On the book's popularity, see Werner Ross, *Der ängstliche Adler. Friedrich Nietzsches Leben*, 355.

he hears not just a confession of his "faith," but also a confession of certain sins. Nietzsche takes Strauss's confession—not in order to absolve him of his sins, but in order to free the German spirit from this "sinful" "faith."

Before Nietzsche even opens Strauss's book he discovers a confession lodged in its title—*The Old Faith and the New: A Confession*. By choosing to make a confession, and not just a confession, but a confession about his beliefs, about his "new faith," Strauss confesses to having faith in his "faith." He really believes his beliefs, so much so that he treats them as more than just beliefs, more than simply a matter of personal faith, and more than just a private matter. The "fact alone that he lets himself make public confessions about his beliefs," Nietzsche says, "already constitutes a confession" of this (§3). Strauss's "new faith" is much more than a private matter not simply because his "faith" is "new," nor simply because it replaces the "old faith" of Christianity. Strauss's "new faith" is a public matter because it is, he confesses, a "faith" in the new, and this makes it the only "faith" possible in modernity. Indeed, it makes it a "faith" in the modern, for Strauss confesses to believing in "modern ideas," and his book is nothing other than a "catechism 'of modern ideas'" (§3)—a jumbled and incoherent cosmology based on a mixture of Darwinism and materialism. These "modern ideas," however, require neither thought nor philosophy to be accepted. Strauss, who was once an important thinker, perhaps even an important philosopher, confesses to being neither a thinker nor a philosopher anymore, and he takes it as an article of "faith" that no one need think or philosophize any longer. It is enough simply to believe. And it is enough simply to believe because Strauss is the founder of a new religion. This religion—this too must be taken as an article of "faith"—is the religion of the future: The "philistine as the founder of the religion of the future—that is the "new faith" in its most impressive form; the philistine turned fanatic—that is the unheard of [*unerhörte*] phenomenon that distinguishes Germany today" (§4). However much Strauss may deny that he is the founder of a religion, he still says that his "faith" is "the sole universal avenue of the future" (§3), and with this confession out in the open, Strauss becomes a fanatic, a fanatic who wants to "rule the future [*die Zukunft zu beherrschen*]" and become "life's leader [*Lebensführer*]" (§4).

To free life from this fanatical leader, Nietzsche counters Strauss's "faith" with something he is often thought to oppose: "Reason." Bringing an end to the "fanaticism [*Schwärmerei*]" of the philistine requires placing Strauss under the "control of reason [*Controle der Vernunft*]" (§4). It requires asking him reasonable questions and listening to the answers he provides in his confession. In "David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer," Nietzsche poses questions to "the confessor" and to "the writer," devoting five sections of the essay to the confessor and five sections to the writer. Whereas the questions posed to the confessor concern *what* Strauss says about the content of his "new faith," the questions posed to the "writer" are concerned with *how* Strauss writes—the logic he employs and his "style" of presentation. Both what Strauss says about the "new faith" and the way in which he says it serve as confessions, and both serve to disclose the content of the cultivated philistine's "new faith." Content and form, substance and style, "the confessor" and "the writer"—each discloses a religion of the future which aims at the same thing: Reality, the real, and realism. For every fanatic, every philistine, Nietzsche says, has "faith" in the reality of their judgements, and every fanatic and philistine believes that reality conforms to these judgements. From beginning to end, the questions Nietzsche poses to Strauss are answered with confessions which demonstrate an extraordinary interest in what already exists, in the real, and in reality. And the reality Strauss believes in is the same as the reality he believed in as a young-Hegelian, a thoroughly rational reality, indeed, a reality which, merely because it is real, must be considered rational. The "rationality of all that is real" (§2)—this is the Hegelian slogan which Nietzsche hears Strauss confess to over and over again. Rather than thinking and philosophizing about the limits which Kant's critical philosophy places on human reason and its knowledge of reality, Strauss's reason knows no limits. He lacks, Nietzsche says, "the foggiest notion of the fundamental antinomies of idealism and of the extreme relativity of all knowledge and reason. Or: It is precisely reason that should inform him how little reason can discern about the in-itself of things" (§6). Nietzsche, who is by no means simply the enemy of reason, takes it upon himself to inform the philistine of precisely how irrational his form of reason is. The philistine's irrationality and fanaticism results from the fact that he "conceives of only himself as real and treats his own reality as the measure of reason in the world" (§2).



Treating reality, or rather his own reality, as reasonable and legitimate, Strauss confesses to a gospel of the crudest sort of realism, to the divination and idolatry of success, to the apotheosis of the trivial and the everyday. Whatever has succeeded, whatever is real, no matter how banal or trivial, is justified by its mere existence, and whatever exists, whatever is real and rational, ought to continue existing: "Whatever is 'rational,' whatever is 'real'—that is," Strauss confesses, "to remain unassailed" (§2). So long as the real is considered rational, so long as the rational is considered to be real, the power of the philistines is, at least according to Strauss's gospel, unassailable.

Nietzsche, on the other hand, assails this power by showing that the philistines' reality is not at all real. Indeed, it is so far from being real that it must be taken for the very opposite of reality: Artifice, construction, illusion, and delusion. Whenever Strauss makes a confession about his "new faith," whenever he talks about its content, he inevitably talks about a reality which is his alone—his own construct, constructed to be as *aesthetically pleasing as possible*. And nothing, of course, ought to be more pleasing in Strauss's "new faith" than its heaven. Like the old heaven of the "old faith," the new heaven of the "new faith" is a place of music and song, of poetry and composers, of art in general. Indeed, this heaven, Strauss confesses, is an "aesthetic heaven [*ästhetischen Himmelreich*]" (§4), a heaven of art and artists where the great poets and composers stimulate the mind and the imagination during one's hours of leisure. And yet even here, in the private rooms to which the philistine retires after work to enjoy art's stimulation, in the place where art and artifice ought to be at home, even here Nietzsche detects a certain delusion and falsification at work. For what the "blessed of the new style arrive at in their aesthetic heaven" has very little to do with art, let alone with anything heavenly. Rather than being heavenly, Strauss's "aesthetic heaven" turns out to be earthly and ephemeral, and rather than being "aesthetic," it appears thoroughly "unaesthetic [*unästhetisch*]" (§4). And there is good reason for this: Strauss's "aesthetic heaven" has nothing to do with either aesthetics or heaven. Its works of art have nothing transcendent about them—they are not the "sublime master works" (§2) Nietzsche commends. Strauss's artworks aim only at the "real" world and its imitation. The philistine theory of art demands only the "imitation of reality" (§2). Rather than transcending the mundane, the philistine demands the greatest possible realism. According

to the gospel of the "new faith," then, art must practice the crudest sort of realism and copy the most trivial of the everyday. And this puts art in the service of the philistine's "reality." Art's transcendent ability, its ability to elevate one over the everyday, its ability to illuminate the illusory naturalness of the everyday—these possibilities, the possibilities of "sublime master works," are renounced by Strauss in the course of his reflections on art, turning art into one more mechanism for rationalizing the real.

Not only does Strauss's "new faith" believe in an aesthetic heaven comprised of artworks so "realistic" that they become unaesthetic instruments in defense of the real, but this same "faith" reverses the process when it returns to reality. In Strauss's topsy-turvy world, not only are works of art turned into instruments of the status quo, but the picture of "reality" which emerges in *The Old Faith and the New* appears extraordinarily unrealistic, even artificial. Nietzsche detects this artifice in the particular form of courage which Strauss's "faith" inspires. Strauss presents himself a "troublemaker" by disposition, a rabble rouser and a man unafraid to depart from the status quo. Indeed, he insures his readers of his courage, saying that, as a "troublemaker" by disposition, he has taken on the "unpopular and thankless task of telling the world precisely what it least wants to hear" (§7). To be sure, Nietzsche says, one hears much that is aggressive in Strauss's confession, but his aggression always manifests itself in assertions without consequence. He praises Darwin and constructs a materialist cosmology on Darwinian premises, but he just as quickly goes on to reassure humanity that the human being is no mere animal. He even formulates an imperative, an ethical imperative, to avert the unpleasant consequences of Darwin's theory of evolution, restoring humanity in the process to the position of superiority undermined by that very theory: "Never forget even for a moment that you are a human being and no mere creature of nature" (§7). Aggressively advocating Darwin, Strauss robs him of his sting and leaves reality unchanged: Rational through and through. And with this, Strauss's courage turns into its opposite: Cowardly accommodation. For not only is the world rational—"God," he says, "shows us that chance would be an unreasonable master of the world, and that necessity, that is, the chain of causation manifest in the world, is reason itself" (§7)—but by subjecting the world to a "chain of causation," he renders all action beside the point: Everything and everyone acts in

accordance with strict laws, and these laws prevent any interference with "reality." Strauss's courage, then, is less real than "artificial [*künstlicher*]," a "union of impudence and weakness, audacious words and cowardly accommodation" (§7) designed to impress the philistine, even to flatter him. Lacking character and strength, Strauss masquerades as someone with character and strength, creating an affected superiority and a generalized "illusion [*Anschein*]" (§7). And affecting qualities he lacks, masquerading as something he is not, Strauss inspires not action but accommodation.

Nietzsche finds all of these confessions not only in what Strauss's says about his "new faith," but even his style of writing and mode of presentation confess to similar beliefs. The logical structure of his argument, for instance, constructed on the basis of four thematic subdivisions—"Are We Still Christians? Do We Still Have Religion? How Do We Conceive the World? How Do We Order Our Lives?" (§9)—does not demonstrate any serious thinking or philosophizing about why these questions ought to be grouped together and not others, for the third question has nothing to do with the second, the fourth is unrelated to the third, and all three lack any necessary relation to the first. Rather than unity and coherence of presentation, a "faith" shows itself which has so little interest in reality that it confuses itself with modern science. But if Strauss eschews the rigors of thinking and philosophizing in the name of a "faith" in modern science, it is because he less interested in getting at reality than in presenting a *picture* and an *image* of reality which is as pleasant and agreeable as possible. And neither logic, thought, or philosophy is required for this, only art and artifice. His book employs the arts of seduction and masquerades as something it is not. To this end Strauss wants only to impress, and to this end he uses his words as a "means for aesthetic effect [*ästhetisches Effectmittel*]" (§9). He writes not to put forward an argument or to provoke thought, but in order to create feelings by means of an "aesthetic technique [*ästhetisches Mittel*]" (§9), presenting things which are dark and gloomy only on order to better highlight the comfort and agreeableness of the reader's final destination: The Garden of Epicures. No one should be uncomfortable in this pleasure garden, where all the "pleasures" of the "arts" are at hand. Strauss himself confesses that even he, a "genius" and a great critic, can enjoy these humble pleasures: "It would be a sign of ingratitude toward *my genius* if I were not to take pleasure in the fact that, along with the



talent for relentlessly incisive critique, I was simultaneously endowed with the ability to enjoy the innocent pleasure of artistic creation" (§10). This false modesty is hardly innocent. It is the rhetoric of an artificeer, of someone who likes to wear the mask of genius, who likes to be theatrical, who likes to play the role of the naive genius and the classical writer. For Strauss himself confesses that "people have paid him the unsolicited honor of regarding him as a kind of classical prose writer" (§10).

It is this Strauss, Strauss the "classical prose writer," the "classical author," the model of German writing, who can finally be heard confessing to his sins—his stylistic sins. Strauss may be a bad actor who likes to be theatrical and wear the mask of the genius, but he is still less gifted as a stylist. For just as Strauss's doctrines demonstrate the incoherence and artificiality of an actor and a deceiver, so to does his style. Indeed, the former is reflected in the latter, and latter in the former. Style is inseparable from content, and content from style. And Strauss's style, for all its appeal with the German public, remains deceptive and pretentious. What it pretends to be—and what it was taken for—is an "artistically rigorous cultural style [*künstlersch strengen Kulturstils*]" (§11), a sign of genuine German culture, of its vitality, its health, and its superiority over French culture. But by pretending to be something it is not, Strauss's "style" discloses less the uniformity and unity of a genuine cultural style than a "universally appealing tone [*allgemein ansprechenden Ton*]" (§11). This tone manifests itself as much in the jargon of the journalists as it does in Strauss's own "style." "Flat, hackneyed, powerless, and common" (§11), this "style" is as inoffensive as it is unproductive. Thoroughly shorn of power and creativity, it keeps to the everyday, to the norms of "today," and this makes it "modern." Offending no one, creating nothing new, it repeats the same words and the same phrases with such regularity that it finally "impresses itself [*prägt sich...ein*] upon the ear" (§11), stamping it with such force that one no longer feels "at home" anywhere else. What ought to be heard as flat, hackneyed, powerless, and common is accepted as the norm and the "rule," even as "signs of health," while the "powerful, uncommon, and beautiful falls into disrepute" (§11). Once the elements of a genuine style fall into disrepute, this norm, this "rule," rules with the force of an "imperative" (§11). It becomes an ethical obligation and a law, a power which exercises its "dominion [*Herrschaft*]" (§11) wherever writing takes

place. Unwritten and unspoken, this imperative proscribes, governs, and dictates every movement of the pen. It becomes an "authority [*Regiment*]" (§11) and a power under which every German writes and every German lives.

And the Germans do live in this language. It is their home. "Germanness," Nietzsche says, is not a matter of "nationalities and customs" (§12). "Germanness" is to be found in the "German language" alone. Language alone is the home of the German spirit, not the German *Reich*, and certainly not the German race.<sup>26</sup> The "Germans"—and not only the "Germans"—are linguistic beings, their spirit lives in language, and to this extent it is not Strauss's "God" against whom one is in danger of sinning. It is language itself which is in danger of being "sinned against [*versündigt*]," language—"the mystery of all our Germanness [*das Mysterium aller unserer Deutschheit*]" (§12). German language, then, the home of spirit and the "mystery" of everything German, is "something holy [*etwas Heiligem*]" (§12). Its laws hold dominion over the "Germans," not the laws of the journalist, the Straussians, or the fabricators of "literature." These laws, not Strauss's stylistic imperative, govern the Germans, and if they do not quite constitute a "faith," they do constitute a "mystery" which must be heeded.

Heeding these laws, however, is by no means an easy matter. It requires a sensitive ear, a well-tuned ear, perhaps even a musical ear. For this ear must be attuned to "sound" as such, not merely to the "universally appealing tone" of philistine optimism. It must be attuned to the "aesthetically subtle and powerful laws of sound under whose dominion [*künstlerisch zarten und kräftigen Gesetze des Klanges Herrschaft*]" (§12) one ought to write, indeed, under which every writer ought to "live." Ears which have been shaped and molded by an incessant rhythm, by the sheer repetition of the journalist's jargon or the ceaseless mantras of Hegelianism—"the real is the rational"—these ears are inevitably deafened by the drone. They tend to confuse a style exhibiting weakness, lameness, and impotence with one filled with "signs of health." Strauss himself is guilty of such sins, of such confusion and mistaken judgement. Indeed, Nietzsche discovers Strauss confessing to such sins whenever his style employs a "twisted, overblown, or frazzled syntax" (§11),

<sup>26</sup> On Nietzsche's rejection of the criterion of race see, *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, VII, 645. For a discussion of the passage see Geoffrey Hartman, *The Fateful Question of Culture* (New York: Columbia, 1997), 5-6.

ridiculous neologisms, and metaphors which confuse rather than clarify. Nietzsche ends his essay with some seventy examples of such errors drawn from Strauss's text, errors which exemplify a loss of feeling for language and the growth of barbarism—confusion, meaninglessness, and the inability to differentiate. These examples demonstrate not a healthy German spirit, but a spirit broken, weakened, and ill, so confused, in fact, that it "reverses the nature and names of things" (§11) and finds "signs of health" where none exist. These signs, Nietzsche insists, do not signify "health." They are a "cosmetic veneer," an aesthetic illusion, merely "painted idols" (§12), the masks of an actor and a deceiver, a genuine pretender. Rather than signs of the cultivated philistines' health, then, they are the "signs of their dominion [*Zeichen ihrer Herrschaft*]" (§12), signs of an attempt, never consciously formulated, to impose a politicized style upon the nation, to impose an imperative upon writers which dictates the conventions to be employed and the rules to be followed. So long as these "signs" are taken to signify "health," that dominion will continue, for the cultivated philistines' power rest on nothing other than their ability to control language and reverse names.

From the start of his essay, Nietzsche attempted to read these signs of barbarism, name the power behind them, and identify the mechanism by which this power ruled the German spirit. If he has attempted, as he confesses in the essay's penultimate paragraph, "to overturn its idols" (§12) and reverse Strauss's topsy-turvy world, he does so not only in order to expose the "sovereign" (§12) behind it all, to rob it of its victory robe, its "cosmetic veneer" and painted face; he does so in order to honor those who sought, and died seeking, as they built, created, and constructed a culture worthy of the name. This culture, a genuine German culture, has never existed and perhaps never will. The founding of a *Reich* and the wining of a war are not sufficient in themselves to guarantee that the German spirit has finally found a home. The "foundation [*Fundament*]" (§2) of this home, Nietzsche says towards the beginning of his essay, must be sought after, constructed, and built. If one listens, this demand can be heard in writings of the classical authors, and nowhere more clearly than in Goethe. It is a demand to seek and an imperative to experiment, and Nietzsche hears it in a simple sentence which Goethe is said to have uttered to Eckermann: "For half a century I have endured hardship and granted myself no



rest, but instead have continually striven and investigated and done as well and as much as I could" (§2).

To honor such spirits, Nietzsche says, it is imperative that one continue seeking—not to increase the quantity of "knowledge" or "information," but to increase one's "capability [*können*]" (§1). Increasing "capability" and cultivating the spirit—giving style to one's character—these are the tasks with which Nietzsche closes his critique. They are demands, no doubt, presupposed by every "culture." But they become ever more imperative with the arrival of the "modern as such." For nothing characterizes modernity so much as the loss of clear distinctions, the confusion of qualities, the mixing of styles, and the obliteration of individual differences. Nietzsche saw the coming barbarism and its inability to recognize "difference," "the difference between the philistine and its opposite" (§2). If this "capability" has been lost, it is because the very need to make distinctions and recognize differences is forgotten in modernity. Modernity, Nietzsche says, "has forgotten to distinguish [*zu unterscheiden*] between living and dead, genuine and counterfeit, original and imitation, god and idol" (§12).

Recovering that "capability" and learning to make distinctions depends upon the "practice of warfare" which Nietzsche eventually calls "great politics." Practicing polemics in an age that wants to hear nothing of distinctions is the first step towards having the "capability" to distinguish, for it is the first step towards differentiating oneself from a fabricated opinion, a patented model, and a barbaric system. But as Nietzsche brings his essay to a close, he admits that the "capability" of distinguishing, of deciding and judging, finally rests on nothing more secure than "instinct [*Instinkt*]" (§12).<sup>27</sup> However fragile this

<sup>27</sup> In "On the Origin of Language" (1869-70), Nietzsche provides his clearest definition of instinct: it "is *not* the result of conscious reflection, not the mere consequence of corporeal organization, not the result of a mechanism located in the brain, not the effect of mechanism acting upon the spirit from the outside and alien to its essence, but rather the most proper performance [*eigenste Leistung*] of an individual or a mass, corresponding to its character" (see *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language*, [New York: Oxford University Press, 1989], edited, translated, and introduced by Sander L. Gilman, Carole Blair, David J. Parent, 210; for the original text see *Gesammelte Werke* [Musanionausgabe], vol. 5, 469). Nietzsche's concept of instinct is neither simply a matter of unconscious and irrational biology or history, but rather marks the point at which the two meet. As such, it is subject to both cultivation and education. For a useful discussion of the concept, see Thomas Heilke, *Nietzsche's Tragic Regime: Culture, Aesthetics, and Political Education* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998), 141-144.

foundation may seem, Nietzsche insists that "instinct" alone is capable of deciding between living and dead, genuine and counterfeit, original and imitation, god and idol. And "instinct" alone is at the basis of the new "concept of politics" first heard in the *Untimely Meditations*. For countering the power of the dead over the living, the imitation over the original—this depends upon an "instinct," upon an ability and a "capability," willing to be courageous in its use of language, willing to employ a powerful style, indeed, willing to offend opinion, unmask actors, and pull the robes off rulers. So fragile is this "instinct" that it resists being "patented" by "fabricators" and incorporated into a "system," and the moment it is, it is no longer powerful, courageous, or offensive; it is something stamped with the deadening mechanisms of convention. However powerful those mechanisms may be, Nietzsche never tired of fighting them, of fighting for the cultivation of "instinct," "capability," and "spirit." Nor did he ever find another basis for his polemical style and the "concept of politics" it puts into practice.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, when he takes up the topic of style again in *Ecce Homo*, he not only insists that it depends on "instinct" alone, but he renders a judgement on his own instinct for style: It is, he says, "infallible."<sup>29</sup>

However final this judgement may sound and however decisively it may seem to end attempts to evaluate Nietzsche's efforts, this statement ought not be interpreted as an attempt to bring the matter to a close. It is, rather, a challenge, a challenge to renew investigations into style and its role in a new "concept of politics." Above all, however, it is a call for others to challenge Nietzsche, to engage in a dispute and enter into a highly sublimated form of political struggle which requires its participants to take off their masks and show themselves in public. Nietzsche's first *Untimely Meditation* did nothing else, but it needed Strauss to bring out its "free spiritedness." This is nowhere clearer than in the discussion of the first *Untimely Meditation* which takes place in *Ecce Homo*. There Nietzsche acknowledges how much he needed Strauss, how much he needed an opponent against whom he could wield his pen, sharpen his style, and cultivate his agonistic instinct.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, *Twilight of the Idols*, "The Four Great Errors," §2. For a discussion of the passage, see Leslie Paul Thiele, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul: A Study of Heroic Individualism*, 72-74.

<sup>29</sup> *Ecce Homo*, "Why I Write Such Good Books," §4.

He needed a combatant against whom he could cultivate his "capabilities" and practice a form of "warfare" which attacks problems and positions rather than persons. Nietzsche's polemic against "a senile book" may have distinguished him from everything that book stood for, but the traces of this contest, of this *agon*, never disappeared. Indeed, they are everywhere apparent in the *Untimely Meditations* which were to follow. Each marks a new stage in Nietzsche's battle against the philistine, each renews the contest and refines his "practice of warfare," and each is an attempt to found a culture which would finally realize the hopes born of the *Reichsgründung*.



CHAPTER V  
SENTIMENTAL EDUCATION: ON THE USE AND ABUSE OF  
HISTORY FOR LIFE

"And do you tell me, friends, that there is no dispute over taste and  
tasting? But all of life is a dispute over taste and tasting!"  
—Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Public Sentiment

If Nietzsche's meditation on David Strauss exemplifies "great politics" for the first time—and this was its author's contention—then the second *Untimely Meditation* appears to provide its first "theory."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, nowhere else does Nietzsche appear more concerned with the activity of theorizing, with the formulation and defense of propositions, theses, and laws, with the construction of a systematic framework capable of illuminating phenomena, even with that most traditional of all objects of theoretical speculation—the eternal. Even the genre of Nietzsche's essay—the meditation—suggests the contemplative, regarding activity of *theoria*. And yet the young philologist's intentions cannot be easily assimilated to those of "the theoretical men"—Socrates, the scientist, and the metaphysician.<sup>2</sup> Not only is Nietzsche's essay, like its predecessors, a contribution to the "eternal conflict" between the philosophers and the poets, the sciences and the arts, the theoretician and the tragedian—and the tragic plays no small role in the meditation—but the essay's task is to discover how politics is possible when theory falls short, to discover how deeds, even great deeds, are possible when theory not only fails to provide the foundations necessary for action, but contributes to their collapse. This problem, which is for Nietzsche

<sup>1</sup> "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben," in *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), I, 243-334. All references to Nietzsche's writings will be to this edition. Translations from the German are my own. Citations will be given in the body of the text in accordance with the essay's numbered divisions. A translation of the text printed in the *Kritische Studienausgabe* may be found in *Unfashionable Observations*, trans. Richard T. Gray (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> On Nietzsche's critique of "theory" and the "theoretical man," see *The Birth of Tragedy*, §15; John Sallis, *Crossings: Nietzsche and the Space of Tragedy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 132.

the problem of modern politics, falls to "great politics," to a form of politics which returns to the original task of the political theorist and the original aim of politics—the founding of the political community, the legislation of its laws, and the creation of a space for action. It culminates in Nietzsche's complex portrait of perhaps the greatest politician of all—the legislator Zarathustra—but it originates, and finds its paradigmatic form, in the second *Untimely Meditation*.<sup>3</sup> The essay provides not so much a "theory" of "great politics" as an example of its founding, legislative, and constructive capacities—the very things lacking from Nietzsche's polemical mediation on David Strauss—and it does so in order to address the most pressing problem of modern politics: On what basis is the individual to act and on what grounds is a people to constitute itself once foundational assumptions are undermined, once every norm believed to be objective, necessary, and true is reduced to an idiosyncratic cultural product and every belief is subjected to the relativizing effects of historicism?<sup>4</sup>

This problem, the difficult dilemma of founding a people once the traditional forms of foundations have become inoperative, invalid, and unjustified, is not new to Nietzsche's corpus. He had identified the problem in his meditation on David Strauss, where he observed that the "foundation [*Fundament*]" upon which "the German spirit might construct its house" (§2) is missing. In that meditation, however, he had failed to find a satisfactory solution to the dilemma, and lacking the requisite resources, he turned instead to the task of conceptualizing the profoundly paradoxical consequences of the German founding. The essay shows how the long sought after unification of the German peoples, finally achieved with the founding of the second *Reich* and the constitution of the modern German nation-state, not only failed to constitute a people, but produced a nation at variance with itself, alienated from itself, so fractured and fragmented that it was, paradoxically, the very opposite of itself—"un-German" (§11). This Germany, the post-war Germany dissected in the first *Untimely Meditation*, appears in the ghostly form of a

<sup>3</sup> On Zarathustra as a political legislator, see Keith Ansell-Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as a Political Thinker: The Perfect Nihilist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1994), 103.

<sup>4</sup> On Nietzsche and historicism, see Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1953), 26.

nation-state without content or genuine specificity, a place where barbarism—this is the word Nietzsche used—is confused with culture and where *Reich* is substituted for *Geist* (spirit), form for content, the exterior trappings of the state for the originality of a people and a culture. This is the dilemma Nietzsche inherits in the second *Untimely Meditation*, and the insubstantial, phantasmagoric character of the post-war state depicted in his essay dictates his task: He must discover foundations secure enough to transform the modern nation-state—Germany serves as the paradigmatic example—from a ghostly abstraction, a mere formality and a mechanical process, into a living, sensuous unity—a united people, a genuine public, a body politic.

Faced with this problem, the second *Untimely Meditation* avoids all appeals to the traditional instruments of politics. It refrains from suggesting constitutional revisions that might bring the state closer to the people, and it makes no attempt to achieve political, social, or cultural unification through patriotic calls for loyalty to the nation, its parties, or its political institutions. Indeed, it shows so little interest in the traditional mechanisms and instruments of modern politics that Nietzsche instead turns in the opposite direction—inward, to the sphere of culture, to the sensuous core of the embodied individual, to the sphere of sentiment, sensibility, and style, the place of taste, judgement, and subjectivity. This turn, however—the turn from the social macrocosm to the microcosm of the individual—does not represent a turn away from politics towards the anti-political stance that has been attributed to him.<sup>5</sup> Rather, it signals a displacement of the macropolitical sphere of the state into the micropolitical sphere of the soul and a recasting of the terms of political debate.<sup>6</sup>

This strategy emerges in the essay's Forward when Nietzsche describes his essay's purpose: "I have sought," he writes there, "to depict a sentiment [*Empfindung*] that has

<sup>5</sup> Walter Kaufmann is the most prominent representative of this interpretation. See *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1964), 352-359.

<sup>6</sup> This turn is best conceptualized by Leslie Paul Thiele; see *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul: A Study of Heroic Individualism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). See also David Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political*, (New York: Routledge, 1997); see also Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1985).



tormented me often enough; I am taking revenge on it by abandoning it to the public [*die Öffentlichkeit*]." With this sentence, Nietzsche announces the problematic which will dominate the whole of his essay and determine the terms of its investigation. Indeed, it provides the first intimations of its political program, and whatever else that program may entail, it requires the abandonment, the handing over, even the sacrifice of a certain sentiment, and not to those who ought to be, by right of Nietzsche's training and vocation, his presumed audience—the specialists of the philological community, the readers of the scholarly journals, or the community of professors. Nietzsche abandons his sentiment to the public at large, to the community of non-specialists, to those who he identifies in his Foreword as "the people." This community is the recipient of his sentiment, and by abandoning it to them, he intends to inaugurate a public debate on public sentiment, on the community's sense of itself and its sense of community. He relinquishes a private, subjective sentiment to the scrutiny of the public realm and asks the public if it recognizes that sentiment, if it is common to the public at large, if the existence of the community, of something public and common to all, requires that one feels the way Nietzsche does and share in his sentiment. And once Nietzsche draws the public into a debate over the private sphere of sentiment, once he brings these two disparate and even antithetical realms together—the public sphere of debate, the private sphere of individual sentiment—he arrives at the topic which will dominate the entirety of his meditation: *sensus communis*, community sense, or, in the language Nietzsche uses in the Foreword—public sentiment.

The sentiment at issue is already announced in the title to the second *Untimely Meditation*—"On the Use and the Abuse of History for Life"—and when Nietzsche begins the process of abandoning it to the public and opening it up to public scrutiny, when he asks the public if this sentiment defines the public's sense of itself and dominates the age, he suggests that it originates in a sensibility that not only threatens the foundations of the public and the public realm, but that poses a threat to the very existence of a public and a people. History, the title says, can be abused, can become disadvantageous for life, a "*Nachteil*"—a drawback, a detriment, something injurious and harmful, a source of suffering and infirmity. And when history comes to dominate a people's sense of itself, when a people is dominated exclusively by a sensitivity to history and a "historical

sensibility [*historische Sinn*]," then—and this is the "theme [*Thema*]" (§1) Nietzsche proposes to investigate—then it can become not merely disadvantageous, but dangerous, a threat to the health of a people, a political community, and its public. Indeed, once public sentiment falls prey to the "historical fever" (Foreword) and becomes sensitive to the flow of time alone, to the transience of all things and to the contingency of all beliefs, it can even lead, Nietzsche insists, to "the destruction of a people [*zum Verderben eines Volkes werden*]" (Foreword), to the destruction of its sense of self, its sense of unity and its feeling of community. In this case, the possibility of politics itself is closed off, the community needed to support it is absent, and the common space needed for its enactment is found wanting.

This is the case Nietzsche's essay sets out not only to diagnose, but to cure, heal, and remedy. It requires the skills of a cultural physician capable of illuminating the effects of historicism and the historical sensibility through a diagnosis of "the peculiar symptoms [*merkwürdigen Symptomen*] of the age" (Foreword)—its sentiments, tastes, and forms of judgement.<sup>7</sup> Curing a people of these symptoms and ridding it of the historical sickness in turn requires countering those sentiments, tastes, and modes of judgement with others, with ones that do not undermine a people's sense of self but rather reconstructs the lost unity that makes politics possible and unites a people around a public space of deeds and action. Nietzsche makes it clear that restoring this unity is not simply a matter of "political reunification [*politische Wiedervereinigung*]" (§4). Political unity, as Nietzsche's meditation on David Strauss makes clear, is not sufficient to insure the existence of a people or a public sphere of action. Restoring a lost unity entails, rather, the discovery of foundations capable of *uniting a public without making it uniform, of constituting a people rather than a mass, of laying the foundations for singular persons rather than identical individuals*. It requires, moreover, the substitution of a certain utilitarian variety of liberalism responsible for each of these latter possibilities with its antithesis—a highly esoteric form of republicanism which Nietzsche derives from Schopenhauer and places at

<sup>7</sup> For Nietzsche's concept of the "cultural physician," see his notes on the subject, "The Philosopher as Cultural Physician," in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's*, trans. Daniel Breazeale (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1979), 69-76.

the basis of a genuine individualism and truly united people. Realizing this goal requires the negation, the "*Vernichtung*" (§4), of the antithesis between the spheres of the public and the private, the state and its people, the community and its sentiment, the political world and individual actors. It is a task which aims to recreate public sentiment, community sense and *sensus communis*, what Nietzsche calls the "sentiment of a people [*Volksempfindung*]" (§4). To carry it out, Nietzsche plays the role of the cultural physician and practices a politics of the soul. He engages in a micro-political strategy to resolve a macro-political problem—the failure of the German founding to found a German people.<sup>8</sup> Statecraft gives way to soulcraft here, and the result, achieved through a sentimental education, ought to found a non-national nation of a non-national people which is both justified and just.

#### "The Shattering and Dismantling of all Foundations"

Nietzsche's task in the second *Untimely Meditation*, is, in essence, the recovery of the political. Like each of his earlier writings—*The Birth of Tragedy*, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense," "David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer"—his intention is to lay the foundations for an ethical form of community and a just form of politics, and like each of his earlier writings, the second *Untimely Meditation* casts that task in terms of a never ending *agon* between two opposing world views, the first tragic, practiced by the poets, the artists, and the pre-Socratic philosophers, the second theoretical, practiced by the proponents of science and post-Socratic philosophy. In the second *Untimely Meditation*, Nietzsche stages the conflict around the problem of history, and he attributes the problem his essay investigates—the loss of the *sensus communis* and the destruction of public sentiment—to the absence of a tragic approach to history. In modernity, the demand arises that "*history be a science*" (§4), and the loss of a tragic, poetic, and even artistic approach to history produces a series of ills which appear as a peculiar series of symptomatic sentiments. Each of these sentiments—nausea, skepticism, apathy, irony, cynicism—results from the demand that history become a science, and far from supporting

<sup>8</sup> On the role of micro-politics in Nietzsche's political thought, see David Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political*, 47-50.



the public realm and cultivating a sense for all that is public—for the world inhabited by others and open to others—these sentiments result in the closure of the public realm, the undermining of public sentiment, and the disintegration of a people.

Nietzsche attributes each of these ills to the onset of historicism, and as his essay proceeds, he slowly draws out its consequences. They originate in catastrophic loss—the loss of being, the unchanging, and the eternal, and the loss of the stability, grounds, and foundations they provide. When everything believed to be eternal, enduring, and stable, when everything believed to be outside and above history is historicized, "the enduring and the eternal" are lost and with it the "the foundation [*Fundament*] of all of man's certainty and rest" (§10). The "tireless unraveling and historicizing of the moderns," Nietzsche writes, leads to the "shattering and dismantling of all foundations, and their disintegration into a fluid, dispersing becoming [*Werden*]" (§9). Far from liberating a people or an individual, however, far from simply freeing them from the constraints of absolutes and opening up a space for a diversity of practices and values, historicism, radically practiced, undermines the possibility of action and leads to the destruction of the self, the death of the subject, and the end of the personality. The result, according to Nietzsche's analysis, is an "overflowing, stupefying, and violent historicizing" (§7), which robs individuals of the power to act, disorients the subject with an excessive influx of historical material, and produces a chaos in the soul of the actor which leaves it sick, suffering from a "historical fever." When one is educated on a purely historical basis, the "strange symptoms" of this fever appear as a series of sentiments indicative of the destruction of the foundations needed to act:

the mass of impressions storming into the young soul is so great, the surprising, barbaric, and violent impressions penetrate so overpoweringly—"balled up in little clumps"—that the soul can only save itself through intentional stupidity. Wherever a more refined, stronger consciousness lay at its foundation [*zu Grunde lag*], a new sentiment doubtless arises: Nausea [*Ekel*]. The young person has become homeless [*heimatlos*] and skeptical of all customs and concepts. Now he knows: In every age it was different; it doesn't matter who you are. In melancholy apathy [*schwermüthiger Gefüllosigkeit*] he lets opinion after opinion pass him by and understands Hölderlin's mood when reading Laertius Diogenes on the lives and doctrines of the Greek philosophers: "Here I have experienced something that already occurred to me several times before: That the ephemeral and changing character of human thoughts and systems

struck me as more tragic than the destinies we usually take to be the only real ones." (§7)

If anything captures the underlying mood Nietzsche finds expressed in Hölderlin, if any concept expresses the unity of the sentiments produced by a purely historical education—nausea, skepticism, and apathy—it is nihilism. To be sure, the concept appears nowhere in Nietzsche's essay, but it is everywhere present in the background. For what Nietzsche is describing is the onset of relativism, the loss of all authority, and the irruption of disorder, struggle, and conflict between the facts and values of different cultures and different historical periods. He is describing, in other words, the breakdown of fixed cultural horizons and the onset of "continually shifting horizons," indeed, of an "infinite horizon" (§9) in which no opinion, thought, or system is perceived to be superior to any other and all meaningful differences are erased. So potent are the effects of this breakdown that they lead not only to the sentiments of nausea, skepticism, and apathy, however; two other sentiments are also produced, and Nietzsche discovers them at the basis of the people his essay investigates—"irony" and "cynicism" (§9). These feelings are indicative of an indifference towards oneself and the world, and they result in radical privation—the retreat from an alien world where one has no home and a turning inward that valorizes the private sphere above all others. Indeed, these two sentiments are indicative of the loss of the world and the withdrawal of the individual from it. "The individual," Nietzsche writes of this condition, "becomes hesitant and uncertain and can no longer believe in himself; he sinks inward, into his interior, which in this case means nothing but the cumulative jumble of learned knowledge that has no outward effect, of learning that fails to become life" (§5).

It is this sinking inward into the sentiments of nausea, skepticism, apathy, irony, and cynicism that Nietzsche finds so threatening to public sentiment and public action, for far from uniting a public, far from founding a people, they contribute to, indeed, are symptomatic of, the disintegration of the foundations needed to support them. The study of history, according to Nietzsche, is ostensibly undertaken for the sake of action, in order to learn about the world and how to act in it, yet it results, when radically pursued, not in action but inaction, not in one's appearance in the world but in one's withdrawal from it. Radically pursued, the study of history results in what Nietzsche calls the "weak

personality" (§4), and this weakness is itself indicative of the loss of the public realm and the *sensus communis* needed to support it. The weak personality is incapable of acting in the world, is radically dissociated from the public realm, and this dissociation leads to the disintegration and bifurcation of public sentiment itself. The internal world of sentiment, the subjective realm of interiority, becomes dissociated from the public sphere, the external world of deeds and action, producing an antithesis symptomatic of the very essence of the modern individual: "The most proper property [*eigenste Eigenschaft*] of this modern human being," Nietzsche writes, is "the peculiar antithesis between an interior that corresponds to no exterior and an exterior that corresponds to no interior—an antithesis unknown to the ancient peoples of the world" (§4). Unlike the ancient peoples of the world, unlike the tragic Greeks who lacked a radical awareness of history, the moderns, who are excessively aware of the changing nature of all things, are racked by an unbridgeable antithesis that separates the private sphere from the public, the individual from the people, the actor from the world. When a world, a people, and a public losses definitive shape, when its horizons continually shift and finally stretch out into infinity, action is foreclosed and the public world is closed off. Nauseated not by perspectivism but by the breakdown of all perspectives, the actor losses all purchase on the world and becomes insensitive to it. One becomes, in other words, apathetic, lacking in any pathos for the world and devoid of any feeling for it. This, Nietzsche insists, is the only means left open to the individual "for overcoming those things which so violently press in upon it" (§4). The world itself must be renounced, and with it all sense of reality, all feeling for "the real [*das Wirkliche*]" (§4) is lost. Lacking pathos, sensitivity, and feeling, a quasi-pathological state emerges in which a form of solipsistic idealism takes over and a radical, even barbaric subjectivism emerges:

the habit develops of no longer taking the real things seriously; from this arises the "weak personality" on whom the real, the subsisting makes only a slight impression. Eventually we become ever more negligent and indolent towards the outer world [*im Äusserlichen*] and widen the precarious gulf between content and form to the point of losing all feeling for barbarism [*zur Gefühllosigkeit für die Barbarei*] (§4).

The loss of the public world Nietzsche describes here, the retreat of the weakened personality into the sensuous content of subjective interiority as it loses all sense for the form of the world—this phenomenon is not only symptomatic of the destruction of a public



space and the onset of a barbaric indifference to the world; it also indicates how damaged the internal world of sentiment has become. Far from freeing up the individual to freely cultivate its sentiments and sensitivity, the loss of the real resulting from a radically practiced historicism robs the subject of the very context needed to cultivate the inner world of sentiment and with it a free personality. And lacking a point of reference in reality and forced to retreat into a solipsistic subjectivism which is the very opposite of historical objectivity, the individual loses all trust in itself, the personality becomes too weak to act in accordance with its own measures, and one begins to lose oneself in history. "The reason for this," Nietzsche writes,

is that history bewilders feeling and sentiment [*das Gefühl und die Empfindung*] wherever they are not strong enough to take themselves as the measure of the past. Those who no longer dare to trust themselves, but instead involuntarily ask history what their sentiment should be [*für sein Empfinden*] and ask it "What should I sense [*empfinden*] here?" gradually become play actors out of timidity and play a role—usually even many roles, which explains why they play them so poorly and shallowly (§5).

Play acting is the upshot of an excessive education in history. History, Nietzsche will argue later in the second *Untimely Meditation*, can serve the invaluable function of providing exemplary examples of deeds and acts, but when one is educated exclusively in history, all perspective is lost, the great and the mediocre become indistinguishable, and the overwhelming accumulation of historical facts "bewilders" the individual. Not knowing how to act, uncertain of oneself and the world, "no one runs the risk of baring his own person, but instead disguises himself behind the mask of the cultivated man, the scholar, the poet, the politician" (§5). Out of fear and timidity, one assumes a role and a disguise, and as a consequence the individual becomes mendacious and deceptive, dishonest not only to others, but to oneself.<sup>9</sup> Historical education, Nietzsche argues, makes individuals unethical and irresponsible, indeed, it forces them to become liars by weakening the personality and robbing it of the strength to risk being themselves. Rather than acting on one's own impulses, one becomes a mimetic machine and learns how to efficiently copy

<sup>9</sup> On this development and Nietzsche's interpretation of it, see Irving Wohlfarth, "'Construction Has the Role of the Subconscious': Phantasmagorias of the Master Builder (with Constant Reference to Giedion, Weber, Nietzsche, Ibsen, and Benjamin)," in *Nietzsche and "An Architecture of Our Minds,"* ed. Alexandre Kostka and Irving Wohlfarth (Los Angeles: Getty Research Publications, 1999), 141-198.

others and become an imitation of a self—a play actor. Along with the loss of the world, then, radically practiced historicism results in the loss of the self: "Inwardness," the realm of sentiment, learns "to dance, to paint its face, to express itself in abstractions and with calculation, and gradually to lose itself" (§5). In the end, the retreat from the world and the turn inward which results culminates in a "coerced external uniformity" (§5). Rather than personalities, "much less free ones," one finds "anxiously disguised universal human beings" who wear "the bourgeois cloak of universality" (§5). And however much the bourgeoisie may look like a general will or a universal subject, Nietzsche writes, it is in reality the very opposite—an "eternal subjectlessness [*ewiger Subjectlosigkeit*]" (§5) capable of neither real action or genuine feeling.

This loss of the subject and loss of the world, this disintegration of the public and public sentiment, culminates, according to Nietzsche, in a extremely influential ethical and political doctrine—utilitarianism. No one should be surprised, he writes, when, under the influence of "utilitarian vulgarity," a "people perishes of petty egoism and wretchedness, of ossification and selfishness, after first falling apart and ceasing to be a people at all" (§9). Nor should one be surprised when a people, having lost all sense for the world and all sense of itself, breaks apart into a form of individualism which knows how to act only according to a strictly utilitarian logic. Having withdrawn from "an infinite horizon" into "the tiniest egotistical realm," having become concerned only with the private sphere and self-interest, this logic dictates that the individual "compromises, calculates, and accommodates himself to the facts; he does not seethe but merely blinks and knows how to seek his own or his party's advantage in the advantage and disadvantage of others" (§9). This individual—the bourgeois subject—conforms to the facts, to objectivity, and having conformed to the facts, this form of individual neither acts to change them nor seethes over them; instead, the individual joins a political party and pursues interests through compromise, calculation, and accommodation—through rational choices and instrumental rationality. This form of individual is pragmatic and clever, deceptive and exploitative of others, a prudent egoist and a member of what Nietzsche hyperbolically describes as "the world system of egoism." Such prudent individuals, finally, recognize the futility of rebellion and resistance, and so they welcome the founding of a state which protects them

from the imprudence of the rebellious and the resistant—"the working classes": "The state has a very special mission in the world system of egoism that is to be founded: It is supposed to become the patron of all prudent egoisms in order to protect them with the might of its military and police forces from the horrible eruptions of imprudent egoism" (§9). Liberal utilitarianism, the eudaemonic doctrine of self-interest and prudent calculation, the antithesis of republicanism and public spirit, the result of a radically practiced historicism—this ethical and political doctrine culminates, Nietzsche insists, in a state defined by its military and police capacities. The paradoxical result of this enterprise, however, is a state without content or genuine specificity—political unity without a people or a culture of its own. A police state is founded to protect self-interest where there are no selves; a military state is founded to protect the nation's interest where there is no nation.

### Sentimental Education

The task of the second *Untimely Meditation* is to cure a people of the historicism responsible for this paradoxical outcome and lay the foundations needed to unite a people, reconstitute its *sensus communis*, and open up a space for action and deeds—a public world. It is a task for modernity in general and for Germany in particular, and as Nietzsche emphasizes in the concluding section of the essay's fourth section, it extends far beyond the strictly political goal of reunifying the autonomous states that make up northern and southern Germany: "I hereby explicitly declare that it is *German unity* in its highest sense to which we aspire, and to which we aspire more strongly than we do to political reunification—the *unity of German spirit and German life after the destruction of the antithesis between form and content, between inwardness and convention*" (§4). This is a founding task; it seeks to legislate the foundations for a genuine political community by reconstituting public sentiment—a people's common sense and its *sensus communis*—and negating the antithesis between the private, inward sphere of sentiment and the public world of convention where deeds and acts take shape. Each of these tasks—founding a people, reconstituting its common sense, and opening up a world of action—is carried out in response to historicism, and each requires that the rule of history—the "sole sovereign" (§8) in modernity—somehow be overthrown.



The course Nietzsche charts to realize this liberatory enterprise ends in one of the oldest topics in political philosophy—the education of the youth—and it leads him to an unexpected destination. It leads him to the origin of political philosophy, to Plato. More than anyone else, Plato rejected history, change, and becoming; more than anyone else, he tilted his gaze upwards, towards the ahistorical, the unchanging, and being. Nietzsche makes no appeal to this ontology, but like Plato, he believes that the founding of a "new state" (§10) depends upon the cultivation of the young according to new pedagogical principles, and like Plato, he believes that those principles must free the young from the historically sedimented practices of the past in order to turn their attention away from the sphere of change and becoming. For Nietzsche and Plato alike, the micro-political sphere of sentiment—the soul—is the battle ground where fundamental political problems are fought, and for Nietzsche and Plato alike, conquering the sphere of sentiment is only possible on the basis of a "new form of education" (§10) which robs the young of their historical consciousness and allows them to forget the past. This is the micro-political, quasi-Platonic strategy Nietzsche deploys to solve the macro-political problem motivating his essay—the failure of the German founding to found a German people—and his meditation presents this strategy as a liberatory enterprise, as a freeing of the individual from the coerced uniformity of the historically educated bourgeoisie, a freeing, finally, which founds a new form of individual and a new generation. "True historical natures," Nietzsche writes, are "great fighters *against history*, against the blind power of the real," and they fight "not for the burial of their generation, but for the founding [*zu begründen*] of new one" (§8). Nietzsche devotes the final sections of his essay to this foundational task, to the legislation of the foundations capable of transforming the modern nation-state into a genuine public united by a public sentiment and a *sensus communis*, and he frames the task as a curative, healing operation which provides the antidote to the historical sickness through a new, sentimental form of education.

Nietzsche uses two, quasi-technical terms to introduce the principles guiding this new form of education. These principles—the "balms and remedies effective against the historical sickness" (§10)—serve as the "antidotes to the historical," and the terms Nietzsche uses to conceptualize them indicates their anti-historicist character: "*The*

*ahistorical and the suprahistorical* [das Unhistorische und das Überhistorische]" (§10). The ahistorical and the suprahistorical serve as indispensable instruments in the reconstitution of foundations needed to support a people and public realm, and Nietzsche deploys them in order to broach the problem of sentiment. The first of these two terms—the ahistorical—provides Nietzsche with an educative principle capable of realizing the Platonic demand that the young forget the past. "With the term 'ahistorical,'" he writes, "I designate the art and power to be able *to forget* and to enclose oneself within a limited horizon" (§1). This same art and power also provides Nietzsche with a means for combating the effects of historicism, for whereas a radically historicist education ends in the loss of horizons as history expands into infinity, an education grounded in forgetting some portion of the past—Nietzsche knows it neither can nor should be forgotten entirely—allows the young to form the horizons and perspectives necessary to gain a purchase on the world. And whereas the historicizing of the moderns in turn results in the destruction of the foundations needed to gain access to the world, the ahistorical—its direct antipode—serves as an educative principle which allows those foundations to be reconstructed: "The ability to sense ahistorically" Nietzsche writes, "lays the foundation upon which something just, healthy, and great, something that is truly human, can grow" (§1). Only on the basis of this education in sentiment—the cultivation of the ability "to sense ahistorically [*unhistorisch zu empfinden*]"—can the young cultivate a sensibility and a sentiment which is their own, and only on this basis can the young form the horizons necessary to begin acting in the world.

An education grounded in the ahistorical, then, not only serves as a means for combating the effects of a pedagogy dominated by the study of history; it also lays the foundations necessary for action and deeds. "All action requires forgetting" (§1), Nietzsche insists, and without the horizon provided through an act of forgetting, without the perspective opened up through a turning away from the past, one loses one's bearings in the world and falls prey to the immobilizing sentiments the second *Untimely Meditation* so diligently tracks down—nausea, skepticism, apathy, irony, and cynicism. Avoiding apathy and inaction requires setting one's sight on the future, not the past, and so insistent is Nietzsche on this point that he makes it the law of action. Indeed, he makes it the "universal law" (§1) of action, the *a priori*, transcendental condition of possibility for every deed.

With this legislative act, Nietzsche demands that one forget what cannot be incorporated into one's horizon in order to focus all of one's attention on "what is to be" (§1). Only on this condition can deeds emerge, and not only deeds, but just deeds—"every just deed" (§1), Nietzsche writes, is made possible through the forgetting of what cannot be assimilated into one's horizon. The possibilities opened up through forgetfulness are by no means exhausted with this revelation, for the very same act of forgetting, Nietzsche admits, the very same deployment of the ahistorical, leads not just to just deeds—it also leads to the very opposite of the just deed: "The unjust deed" (§1). The ahistorical makes all sorts of deeds possible, just and unjust alike, for while it opens up horizons, it closes others off. The ahistorical may be the transcendental condition for every just deed and forgetting may be the only basis for action, but because the horizons they enable remain limited, closed, and finite, they cannot help but be unjust to the past. Whatever their merits—and Nietzsche is the first to insist upon them—they shut most things out, close off access to the past, and finally appear less enabling than terrifying, dangerous, and deadly, "a dead sea of night and oblivion" (§1). Nietzsche himself calls the ahistorical "the most unjust condition in the world" (§1), and for all its necessity, it is a condition which is nevertheless "narrow, ungrateful to the past, blind to dangers, and deaf to warnings" (§1)—a necessary condition for all who would risk acting, but a dangerous one.

This danger make the ahistorical a necessary but insufficient cure for the ills of historicism. The ahistorical may lay the foundation for deeds and Nietzsche may legislate its necessity for every actor, but it cannot insure the justness of the deed or the actor. It may open up a perspective on the world, but, because it closes others off, it cannot insure that a public world emerges. And though it may allow the young to cultivate sentiments of their own, it does not necessarily unite a people and restore its *sensus communis*. Something more is needed to achieve these goals, and that something is to be found through remembering the past, not forgetting it. Another form of action, another form of sentiment, and another form of judgement is needed, and Nietzsche proposes to find them through the study of history. History, as the title to the second *Untimely Meditation* indicates, is not only disadvantageous to life; it also has its *advantages*, necessary advantages, ones which life—the life of a people and the life of individuals—cannot do without. These advantages



serve as Nietzsche's corrective to the problems resulting from the ahistorical. Whatever cannot be incorporated into the horizons opened up by the ahistorical must be forgotten, Nietzsche says, and because this act of forgetting makes one dumb to the past and insensitive to it, it results in judgements about the past which are themselves unjust. In the end, the problems resulting from the ahistorical are all problems of judgement. The "inhabitant of an isolated alpine valley," Nietzsche writes, someone whose "historical knowledge and sentiment is very limited," may be protected from the dangers of historicism, but the "judgements" which result from this limited horizon will inevitably tend towards "injustice" (§1). Isolated in a valley, horizons drawn tight, such alpine dwellers are cut off from the rest of the world and their judgement suffers as a result. Their sense of the world and ability to judge it are, as Nietzsche says, "very limited," and it is precisely this limited ability to judge and lack of a sentiment sensitive to the world that opens up the possibility of unjust deeds. History is needed, and an openness to it, in order to find examples of just deeds, models that can guide human action once traditional models have been swept away under the flood tide of historicism. History must be remembered, and not merely forgotten, because historicism destroys the traditional guideposts of action and with it those absolutes which once resisted history's corrosive effects. After historicism, history alone remains, and if any guidance for action is to be found, one must appeal to the great deeds of the past. Only the exemplary deeds of history are capable guiding action once its traditional foundations have crumbled, and so everything depends on one's sense of the past and ability to judge it. The "general welfare [*allgemeine Wohlfart*]" — Nietzsche's decidedly broad term for this "everything" — "would require nothing *more* than to sow as widely as possible the seeds of the power to judge [*Urteilstkraft*]" (§6).

In Nietzsche's attempt to found a new form of education capable of curing the ills of historicism, everything, including the "general welfare" of a people, really does depend on *Urteilstkraft*, on the power to judge and the sentiments judgement expresses. If a people's horizons are to be opened up, if the provincialism of the alpine dweller is to be overcome and a genuinely open public space is to take shape, then the ability to judge and sense must be educated, cultivated, and allowed to grow. And if deeds are to emerge in that public space, just deeds, then judgement and sentiment must be directed towards the past,

towards the exemplary actors of history who are alone capable of providing guidance once the traditional foundations of action have been swept away. This approach to history is not that of the historicist. It does not direct its attention to the past indiscriminately, to everything that has been, nor does it seek, Nietzsche writes, "what naive historians call 'objectivity'" (§6). Rather than burying the future under the indiscriminate accumulation of past artifacts, this approach to history seeks to preserve what the future needs most—"the loftiest, rarest of things," "the highest and the greatest of things" (§6). These are ambiguous terms—the loftiest, the rarest, the highest, the greatest—and it is precisely their ambiguity, Nietzsche argues, that relieves the historian of the "mythology"—the "bad mythology" (§6)—of "objectivity." History is not a "photograph" (§6), it is something which must be judged and interpreted. The loftiest, the rarest, the highest, and the greatest—these are qualities which are endlessly fought over, qualities which judgement has trouble deciding, and no science, least of all a science of history, has ever been able to resolve the quarrels they give rise to. History, Nietzsche learned from Schopenhauer, is not the province of science, for "history has to do with the absolutely particular and with individuals," and so it remains impervious to the generic concepts used for scientific classification. History, Schopenhauer argued, cannot be a science, "and thus it approximates in all respects to a work of fiction."<sup>10</sup> So too is there a certain fictive, aesthetic quality to Nietzsche's approach to history, and when he illustrates what this approach looks like, he paints a picture of the historian which places the problem of judgement at its very center. The "genuine historian," he writes,

observes all the motives and consequences of an event with such purity that it has absolutely no effect on his subjectivity; this is the aesthetic phenomenon, that being-free [*Losgebundensein*] from personal interest with which the painter, in a stormy setting among lightening and thunder, or on a tempestuous sea, contemplates his inner picture; it is that total immersion in things; however, it is a superstition that the image that things produce in such an aesthetically attuned person reproduces the empirical essence of things. (§6)

This is a telling example, and it provides the key to Nietzsche's understanding of history and historiography. All of its imagery is drawn from the field of aesthetics. Indeed,

<sup>10</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. II, trans. E. F. Jayne (New York: Dover, 1958), §58.

it is drawn from a long history of works which attempt to determine the conditions necessary for a very specific aesthetic effect and a very specific aesthetic sentiment—the sentiment of the sublime. Schopenhauer, like Kant before him, uses "lightening and thunder" and "a tempestuous sea" to exemplify those things in nature which give rise to the sentiment of the sublime, those things which we *judge* to be sublime.<sup>11</sup> In Schopenhauer's reading, like Kant's, these dynamic forces of nature give rise to a dynamic sentiment—the dynamically sublime. Viewed without interest, safely free from danger, these forces are capable of having a dynamic effect on the observer as well: They can elevate us over our selves, over our self-interest, and, in the face of terrifying powers, they can arouse courage and call forth the strength of resistance. Nietzsche, in a remarkable slight of hand, makes these forces the object of his genuine historian, but rather than locating them in nature, he discovers them in history, in the great historical actors whose exemplary deeds call forth our courage and strength of resistance. What the genuine historian observes—free from the self-interest of "disguised egoists and partisans that wear an objective look," free from the interests of the times and "the opinions of the present moment" (§6)—free from all these interests, the genuine historian observes the great dynamic forces of the past, the great historical actors, and observing them free from interest, they are judged sublime.<sup>12</sup> The sublime has always been defined as the great, indeed, as the absolutely great, and it is the great—"what in the past is great and worth knowing and preserving" (§6)—that Nietzsche makes the object of the genuine historian.<sup>13</sup> What the genuine historian exemplifies, and what Nietzsche's youth must learn from such a historian, is the sentiment of the sublime—the ability to judge the great, the ability to observe the sublime figures of history free from self-interest and free from the interests of the times. And having learned to judge

<sup>11</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. I, trans. E. F. Jayne (New York: Dover, 1958), §39; Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), §28.

<sup>12</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard has developed this approach to history in *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), esp. 165-169.

<sup>13</sup> See also "Das Verhältniss der Schopenhauerischen Philosophie zu einer deutschen Cultur," in *Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. I, 779.



and observe, having become immune to the historical fever and the dangers of the ahistorical, the youth are once again ready to act—on the basis of the sentiment of the sublime.

The sublime can serve as a basis for action, indeed, for moral, just action, because the sublime is a moral sentiment. It elevates one over the narrow horizons of the ahistorical and opens up one's perspectives. It elevates the actor over self-interest and the interests of the times and enables one to act without regard for oneself, without regard for one's self-preservation or merely private interests. Indeed, so powerful is the sublime's elevating, heightening effect, that it allows one to "overcome oneself [*sich überwinden*]" (§10) altogether. It suspends the will to calculate, to compromise, to further the merely private and the narrowly interested. It frees one from "the tiniest egotistical realm," from the need to accommodate oneself to the facts and seek one's own advantage through accommodation. Without regard for the narrow, the limited, the private and the personal, without regard for all that restricts the growth, cultivation, and development of persons, it makes the honest, genuine deed possible. Only on the basis of the sentiment of the sublime is a genuine act possible, and without it, one loses oneself under the canopy of history. For Nietzsche, this is a moral truth all rational calculators and instrumental rationalists must learn:

Expressed in moral terms: You no longer succeed in holding fast to the sublime [*das Erhabene festzuhalten*], your deeds are sudden claps, not rolling thunder. Even if you accomplish the greatest and most wonderful things, they will still descend silent and unsung into Orcus. For the moment you cover your deeds in the canopy of history, art takes flight. Anyone who seeks to understand, calculate, or comprehend in a moment when he should hold fast in prolonged quaking to the incomprehensible as the sublime [*in langer Erschütterung das Unverständliche als das Erhabene festhalten sollte*] might be called rational, but only in the sense in which Schiller speaks of the rationality of rational people: He fails to see some things that even a child sees; he fails to hear some things that even a child hears. (§5)

What the child sees and the prudent, calculating adult misses, of course, is the possibility of acting without the canopy of history, of acting otherwise than history has dictated up until now. The child—and even more so the youth educated in the sublime examples of Nietzsche's great historical actors—sees possibilities that go beyond the

prudent world of adult understanding. They see great possibilities, and the possibility of being great. Nietzsche has a name for these great possibilities, a historical name—monumental history. Monumental history is the history of the incomprehensible, the history of great historical actors who did not wear the canopy of history but threw it aside, overcame historical limitations, and achieved what appeared incomprehensible. These singular individuals did not calculate in accordance with reality. They overcame it, opened it up, and expanded humanity—the rational, the real, and the possible. They achieved something great, and to this extent, they achieved something sublime and incomprehensible. The sublime, then, is moral not simply because it shakes the foundations of prudent, self-limiting and self-negating calculation. It is moral not simply because it exposes the individual to something incomprehensible that—if one has the power to hold onto it—makes the honest deed possible. It is also moral because it opens up horizons that appeared closed, destroys limits that appeared natural, and opens up the possibility of the very greatest. This is what an education in monumental history teaches: "That the greatness [ *das Grosse* ] that once existed was at least *possible* at one time, and consequently will probably be possible once again" (§2). The possibility of possibility—this is what monumental history teaches. Possibility is possible, the incomprehensible, the sublime, and the great are possible—this is the lesson Nietzsche's youth must learn. And they must learn it, Nietzsche writes, as a "commandment": "Whatever was once able to expand the concept of 'humanity' further," monumental history teaches, "must be eternally present in order to enable this expansion" (§2). This is the imperative, the moral imperative, that must guide the just deed.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche provides two other imperatives as corollaries: "know thyself" (§10) and "create for yourself the concept of a 'people': you can never conceive it to be noble and lofty enough" (§7). Whereas the first speaks to the individual, the second concerns the collective. Taken together, these categorical imperatives command what must be done once historicism destroys the ethical horizons of the individual and the community. Acting on both achieves the end "commanded" by the imperative "to expand the concept of 'humanity'": the expansion of humanity through deeper self-understanding and a higher concept of the people. Each of the three imperatives is necessary and not arbitrary because "humanity" lacks a definitive meaning in modernity and must therefore be thought anew. Only expanding the "concept" can in turn do justice to the problem; any contraction lacks legitimacy after the rise of historicism.

It is this imperative which brings Nietzsche's new form of education to a close and completes the foundations needed to found a people and reconstitute their common sense. That education consisted of two "antidotes" to historicism — "*the ahistorical and the suprahistorical*" (§10). Whereas the first of these lays the foundations for action once its traditional guideposts have been destroyed by historicism, the second — the suprahistorical — restores the foundations needed to unite a people and reconstituted their *sensus communis*. The "'suprahistorical,'" Nietzsche writes, are "those powers that divert one's gaze from what is in the process of becoming to what lends existence the character of the eternal and the stable in meaning, to *art* and *religion*" (§10). The second *Untimely Meditation* says very little about religion, but its treatment of history — of the genuine historian — reveals the aesthetic core of a certain indispensable form of history — monumental history. The greatest historical deeds exceed comprehension, and so they are sublime. They elevate the observer over the given range of historical possibilities, and so they elevate one over the endless sea of historical facts and into the suprahistorical. Monumental history demonstrates the possibility of possibility, and on the basis of the moral imperative it commands — possibility must be eternally possible — it elevates one over history and into eternity: "The foundation [*Fundament*] of all of man's certainty and rest" (§10). Far from delimiting, stabilizing, and closing off horizons, this extremely fragile, refined foundation places certainty in the hands of those who are capable of "holding fast to the sublime." Holding fast to the sublime stops calculation in its tracks and opens up other possibilities. Far from holding one down, this elevating, empowering foundation lifts one up, commands one to "overcome oneself [*sich überwinden*]" (§10), and expands humanity's horizons.

Everything really does depend, then, on the ability to judge, on the ability to hold fast to the sublime and the taste for it, and Nietzsche's education in monumental history aims at nothing more than the refinement of that ability. "Judgement and taste [*das Urteil und der Geschmack*]," Nietzsche writes, must be made "more refined and more sublime [*feiner und sublimierter*]" (§4) if a people is to be unified, its common sense restored, and a public sphere reopened. After all foundations have collapsed, after every norm of action has been swept aside, the sublime alone is left — the incomprehensible, the elevating, that



which brings all calculation to an end and with it the utilitarian pragmatism of the nation-state. After historicism, after everything has been contextualized, devalued, and put in its place, only that which explodes every context and puts things out of place is capable of reuniting a people. Nietzsche's essay calls for a "national culture [*nationale Culture*]" and searches for a "German sentiment [*deutschen Empfindung*]" that will once again restore the "unity of the people's sentiment [*Einheit der Volksempfindung*]" (§4), and that sentiment is the sublime. "German unity in the highest sense" is a sublime unity, a unity which is never uniform, never stationary, and never perfectly comprehended once and for all. This form of unity constantly overcomes itself and perpetually expands its horizons—not through the expansion of the nation-state, not through the pragmatic utilization of its military forces, but through a people's elevation over its borders. The national culture which Nietzsche seeks to found is a culture of the sublime, a culture of constant self-overcoming, and constantly overcoming itself, the German identity he seeks to found is not identical with the borders of the nation-state. This is a culture of the non-national, for the sentiment that it expresses exceeds the confines of the nation and lifts one over it. The singular individuals united by this culture see far beyond the borders of the nation, and the republicanism they practice—their concern for the "general welfare," their heroic public spiritedness—extends far beyond any nationalism. Indeed, these singular actors live in a republic high above the confines of the nation-state, and the greatness they strive for extends to all of humanity. These "singular individuals," Nietzsche writes,

live in the republic of geniuses [*Genialen-Republik*] of which Schopenhauer once spoke. One giant calls to another across the desolate expanses of time, and this dialogue between spirits continues, undisturbed by the wanton, noisy chattering of the dwarfs that crawl beneath them. The task of history is to be their mediator and so to ever incite and lend strength to the production of the great. No, the goal of humanity cannot possibly lie in its end point, but only in its highest exemplars. (§9)

This is the goal of Nietzsche's sentimental education—to raise humanity to the level of its highest exemplars. It proceeds from a moral imperative that founds a new form of education, a new culture, a new, non-nationalist form of cosmopolitan republicanism, and—most of all—a new generation attuned to the sentiment of the sublime. It lays the foundations for a people by teaching them to hold onto the elevating force of the sublime; it

opens up the most public of public spaces by opening up a dialogue that spans the whole of humanity; it makes genuine action possible by demonstrating its possibility; it lays the foundations for a new form of state through a new form of education; and it reconstitutes the *sensus communis* by cultivating a taste for only sentiment open to all — the incomprehensibly sublime. In the end, these are Nietzsche's micro-political, quasi-Platonic solutions to the macro-political problem guiding his essay — the failure of the German founding to found a German people.

CHAPTER VI  
THE REVALUATION OF VALUES: *SCHOPENHAUER AS EDUCATOR*

One must reach out and try to grasp this astonishing *finesse*, that the  
value of life cannot be estimated.

—Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

"Pieces"

Nietzsche's four *Untimely Meditations* have something of the fragmentary, incomplete, and unsystematic about them. They have this character, in the first instance, thanks to the empty numerical divisions that break up their essays, separating their sections and, often enough, destroying their continuity. They have it, too, because the meditations, collected together by Nietzsche and published as a "book," stand in apparent isolation from one another, without introduction, foreword, or preface articulating their unifying idea, almost as parts of a whole left incomplete and unfinished.<sup>1</sup> This sense of fragmentary incompleteness, as if the project of the *Untimely Meditations* had been suspended before it

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<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche typically describes his works as "writings" rather than "books." On this distinction and its importance, see Jacques Derrida, "The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing," *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 6-26, esp. 15-20.



could be concluded, did not escape Nietzsche's recognition.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, he emphasized the fragmentary nature of his collection of essays when, in preparation for the publication of the *Untimely Meditations*, he appended to the titles of each of his four texts the cautionary term "pieces [*Stücke*]": "First Piece: David Strauss the Confessor and Writer," "Second Piece: On the Use and Abuse of History for Life," "Third Piece: Schopenhauer as Educator," "Fourth Piece: Richard Wagner in Bayreuth."<sup>3</sup>

Nietzsche's description of his meditations as "pieces," or as "fragments," "parts," "portions," "bits," or even "morsels" — these too get at the sense of the German word <sup>2</sup> One reason for Nietzsche's uncertainty about the completeness of the *Untimely Meditations* was his inability to decide how many meditations would be needed to bring the project to fulfillment. Originally, he envisioned a series of thirteen essays, many more than the four that were completed and published as his second work. As late as 1885, some twelve years after outlining the project, he still considered adding three additional essays to a new publication of his initial output. On Nietzsche's changing plans for the meditations, see Richard T. Gray, "Translator's Afterword," *Unfashionable Observations, The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. 2, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 399-400. For Nietzsche's original "Outline of the 'Untimely Meditations'," where he lists his thirteen planned titles or subjects, see *Unpublished Writings from the Period of Untimely Meditations*, trans. Richard T. Gray (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 98-99; see also his comments to Malwida von Meysenbug and Hans von Bülow, in letters of 25 October, 1874 and 2 January, 1875, in *Friedrich Nietzsche, Sämtliche Briefe, Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), vol. 4, 268-270, vol. 5, 3-4. On Nietzsche's plan to add additional works to the original four *Untimely Meditations*, see *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), vol. 11, 534-535. For two other lists of the planned meditations, which differ from one another and from Nietzsche's initial list of thirteen, see *Unpublished Writings from the Period of Untimely Meditations*, 304-5, 313-314.

For Nietzsche's concerns about the fragmentary character of the meditations, see his letter of 15 February, 1874 to Erwin Rhode, in *Sämtliche Briefe*, vol. 4, 201-203. In the letter, Nietzsche, concerned that he was failing to achieve the unity of style and thought called for in his first meditation, asks his friend to subject the mode of "presentation [*Darstellung*]" of his second *Untimely Meditation* to a "hard and brief" critique. In Rhode's detailed response, he criticizes, among other things, the essay's fragmentary, patchwork character. On Rhode's criticisms, see Richard T. Gray, "Translator's Afterword," in *Unfashionable Observations*, 404. See also Jörg Salaquarda, "Studien zur zweiten unzeitgemässen Betrachtung," *Nietzsche-Studien* 13 (1984), 1-45, esp. 9-15; Hubert Cancik, *Nietzsches Antike: Vorlesung* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1995), 81-2; J. P. Stern, "Introduction," *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), x.

<sup>3</sup> On the fragmentary character of Nietzsche's writing, see Maurice Blanchot, "Nietzsche and Fragmentary Writing," in *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 151-170. See also Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "The Detour," in *The Subject of Philosophy*, trans. Gary M. Cole (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 14-16, esp. 17-18.

"*Stücke*," and could be used as its translation—testifies to a political, philosophical, and cultural problem that extends beyond his own concerns about the completeness or incompleteness of his essays. This problem, which makes it more and more difficult to write treatises and doctrinaire works in modernity, and which accounts for the increasingly fragmentary and aphoristic character of Nietzsche's own writings, originates in an epochal event that is first diagnosed, but not yet named, in the *Untimely Meditations*. The event, simply stated, is the onset of nihilism in Western modernity and the break-up of the great philosophical and theological systems of thought of the past that gave purpose and meaning to political communities and individual existence.<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche has done more than anyone else to comprehend and diagnose the debilitating effects of nihilism in modernity, with its disorienting destruction of historically effective systems of value and horizons of meaning, and no one worked harder than him to find the path leading beyond nihilism and the purposelessness it produces in individual and collective life alike. In the *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche inaugurates this twofold task, at once diagnostic and curative, and in its four essays, he makes his first concerted attempts—incomplete, fragmentary, and necessarily piecemeal—to transform the extraordinary loss of meaning and purpose in modernity into a liberating and exhilarating opportunity to formulate the possibilities of a post-metaphysical, secular existence without sure footing.

Nietzsche's project of philosophizing without foundations reaches a certain apex in the third of his *Untimely Meditations*, *Schopenhauer as Educator*. The essay has long been

<sup>4</sup> Keith Ansell-Pearson is one of Nietzsche's few readers to see the problematic of nihilism operative in the *Untimely Meditations* (see *An Introduction to Nietzsche as a Political Thinker: The Perfect Nihilist* [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1994], 202-203). In supporting his claim, Ansell-Pearson appeals to Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditation*, *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*, citing its ninth section. It should be noted, however, that the motif of nihilism finds its clearest articulation in the meditation which follows, *Schopenhauer as Educator*. There Nietzsche confronts the problems that defines all of his future explorations of modern nihilism: the "senselessness [*sinnlos*]" life (§4), the "worthlessness of his existence [*Unwerth seines Daseins*]" (§3), and the "worthlessness of the present age [*Unwerthe der gegenwärtigen Zeit*]" (§3).

recognized as holding a pivotal place in Nietzsche's thought.<sup>5</sup> It not only thematizes for the first time the purpose of the final three meditations—to rethink the problem of value after the collapse of historically effective systems of thought by revaluing the value of history, philosophy, and art for life—but it announces the basic task that will dominate Nietzsche's final output and define his understanding of the proper role of the philosopher and the political philosopher of the future: To achieve a decisive "revaluation of all values," to "create a new and proper table of goods [Gütertafeln]," to once again give meaning and purpose to human life after the death of God and the devaluation of all values.<sup>6</sup> This task, Nietzsche insists, is a political task, perhaps even *the* political task in an age bereft of goals exceeding those of the nation-state, and in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, he formulates it in terms of what he will later call "great politics." Great politics is Nietzsche's answer to the problem of nihilism and the crisis of values it foments in the West. It is a strategy, necessitated by historical events, designed to respond to the new political conditions created by the loss of meaning in modernity through an expansion and refinement of our concept of politics. As Nietzsche writes in a note to himself, modern nihilism requires that we "learn politics all over again [über Politik umlernen wird]," and we must do so, he believes, in

<sup>5</sup> Walter Kaufmann, for example, says that the "third of the *Untimely Mediations*, though not as well known as the second and *The Birth of Tragedy*, represents nothing less than the consummation of Nietzsche's early philosophy" (*Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* [Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1964], 133). Richard Schacht assigns still greater importance to the meditation, writing that "there is perhaps no better introduction to [Nietzsche's] thought than *Schopenhauer as Educator*" (*Making Sense of Nietzsche: Reflections Timely and Untimely* [Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995], 153). Most recently, David Conway has uncovered the center of Nietzsche's political thought in ideas first articulated in *Schopenhauer as Educator* (*Nietzsche and the Political*, [New York: Routledge, 1997], 7, cf. 61-65). In the essay that follows, I develop ideas that also appear in Conway's work, but I proceed along different lines to reach different conclusions about the importance and meaning of *Schopenhauer as Educator*.

<sup>6</sup> *Twilight of the Idols*, Foreword; *Gay Science*, §335. On the problem of value in modernity and Nietzsche, see Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*; trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 1-3; Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. III, *The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics*, vol. IV, *Nihilism*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, David Farrell Krell, Frank A. Capuzzi (San Francisco: HarberCollins, 1991); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 353-369.



order to combat its effects by rethinking the concept of politics independently of the practices and goals of the modern state.<sup>7</sup>

As is well known, Nietzsche formulates his concept of great politics in opposition to the "petty politics" of the European nation-states and their reduction of politics to questions about the administration of the affairs of the state and the destiny of nations. This reduction, Nietzsche believes, results from a failure to reflect on the underlying values that support state-centered politics, a failure that also appears as an unwillingness to question the purposes and aims of the nationalistic politics that it promotes. The importance of great politics lies in its willingness to undertake the evaluative enterprise refused by the modern state, and, even more, to engage in the much more difficult problem of creating values capable of combating modern nihilism without recourse to the imperatives of the state and the evaluative framework on which they depend. Already, in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Nietzsche makes it clear that he believes the philosopher, properly understood, is best suited to the task of evaluating modernity's dominate values, for the philosopher, more than anyone else, is capable of achieving the freedom necessary to evaluate the values of the present age irrespective of the consequences and condemnations that may result. If this is so—and Nietzsche presents a strong case for his argument in the third meditation—then the political philosopher of the future must be ready to investigate spheres of life typically held at a distance from political life by state-centered inquires into politics. This means, for Nietzsche at least, that the philosopher of the future must be a political philosopher who takes up the tasks traditionally ascribed to political philosophy: The legislation of the just and legitimate conditions for individual and collective life. Unlike the traditional task of political philosophy, however, Nietzsche's philosopher must legislate these conditions independently of and in opposition to the predominate figure of the political in modernity—the nation-state. With this reconfiguration of the task of political philosophy, Nietzsche effectively transforms its domain and purpose.

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<sup>7</sup> *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968), §960. For a further discussion of this passage, see Lester H. Hunt, *Nietzsche and the Origin of Virtue*, (New York: Routledge, 1991), 39-40; see also Tracy Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and Politics of Transfiguration*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 211-212.

However necessary Nietzsche's call to revalue the value of politics in modernity may be, it is not without its dangers. Indeed, the project he announces, which today is being carried out in some quarters, is threatened by paradox, and its success or failure depends on its ability to resolve this paradox.<sup>8</sup> For it to succeed, we are told in *Ecce homo*, a fundamental "*revaluation of all values* [Umwertung aller Werthe]" must be possible, a revelation that creates new values capable of evaluating, measuring, and justifying human existence independently of the purposes of the state and free from the supernatural and metaphysical values of the past.<sup>9</sup> But precisely this task—the revaluation of values without recourse to a metaphysical or supernatural scale of values—appears increasingly difficult in modernity. Values must be created to give individuals meaning and the political community purpose—the problem of nihilism necessitates it—and yet because no known values exist to replace the devalued values of tradition, any new creation of values appears to lack the resources necessary to give it the legitimacy needed to make it more than just an arbitrary act of power, repression, or domination. Nietzsche's political philosophers—the practitioners of what he calls "*higher politics* [höhere Politik]"—therefore find themselves in a difficult, seemingly untenable situation: They can no longer claim, as Plato's philosophers could, to be philosopher-kings who justify their creation of values by drawing on the resources of an eternal realm of values legitimated by an ultimate value called "the Good," for the emergence of nihilism has rendered precisely such eternal values valueless.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, however, Nietzsche wants his political philosophers to be more than just philosopher-tyrants who legislate values without justifying or legitimating

<sup>8</sup> Recent examples of attempts to revalue the value and values of politics in modernity may be found in Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998; William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (New York: Verso, 1997; Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> *Ecce homo*, "Why I am a Destiny," §1.

<sup>10</sup> *Twilight of the Idols*, "The Four Great Errors," §2.

them.<sup>11</sup> Lacking such legitimacy, the values created by Nietzsche's political philosophers fall prey to the very same charge of arbitrariness, mendacity, and subjective imposition that the skeptical forces of nihilism discover in the values of the past. In this case, the values created through great politics would not be universally valid values capable of guiding humanity beyond nihilism, but values that were valuable only according to the perspectival evaluations of this or that individual, this or that group, or this or that power. Far from resolving the problem of nihilism, Nietzsche's political philosophers would then be merely exacerbating it. It is this paradox—values must be created, but the creation of values appears to lack a legitimate basis—that Nietzsche wrestles with through his very last writings.<sup>12</sup> The essay in which it is first confronted, however—*Schopenhauer as Educator*—deserves particular scrutiny, for it, perhaps more than any other of Nietzsche's writings, manages to respond successfully to the political problem of meaninglessness and

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<sup>11</sup> On the distinction between philosopher-kings and philosopher-tyrants as it applies to Nietzsche, see Lester H. Hunt, *Nietzsche and the Origin of Virtue*, 42.

<sup>12</sup> A version of the paradox Nietzsche faces in his efforts to revalue values is uncovered by Walter Kaufmann in his discussion of *Schopenhauer as Educator* (see *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 133-152, esp. 134-135). Kaufmann claims that Nietzsche fails to resolve the paradox. It would be more accurate to say, of *Schopenhauer as Educator* at least, that Nietzsche does not attempt to resolve the paradox, but only do justice to it, and thereby announce the only possible solution to the devaluation of all values in modernity. This is the thesis that will be tested in the pages to follow.



purposelessness arising in modernity without falling prey to the charges of philosophical tyranny, aristocratic conservatism, or the blunt imposition of power from above.<sup>13</sup>

### Political Theology

In *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Nietzsche approaches the problem of meaninglessness and purposelessness in modernity from the perspective of politics, a perspective which is informed, however, by the recognition of an event that, more than any other, is responsible for the crisis of nihilism. This event, as Nietzsche would later proclaim, is the death of God. The decline of the power of religion over social life, the eclipse of theological values effected by the forces of secularization, and the waning of the influence of the church in modernity—these developments, Nietzsche believes, leave modern life "senseless [*sinnlos*]" (§4) and existence "worthless [*Unwerth*]" (§3), bereft of genuinely meaningful meaning and devoid of real purpose. The decline of religion and the onset of nihilism are for him synchronic phenomena, originating out of the "agitated seas of secularization [*Verweltlichung*]" (§4), and taken together, they effectively dissolve the bonds that once suppressed social antagonisms, creating a social crisis requiring new

<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche's critics most often focus on his perceived shortcomings in solving this problem in order to present his philosophy as a dangerous threat to liberal freedoms and the democratic project. Ansell-Pearson, for example, claims that Nietzsche's attempt to legislate new values for the modern age is "problematic" because his "thinking fails to appreciate sufficiently that the conception of great politics lacks legitimacy in the age of moral nihilism" (see *An Introduction to Nietzsche as a Political Thinker: The Perfect Nihilist*, 161). Bruce Detwiler, on the other hand, argues that Nietzsche's revaluation of values depends upon "a 'new aristocracy' of supermen" who make "social subordination again...possible" (see *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990], 188). Ofelia Schutte, one of Nietzsche's sternest critics, concludes her attempt to "unmask" Nietzsche's politics by condemning it to an "authoritarian mentality" caught in the "ideology of superior/inferior and good/evil" (see *Beyond Nihilism: Nietzsche without Masks* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984], 193). Mark Warren similarly characterizes "Nietzsche's political ideology" as "neoaristocratic conservatism" (see *Nietzsche and Political Thought* [Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 1988], 3). Frederick Appel characterizes Nietzsche's philosopher-legislator an "artist-legislator" who is in truth an "artist-tyrant" (see *Nietzsche contra Democracy* [Ithaca: Cornell University, 1999], 166). J. P. Stern, finally, carelessly asserts that "no man came closer to the full realization of self-created 'values' than A. Hitler" (see *Friedrich Nietzsche* [New York: Penguin, 1979], 86). Responding to all of these criticism and concerns would require a work of its own, but it should be said that they are too often the product of partial and often hurried readings of Nietzsche's works. At the very least, they do not apply to one of Nietzsche's works, *Schopenhauer as Educator*.

forms of organization. Nietzsche conceptualizes the crisis by describing modernity as an "age of atomic chaos" and "fundamental tremblings [*fundamentale Erschütterungen*]" (§4), an age in which forces once held in check by the power of the church are unleashed without direction or purpose, and it is only thanks to the development of the modern state, he believes, that anarchy does not result. The state steps into the void created by the declining power of the church, Nietzsche writes, "to organize everything anew out of itself and provide a bond that will hold these inimical forces in check" (§4). As a result, the state becomes the center of social life in modernity, replacing the church. Whereas previously the church had given meaning and purpose to life, now the state assumes this role. And just as the church's ability to impose meaning and purpose on life derived from the authoritative value of religion, now the state's power to give meaning and purpose to life depends on the authoritative value it derives from maintaining social order. Under the forces of secularization, then, the power of the church is transferred to the power of the state, and as a result, Nietzsche argues, "the state wants people to worship it in the very same idols they previously worshipped in the church" (§4).

These are the characteristic developments that broadly define modernity according to Nietzsche's analysis in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, and they make the problem of nihilism an enormous political problem. Its magnitude can be gauged from the fact that the solution to the problem of nihilism appears in the development of the modern state, a development that, for Nietzsche at least, serves to exacerbate the problem by shifting the locus of social authority without in any way resolving the problem at its source: Nihilism. Rather than solving the problem of nihilism, the development of the modern-state obscures it through its assumption of an authority no more legitimate than that previously held by the church. The result, as Nietzsche makes clear in his meditation, is a form of political theology, a secularized theocracy, produced by a transference of value and power from the religious sphere to the secular world. Far from liberating humanity from the chains of religious dogma, this transference of value and power subjects it to the control of a new

idol, the modern state, "the coldest of all cold monsters."<sup>14</sup> The danger that Nietzsche uncovers in this development, and which has arguably only just begun to be fully understood, lies in the new form of power that emerges, a form of power that operates on multiple levels and in an obscure, self-concealing fashion.<sup>15</sup> On the one hand, this power takes the well-known form of a monopoly on physical violence, for as Nietzsche writes—and Bismark's state-founding strategy of "blood and iron" is no doubt his reference point here—it is the "military despots [*militärischen Gewaltherrscher*]" (§3), more than anyone else, who use the state to "organize everything anew out of itself" and create a new social bond. On the other hand, however, over and above this first form of power, another form emerges in modernity according to Nietzsche's analysis in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, far more subtle in nature and free from the obvious objections of repression and coercion.

This second form of power does not act publicly through force, violence, or coercion, but privately, through the consent of individuals. Nietzsche discovers it in the state's ability to exert its power not only in public life, but in private life as well. Through its ability to influence and regulate culture and education, the state is able to promote its own system of values, values which extend beyond the promotion of the state as the legitimate entity for providing "protection from internal enemies, protection from external enemies, and protection from the protectors" (§7).<sup>16</sup> Under the "new political conditions" (§7) that emerge in modernity, Nietzsche argues, a new form of power appears that draws *life as such* into the political sphere, politicizing the seemingly neutral domain of life by extending the grip of the state beyond the sphere of juridical-political institutions. Nietzsche

<sup>14</sup> *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "Of the New Idol." On the phenomenon of political theology, see Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 1988).

<sup>15</sup> Michel Foucault has done more than anyone else to advance Nietzsche's analysis of this new form of specifically modern power. See, for example, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1977).

<sup>16</sup> Nietzsche's analysis of the role of culture and education in promoting the power of the "idol" called the state foreshadows Louis Althusser's investigations of the role of culture and education in furthering "ideological state apparatuses." See "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971).



uncovers it at work in Bismarck's promotion of the German nation-state as a "*Kulturstaat*," a state that "promotes culture only in order to promote itself" (§6), and he sees it at work in the fact that "the modern state regards the promotion of philosophy to be one of its tasks" (§8). As is true of the state's promotion of culture, however, the state's promotion of philosophical education—for Nietzsche, any complete education culminates in the study of philosophy, as the Greeks demonstrated—is motivated by its own interests. "The state," Nietzsche writes, has "no other interest in the university than having it educate submissive and useful citizens" (§8). This is the crux of the problem that Nietzsche uncovers in his revaluation of modern politics. Culture and education, promoted by the state, transform individuals into citizens who are obedient to the imperatives of the state, constituting them as its subjects by subtly inscribing them with power even as these citizens celebrate the virtues of the nation-state and the freedom it provides from foreign powers. This was the development that Nietzsche witnessed firsthand with the founding of German *Reich* and the triumphalism it unleashed in the press and public less than three years before he composed *Schopenhauer as Educator*, and this experience undoubtedly allowed him to see that, whatever liberties and rights may be won when individuals achieve the status of citizen, individuals as citizens remain, more than anything else, subjects of the state. By figuring life in the form of the citizen, life—public as well as private—is drawn into the order of the state, a development unknown in classical political philosophy, where the political sphere was limited to the public sphere of the *polis*. With the rise of the nation-state in modernity, however, the politicization of the private sphere is itself undertaken, and it is the discovery of this development that accounts, in part, for the originality and foresight of the third *Untimely Meditation*.<sup>17</sup>

Nietzsche further conceptualizes this turn from the deployment of public power to the development of a power operating at the previously unpolitical level of the private sphere by clarifying its *telos*. If the modern politics of the nation-state transforms living human beings into citizens of states, and if citizens are thereby destined to be subject to the powers of the state, then the highest aim of life—its proper *telos* and purpose—can only lie

<sup>17</sup> Giorgio Agamben, without so much as saying so, has furthered Nietzsche's analysis of the politicization of the private sphere and deepened his discoveries. See *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*.

in serving the state. According to this logic, state power inscribes itself into the very core of existence and the very fibers of life. "What is the purpose of your life?," Nietzsche asks rhetorically of his fellow citizens. The answer he receives is "*to become a good citizen*" (§4). Here citizenship appears more as a strategy for regulating conflict and maintaining order than as a set of practices enabling the articulation of popular demands against the state and its centralized powers. Indeed, this form of citizenship points towards a sacrificial politics in which life itself is sacrificed to "a state that demanded this sacrifice" (§6), a sacrifice made possible only because "state power" (§8) so thoroughly penetrates life through the institutions of culture and education that it estranges life from itself and redirects its energies towards the ends of the state. Citizenship, then, according to Nietzsche's account, is a practice of self-sacrifice, corresponding to the "dogma that asserts that the state is the highest aim of humanity and that a man can have no higher duty than service to the state" (§4).<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche attributes the power of this "dogma" to a confusion of politics and life. The aim of life—the aim of individual existence—can only be a political aim, if politics is capable of solving the problems of life, if it is capable of altering, controlling, and manipulating existence itself, so that existential problems—what is the meaning of life? what is the purpose of existence?—can be persuasively solved through state action. Nietzsche does believe that existence is malleable, that there are different forms of existence—tragic, Socratic, and Apollinian are some of the examples his writings provide us with—but he does not accept the claim that the state is the appropriate vehicle for such transformations. "Any philosophy that believes that the problem of existence [*das Problem des Daseins*] can be altered or solved by a political event [*politisches Ereigniss*]," Nietzsche writes, "is a sham and pseudophilosophy [*Spaass- und Afterphilosophie*]" (§4). Such a philosophy, he suggests—and this was the purpose of Bismarck's *Kulturstaat*—would result in a total politicization of existence in which the state pushes itself into the recesses of an individual's being by dictating its ends and reason for existing. This sort of all-encompassing philosophy, Nietzsche recognizes, can only be a product of "Hegel's time" (§8), a period which could believe that "the founding of the new German

<sup>18</sup> On the logic of sacrifice practiced by political theology, see Jean-Luc Nancy, "Politics I," in *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1997), 88-93.

*Reich* represents the decisive and deviating blow against all 'pessimistic' philosophizing" (§4). The founding of a state, the subordination of life to the ends of the state, the extension of state power into "existence" itself—these developments, Nietzsche believes, are prophesied by Hegel's philosophy of history, and with the founding of the German *Reich* in 1871, they are realized to an unprecedented degree.

None of these developments would have been possible, however, without the state's ability to establish *its own values* as the dominate values of the period. Whether they originate in Hegel's philosophy or simply find their clearest articulation there matters little for Nietzsche's argument. The more fundamental problem his meditation addresses lies in the determination of values and the role they play in furthering specific forms of life and peculiarly modern types of power. In Nietzsche's critique of the modern state, this problem, as we have already seen, is solved through the spheres of education and culture. In these two realms, the state imposes its values through the promotion of its own interests. In the sphere of culture, it does so—at least in the German example Nietzsche takes as his model—through Bismarck's "*Culturkampf*" (§7), an attack on the last vestiges of religious authority exercised by the Catholic Church, designed to draw a sharp line between church and state and solidify the state's power over institutions such as marriage and divorce. In the case of education, which is where the real conflict lies for Nietzsche—his meditation is entitled, after all, *Schopenhauer as Educator*—the state exerts its influence through the promotion of philosophers who reflect the needs and interests of the state. "The state," Nietzsche writes, "selects its own philosophical servants, and it selects just as many as it needs for its own institutions" (§8). As Nietzsche makes clear, the state selects its servants according to their values, and anyone who would attempt the opposite, as Schopenhauer did—to evaluate and critique the state according to the highest value of philosophy, truth—could be assured of not securing a salaried position in a philosophy department. From the perspective of the state, of course, such a decision would be perfectly justified. "Were someone to appear," Nietzsche writes,

who really acted as though he wanted to measure everything, including the state, by the standard of truth, then the state—because above all else it affirms its own existence—would be justified in banishing such a person and treating him as an enemy, just as the state banishes and treats as an



enemy any religion that sets itself above the state and wants to act as its judge. (§8)

Nietzsche's essay revolves around precisely this conflict between the state and the philosopher, between a state that affirms its own existence and the values that support its existence, and the philosopher who wants to evaluate the state according to the criterion of truth. And it is here, with the introduction of the philosopher and the problem of truth, that Nietzsche turns to the task of legislating those values which can address the problem of nihilism without recourse to the values of the modern nation-state.

### Culture

Nietzsche presents his revaluation of values in *Schopenhauer as Educator* as an essentially liberatory task. In the very first section of the meditation, he declares that his essay exists to promote "the true liberation of life [*der wahrhaften Befreiung des Lebens*]," a liberation of life from the values of the state, and a liberation of life from the rituals of citizenship that it enforces. Nietzsche conceptualizes the process of liberation in several ways. It depends, first of all, on a rejection of laziness and fear—fear of the state, fear of public opinion and the values of the day, and laziness in adapting to convention and avoiding the struggle to become oneself. Becoming oneself, or rather obeying the imperative to "be yourself!" (§1), defines the task Nietzsche sets out for his readers at the start of his essay, and if it requires turning away from the realm of convention and opinion, it also depends on *not* retreating inward into the sphere of the subjective ego. "Your true essence [*Wesen*] does not lie deeply hidden within you," Nietzsche writes, "but rather immeasurably high above you" (§1). This higher self, this liberated, true self, can only be realized through a process of education, Nietzsche believes, and genuine "educators can be nothing other than your liberators" (§1). The third *Untimely Meditation* could just as easily be titled *Schopenhauer as Liberator*, and Schopenhauer, if not Schopenhauer's philosophy, certainly plays a decisive role in Nietzsche's essay. Above all, Schopenhauer's value lies in his example. Indeed, his example is precisely that of the liberated life, of the "liberation of the philosophical life" (§3). "Schopenhauer," Nietzsche writes, "wants to have little to do with the learned classes; he keeps to himself, and strives for independence from state and

society—this is his example, his model" (§3).

It is significant that Nietzsche treats Schopenhauer as an example of his ideal of liberation. Indeed, the real problem of the essay, Nietzsche confesses, is "to understand what is exemplary and educational in Schopenhauer's nature" (§3). After announcing this problem, however, Nietzsche goes on, in the very next sentence, not so much to solve it, as take an imaginative detour necessary to comprehend its solution: "Let us imagine the philosopher's eye trained on existence; he seeks to establish its value [*Werth*] anew. For it has always been the peculiar task of great thinkers to be legislators of the measure, mint, and weight of things [*Gesetzgeber für Maass, Münze und Gewicht der Dinge*]" (§3). With this sentence, Nietzsche tells us that the source of Schopenhauer's liberatory example lies in the autonomy with which he legislates new values. This understanding of the philosopher is easily imagined, and Schopenhauer's example seems to prove its possibility: He shuns the state and society, and values things independently of the predominant scale of values. He is, in short, an example of Nietzsche's philosopher who freely revalues values without recourse to the values of the state. Here, though, we encounter the problem of evaluating values previously discussed: On what basis does Schopenhauer's revaluation of values take place? What legitimates his legislative act, his establishing the value of existence anew? How can we be sure that this pessimistic philosopher assigned the correct value to existence? Nietzsche's answer to these questions, and the paradox that poses them in modernity, is perhaps grasped through a consideration of the specific character of Schopenhauer's revaluation of values. If, as Nietzsche insists, Schopenhauer is a legislator, what does he legislate? Nietzsche tells us that he legislates the measure, mint, and weight of things, as well as the value of human existence. And he also tells us, in the same paragraph of the meditation, that Schopenhauer's evaluative, legislative judgement on existence's value aims "to be just towards existence [*gerecht gegen das Dasein*]" (§3). Schopenhauer, then, on Nietzsche's account, is a lawgiver who assigns existence its value—it remains to be seen what this value is—and does so justly. Schopenhauer, in short, legislates the just laws that govern true existence and should govern the political

community. The decisive question, around which the whole of Nietzsche's meditation turns, therefore asks: What is this law?

In Nietzsche's meditation, he tells us what the character and function of this law is, but he does so slowly, in piecemeal fashion, almost as if he is discovering it as he writes. He begins, in the first section of the meditation, by simply telling us that we "must live according to our own standards and laws." We have already seen that this does not mean living according to the laws of crude egotism, the laws of a mythical inner self, waiting to be discovered through introspection. Rather, Nietzsche insists, "the fundamental law of your proper self [*das Grundgesetz deines eigentlichen Selbst*]" (§1) lies high above the self-evident ego. Later, in the second section of the meditation, Nietzsche specifies this law by revealing the law Schopenhauer lived by. It is this law, Nietzsche believes, that made Schopenhauer one of the few "moral exemplars" (§2) of our time, and it is this same law that Schopenhauer the lawgiver made his own through a legislative act that revalued the mendacious values of the state: "Schopenhauer," Nietzsche writes, "never wants to create appearances, for he writes only for himself, and no one likes to be deceived, least of all a philosopher who has made this his law: Never deceive anyone, not even yourself!" (§2). This imperative, like the imperative "Be yourself!", issues from Schopenhauer's example of how one should live. It commands obedience to oneself rather than the state. But Nietzsche does not end his discussion of Schopenhauer's law here. And indeed, he could not, for while the command to be truthful is virtually uncriticizable, it lacks the criterion needed to determine what decides truthfulness. Here Nietzsche takes an unexpected turn, a turn which leads through the problem of nihilism and into its solution:

All existence that can be negated deserves to be negated, and to be truthful means to believe in an existence that could not possibly be negated and that is itself true and without falsehood. That is why the one who is truthful senses the meaning of his activity as metaphysical, something that is explicable only by the laws of another, higher life [*Gesetzen eines andern und höhern Lebens*], one that is in the most profound sense affirmative—regardless of how much everything he does appears as the destruction and violation of the laws of this life [*Gesetze dieses Lebens*]. (§4)

Nietzsche juxtaposes two laws here, the laws of "this life" and the laws of "another, higher life." The laws of this life are the laws of the state, of conventional



morality and custom. The laws of Nietzsche's other, higher life, by contrast, are not conventional or customary, the contingent products of a particular society or state, but the true laws of "life" itself. These laws conflict with the mendacious laws of the state, which define life's meaning and purpose not in terms of "life" itself, but in terms of the state and its values. To live according to laws that transcend the state, Nietzsche argues, means to live according to laws that one "senses" or "believes" to be "metaphysical." It is significant that Nietzsche, who chooses his words carefully, speaks here only of sensing (*empfinden*) and believing (*glauben*) rather than the more emphatic "being" (*sein*). Rather than stating that the moral law which Schopenhauer legislates — "Never deceive anyone, not even yourself!" — is metaphysical, Nietzsche states that this law of truth must be conceived of from the perspective of metaphysics. It is this idea — the idea of metaphysics — that, for Nietzsche, provides the criterion of truthfulness needed to justify Schopenhauer's legislative act and prescriptive law, but since it does not confuse the law or the existence that attempts to live in conformity with this law with the actual achievement of a metaphysical existence — with a "higher life" beyond the physical plane of existence — it is a criterion which remains always just out of reach, more a regulative idea than an achieved or achievable reality.<sup>19</sup>

The remainder of Nietzsche's essay unfolds the consequences of the metaphysical idea of a "higher life" to explain how Schopenhauer's example serves to guide human life towards values and aims that are independent of those of the state. These values and aims are articulated and prescribed in the imperatives that Schopenhauer's example exemplifies. The imperatives "Be yourself!" and "Never deceive anyone, not even yourself!" are justified and legitimated by a metaphysical idea of life that places the meaning and value of "life" beyond any and every particular evaluative act that would define its value once and for all. It therefore places it beyond the confines of the state. But it also, in turn, places "life" beyond *all* attempts to evaluate its dignity or meaning definitively. The attempt to revalue values in modernity, then, finally devolves into the impossible attempt to evaluate what has become, with the dissolution of all values, *invaluable*. The moral imperatives that

<sup>19</sup> On the necessity of "metaphysics" after its decline, see Theodor W. Adorno, "Meditations on Metaphysics," in *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1987), 361-408.

issue from Schopenhauer's example of the freely evaluating philosopher are therefore neither capricious or imposing, but *necessary*, and their lawful necessity is derived from the inaccessibility of the ultimate object under evaluation—"life" itself. In this way, Nietzsche can deploy Schopenhauer as a way out of the problem of nihilism and the devaluation of values without letting his example fall prey to the abyss of arbitrariness or imperatives of power. Schopenhauer's law—"Never deceive anyone, not even yourself!"—does not issue in a positive definition of life that assigns it a definitive and final value, but rather articulates the negative condition—an idea of "life" that transcends all evaluative attempts—needed to begin the process of liberating life from its truncated, politicized, modern form. The criterion of truthfulness that commands one to be oneself, is therefore truthful to the extent that it does not subsume the possibilities of life under one particular form of life, say that of the German people living within a German state.

The ultimate consequence of this understanding of "life" is, for Nietzsche, the creation of a new series of moral "duties" (§5) that tell what ought to be done in the wake of modern nihilism and the rise of the nation-state. These duties are already implied by the imperatives Nietzsche articulates in his meditation, and they are united in the task of liberating life from its politicized, modern form so that life may finally become itself, unalienated and independent of life-denying values. In an imperative that Nietzsche articulates in the first sentence of his meditation's sixth sentence, an imperative legitimated and necessitated by the loss of those past values that gave life value and purpose, he states the task demanded by these duties: "Humanity [*die Menschheit*] should work ceaselessly toward producing singular, great humans [*einzelne grosse Menschen*]"—this and only this should be its task." This task, Nietzsche argues, is not a task for isolated individuals, but is rather a communal task and a communal duty if humanity is to find a just and legitimate path beyond nihilism. And these tasks and duties, Nietzsche goes on to write, are essentially cultural in nature:

One thing, above all, is certain: These new duties are not the duties of a solitary individual; on the contrary, through them one is integrated into a powerful commonality [*Gemeinsamkeit*], one that, to be sure, is not held together by external forms and laws, but by a fundamental thought [*Grundgedanken*]. This is the thought of culture [*Kultur*], insofar as it is capable of charging each of us with one single task: *To foster the production*

*of philosophers, artists, and saints within us and around us, and thereby to work for the perfection of nature. (§5)*

The thought of culture, like the idea of metaphysics, transcends the actual forms and laws governing empirical life in modernity. Culture, like metaphysics, goes beyond merely existing examples of life, and calls for its overcoming and perfection. Just as metaphysics is concerned with what lies beyond nature (*physis*) and truly defines it, so too is culture concerned with what transcends mere nature and transforms it. Culture is for Nietzsche a "transfigured *physis* [*verklärten physis*]" (§3), a sphere in which life becomes itself and liberates itself by taking possession of itself. The "thought" of culture therefore charges us with promoting those forms of life which promote "life": The saint, who teaches us to renounce the illusions of the empirical ego; the philosopher, who holds out the hope of the metaphysical against the tyranny of the physical; the artist, who spurs us on with the image of perfected nature. Our duty to promote these forms of life and so to perfect the liberated life is legitimated and necessitated by the collapse of those values that would otherwise define the purpose of life. From the perspective of "life," then—and "life" alone remains valuable after the devaluation of values in modernity—value arises from life's perfection. The more perfect life is the more liberated, autonomous life, the one which has realized most fully what it means to be a living, human being. The duty to perfect life, like the imperatives that Nietzsche discovers emanating from Schopenhauer's example, is derived from "the laws" of "higher life," laws that come into existence in the absence of earthly laws that could persuasively solve the problem of "life's" value and purpose. Once earthly laws—the laws of the church, state, or custom—fall into disrepute, then life can appeal to nothing other than "the laws" of "life" itself, laws which withdraw into the inaccessible sphere of metaphysics and always, of necessity, remain yet to be achieved, and which command, as a duty, the increasing and unending perfection of earthly life. Anything less, Nietzsche insists, would violate one's duty to "life."

It can now be better understood who Schopenhauer's "example" plays such an important role in Nietzsche's meditation. Schopenhauer does not represent life perfected. He is rather—although this necessarily remains open to argument—an example of a more perfect life. The perfected life, the completed life, which would be *completely* "life,"



purified of the diluting traces of empirical time and place, would be a genuinely metaphysical achievement. Nihilism rules out this possibility, for Nietzsche, and so he has no choice but to proceed by way of example. Examples are necessary because they alone can suggest distinctions once the values underlying historically effective distinctions have lost their authority. They alone can promote the cause of overcoming and expanding individual perspectives in modernity by raising questions, through the use of examples, about different forms of life and different scales of value. The object that these examples exemplify, however—true "life"—remains fundamentally unfathomable, and the "laws" of this true life, the law that defines life itself, therefore remain inaccessible. This means that Nietzsche's examples—and he refers, in his meditation, not only to Schopenhauer's example, but more broadly to "the rarest and most valuable examples [*der seltensten und werthvollsten Exemplare*]" (§6)—cannot be subsumed under a law and translated into a fixed concept of being human. The task commanded by Nietzsche's "duties" and imperatives is not to fix the concept of humanity once and for all, but, as he wrote in his second *Untimely Meditation*, to perpetually expand the concept of humanity through its perfection. No general law exists which could finally define when this expansive process of cultivation has achieved its end. Other laws, duties, and imperatives, however, are articulated in *Schopenhauer as Educator* that direct our attention towards this unfathomable, inaccessible law of life, and taken together, they provide Nietzsche with a way to progress beyond the problem of nihilism and the values of nationalism.

Against the ungrounded imperatives of the nation-state, Nietzsche's laws, duties, and imperatives command obedience to life itself, the sole remaining value and end for living human beings in modernity. Like Aristotle's description of the end of life as the good life, a good defined through the cultivation and perfection of life, life's purpose for Nietzsche is also its perfection. But for Nietzsche, it is not the state or *polis* that furthers this end, but a "powerful commonality" (§5) that exists independently of and in opposition to the state's efforts to make life serve its purposes and submit to its powers. This commonality is a commonality of culture, a sphere of activity, in which individuals take possession of themselves, overcome themselves, and free themselves from the values and standards of the modern state. Nietzsche fourth and final *Untimely Meditation*—Richard

*Wagner in Bayreuth*—describes what this culture might look like in practice. In his third meditation, however, Nietzsche's task is to overcoming the idol of the state by holding up the example of the "ideal" life (§5) exemplified by Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer's example of the freely evaluating, liberated individual, in turn serves the cause of overcoming the individual's transformation into a submissive citizen. Nietzsche's opposition to the state and the submissive citizen, however, is not an abandonment of political life, but an example of what he will call "great politics." It is a strategy designed to respond to the new political conditions created by the process of secularization and the emergence of the nation-state, and it is a strategy which Nietzsche never abandons.

THE COMMONALITY TO COME: *RICHARD WAGNER IN BAYREUTH*

The Germans are at home in the narrowness of life, knowing, and judging; if someone wants to carry them out over themselves into the sublime [*ins Erhabene*], they make themselves as heavy as lead....

—Nietzsche, *The Relationship of Schopenhauerian Philosophy to a German Culture*

## "True Art"

"Richard Wagner in Bayreuth" is the last of the *Untimely Meditations*. It serves as their summa: a final, labored effort to solve political, cultural, and ethical problems unresolved by Nietzsche's previous writings, a vast monument and testament to earlier hopes, a recapitulation and transformation of themes in a single, triumphant swan song—a vision of a future society and state free from the ills of modernity, an image of humanity to come, transfigured by tragedy and born anew into a rapturous world of freedom. Everything in the essay revolves around this programmatic, utopian vision of the future, just as the essay itself revolves around the programmatic event at its origin—the opening of the Bayreuth *Festspielhaus* in 1876 with the first performance of Wagner's monumental *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, a tetralogy in the mold of Greek tragedy.<sup>1</sup> Between these two poles, between the event of Bayreuth and the realization of its program, Nietzsche's essay unfolds. From the start, it proposes nothing other than the discovery of the path leading from Bayreuth to the future, the *Festspielhaus* to its audience, the work of art to its community, even, and perhaps above all, from tragedy reborn to a transformed society and state. This task, at once a defense of art's political value and redefining of art's relation to

<sup>1</sup> On the essay's relation to the opening of the Bayreuth *Festspielhaus* (Festival House), see Richard Grey's "Translator's Afterword," *Unfashionable Observations*, in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. 2, trans. Richard T. Grey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 405-6. Quotations from the essay are from "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth," *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), I, 429-510. Translations from the German are my own. Citations will be given in the body of the text in accordance with the essay's numbered divisions. A somewhat unreliable translation of the text printed in the *Kritische Studienausgabe* may be found in *Unfashionable Observations*, trans. Richard T. Grey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).



politics, is an attempt to open up the aesthetic sphere, to find the path leading from the work of art, itself cut off from life and kept at bay in theaters, concert halls, and salons, back into the world. It is an effort to retrieve values banished from modern society by its rationalizing logic and sequestered in the aesthetic sphere—freedom, happiness, and sensuous fulfillment—so that they may be harnessed for the purposes of social and political transformation and realized in the practices of everyday life. This audacious program, proposed once before in *The Birth of Tragedy*, is again taken up in "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth," and whatever its course, it ends, or ought to end, in a world transfigured, transformed, or—to cite the word Nietzsche will press to its limits—"reformed [*reformirt*]" (§4). Art—this is Nietzsche's bold proposition in his final meditation—can reform the world, and as the reformer of the world, it is to be accorded a stature in contemporary society equal to that of Greek tragedy in the ancient Athenian *polis*.

When Nietzsche turns to this vision of art in the first section of the meditation and begins the slow process of delineating its path back into the world, he avoids the well-trodden, familiar routes. The first charts a course directly from politics to art and reaches its goal by infusing the aesthetic sphere with political values. It demands that works of art portray life with fidelity and take sides in its conflicts, insisting on the sociopolitical consciousness of the artist and valorizing the didactic possibilities of the work of art. Already, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche had rejected this strategy, arguing that art's liberatory force depends on its freedom from the pragmatic goals of the sociopolitical sphere, and in "Richard Wagner and Bayreuth," he again refuses to locate art's

emancipatory potential in its politicization.<sup>2</sup> The politicized work confuses art with reality, aesthetics with politics, and illusion with truth, transforming art into an aesthetic ideology and undermining the cause of freedom, and for this reason, Nietzsche's final meditation rejects the introduction of political values into art.<sup>3</sup> It also rejects the introduction of aesthetic values into politics. This strategy dialectically inverts the first, and it treats the individual, the community, and life as works of art, as matter to be formed, shaped, and

<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche's critique of politicized art and politicized theories of art originates in the seventh section of *The Birth of Tragedy*. Nietzsche is concerned there with refuting J. L. Klein's "political explanation" of tragic art, which locates tragedy's origin in the "sociopolitical sphere" and makes the tragic chorus representatives of "the immutable moral law of the democratic Athenians" and precursors to a "constitutional popular assembly." This explanation of tragedy, Nietzsche acknowledges, is appealing "to the ears of some politicians," but it forgets that tragedy's origin is religious, just as it forgets that its religious values—embodied in the mythical, transcendent figure of Dionysus—exist in strict opposition to the Apollinian values of the Greek *polis* and society—measured hierarchy, harmonious integration, and well-ordered stability. For Klein's theory, see his *Geschichte des Dramas*, vol. I (Leipzig: 1865), 162.

Like Klein's concept of tragedy, Wagner's early theories of art similarly drew an unmediated line between the sociopolitical sphere and drama. The first version of the *Ring*, written under the influence of Bakunin's anarchism, Feuerbach's social radicalism, and Wagner's own participation in the revolutionary upheavals of 1848-9, was intended to be a politicized work of art in the service of a revolution still more radical than the 1789 bourgeois revolution in France. As Wagner put it, the *Ring* should "make clear to the men of the revolution the meaning of that revolution, in its noblest sense" (*Sämtliche Briefe*, ed. Gertrud Strobel, Werner Wolf, Hans-Joachim Bauer, and Johannes Fornier [Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1967—], letter of 12 November, 1851). In the final, much revised version of the *Ring*—the only version Nietzsche discusses—it is no longer the revolutionary enthusiasm of Bakunin or Feuerbach that predominates, however, but the post-revolutionary pessimism of Schopenhauer. On Wagner's revisions of the *Ring*, see Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingston (Great Britain: NLB, 1981), 130-142. For a general discussion of Wagner's art and politics in the context of their influence and reception, see Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica Ficta (Figures of Wagner)*, trans. Felicia McCarren (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994). For Wagner's original thoughts on art and politics, written and published in 1849, see *Die Kunst und die Revolution (Art and Revolution)*, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtung* (Leipzig: E. W. Fritzsche, 1887-88), vol. 3, 8-41. An English translation of the text may be found in *Richard Wagner's Prose Work*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1892-99), vol. 1, 21-65.

<sup>3</sup> On aesthetic ideology, see the Paul de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990); *Aesthetics and Ideology*, ed. George Levine (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 1994).

produced at will.<sup>4</sup> It deploys techniques of art as political instruments for the reinvention of nature, the stylization of life, and the domination of the material world. "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth" avoids this path, and it refrains from talk of the state as a work of art and makes no allusions to the art of politics.<sup>5</sup> Just as it steers clear of temptations to politicize art, it shuns the aestheticization of politics.<sup>6</sup> Neither the politicization of art nor the aestheticization of politics successfully integrates art back into life, and with these two options foreclosed, Nietzsche must find another path capable of bringing art back into the world and placing it in the service of emancipation.

Nietzsche finds this path in something he calls, in the first section of the meditation, "true art." "True art," in contrast to a long tradition, is neither a luxury to be contemplated

<sup>4</sup> One of Nietzsche's most productive readers—Michel Foucault—placed this strategy at the center of his final works. See his discussions of the "arts of existence," the "aesthetics of existence," and the "techniques of the self," in *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality*, vol. 2, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 10-12.

<sup>5</sup> On the state as a work of art, see the path breaking work of 1869 by Nietzsche's friend and Basel colleague, Jacob Burckhardt, "The State as a Work of Art," in *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C Middlemore (New York: Penguin, 1990), 19-97. See also Hannah Arendt, "The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and Political Significance," in *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Meridian, 1961), 197-226.

<sup>6</sup> On the aestheticization of politics, see Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 242. See also, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "The Aestheticization of Politics," in *Heidegger, Art and Politics: The Fiction of the Political*, trans. Chris Turner (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 61-76. Thomas Heilke has recently argued that Nietzsche's early writings conceptualize a theory of the "aesthetic state" (see *Nietzsche's Tragic Regime: Culture, Aesthetics, and Political Education* [DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998], 4), but this claim is not supported by Nietzsche's texts, for nowhere do they speak of an "aesthetic state." Nietzsche comes closest to a conception of the "aesthetic state" in his discussions of the "Doric state" in the fourth section of *The Birth of Tragedy*, but there he describes it as "a permanent military encampment of the Apollinian" and a "cruel and ruthless polity [*Staatswesen*]." Nietzsche goes on to contrast this imperial, "Apollinian" state—"the Roman *imperium*" (§21) and the modern nation-state are also given as examples—with his own political ideal: the moderate, well-balanced city-state of classical antiquity. This political form, he argues, is purified of the excessive "political drive" (§21) that dominates the "Doric state," and so it no longer succumbs to a total politicization that treats the state as a total work of art, impervious to what lies beyond its borders and incapable of withstanding the internal dissent that would fracture its aesthetic unity and formal integrity. Heilke draws heavily on similar claims made by Josef Chytrý in *The Aesthetic State: A Quest in Modern German Thought* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989).



at a distance by cultivated experts, safely set aside from the world, nor an expression of subjective political interests. It is a form of art that is no longer confined to the aesthetic sphere or collapsed into the domain of politics, and Nietzsche therefore describes it in terms less aesthetic or political than ontological—as an event that transports us "outside ourselves [*ausser uns*]" (§7) and discloses a new, unfamiliar world, beyond the confines of our culture and unimaginable within its limits.<sup>7</sup> This art, Nietzsche insists, leads away from the world of the mundane, the everyday, and the familiar, exploding the quotidian universe of conventions, transfiguring accepted norms, and transporting us into a world in which "every object shines with new colors and speaks to us in new characters [*Schriftzeichen*]" (§7). Rather than concentrating our attention on a particular political objective, true art—and here it gains a pedagogical force that Nietzsche's meditation depends on for its success—transforms our understanding of reality and enlarges our view of life. Its truth resides not only in its freedom from the distorting discourses of politics and aesthetics, but in its power to illuminate the world, disclose a new realm of possibilities, and reveal the truth of needs long tabooed, repressed, and forgotten.<sup>8</sup> In "true art," and in it alone, Nietzsche argues, happiness and human fulfillment are presented as real possibilities, and by opening up a view of the world as it might be, free from "violence, deceit, and injustice" (§4), Bayreuth—the "event of Bayreuth [*das Bayreuther Ereigniss*]" (§1)—becomes a *promesse de bonheur* and the prefigurative cipher of an emancipation yet to come. Once art is freed from the categories of aesthetics and the ends of politics—once it becomes "true"—it supports this utopian gaze at the center of Nietzsche's meditation and becomes a force for change in the world.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of art's transformation into "aesthetics" which takes its point of departure from Nietzsche, see Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. I, *The Will to Power as Art*, trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarberCollins, 1991), 77-91. Heidegger's own thought of art as a world-disclosing event depends on this reading. See his "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 15-87.

<sup>8</sup> On Nietzsche's "unique demonstration" of the repressive character of occidental culture and art's role in resisting it, see Theodor Adorno's "Review" of Ernst Newman's Wagner biography, *Kenyon Review* 9 (no. 1. Winter 1947), 161. See also Heilke, *Nietzsche's Tragic Regime*, 161.

*Richard Wagner at Bayreuth* is not principally about Richard Wagner or Bayreuth. Its aim is not to eulogize the composer, nor does it dream of Bayreuth as a paradigm for all things German. More than one sentence in the meditation highlights Wagner's shortcomings, and in more than a few places the essay steers clear of Germany.<sup>9</sup> *Richard Wagner at Bayreuth* is rather a contribution to changing the world. On this point, Nietzsche is emphatic. The "most important question in all of philosophy," he writes, "is the extent to which things possess an unalterable modality and form [*unabänderliche Artung und Gestalt*], so that, once this question has been answered, we can, with relentless courage, set about the *improvement of that aspect of the world recognized as being alterable*" (§3).<sup>10</sup> In this respect, the *Kampf* (battle, struggle) Nietzsche will advocate in his meditation—is this how the world is to be improved—is no different than the *Kampf* he ascribes to great politics in *Ecce homo*. Both put into practice a "concept of politics [*Begriff Politik*]" based on a spiritual battle against the dominant structures of power, and both aim to perfect a world mired in abstraction, illusion, and falsity.<sup>11</sup> In *Richard Wagner at Bayreuth*, as in all

<sup>9</sup> On Nietzsche's doubts about Wagner, see Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, *Wagner and Nietzsche*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Seabury, 1974), 84-138. See also Carl Pletsch, *Young Nietzsche: Becoming a Genius* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 186-195; Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Cleveland and New York: Meridian, 1960), 44-5; Richard Grey, "Translator's Afterword" *Unfashionable Observations*, 405-6; J. P. Stern, "Introduction" to *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), xxv-xxviii. Nietzsche's sharpest criticisms of Wagner during this period are found in his notes for "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth." See *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, VII, 753-775. An English translation of the notes can be found in *Unpublished Writings from the Period of the Unfashionable Observations*, in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. 11, trans. Richard T. Grey (Stanford: Stanford University, 1995), 312-347.

<sup>10</sup> The meaning of this passage is disputed. George Morgan interprets Nietzsche's statement as a call to unite thought and action, theory and practice, in the realization of an ideal that rejects inaction and resignation (see *What Nietzsche Means* [New York: Harper & Row, 1965], 35). Julian Young, by contrast, interprets the passage as a pessimistic call to change our *attitude* towards the world rather than the world itself (see *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Art* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993], 57). In fact, Nietzsche calls for both: a change in attitude towards those aspects of the world that are not ontologically frozen so that they may be improved through action.

<sup>11</sup> On the concept of "great politics," see Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*, "Why I am Destiny," §1. On Nietzsche's "political perfectionism," see Daniel W. Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 6-27.

of Nietzsche's later writings, a certain art is needed to accomplish this task—a "true art," a tragic art, a Dionysian art—and in the final meditation, as so often in the later works, the need for this art is created by Plato. The final meditation, then, is a response to Platonism, to the victory, in Nietzsche's "eternal battle," of philosophy over tragedy, the theoretician over the poet, reason over sentiment, untruth over truth.<sup>12</sup> With Platonism—and it is Plato who appears as Nietzsche's chief antagonist in *Richard Wagner at Bayreuth*—the poet is exiled from the republic, "true art" is purged from the world, and the citizenry are subjected to the violence of linguistic abstraction and philosophical idealism. Overturning Platonism and purifying the world of mendacity—"improving" the world, making it true—in turn depend on reigning in the language of abstraction and bringing art, "true art"—the language of concrete sentiment—back into the republic.<sup>13</sup> It depends, in other words, on a battle Nietzsche calls great politics.

Nietzsche insists on the necessity of this battle in *Richard Wagner at Bayreuth*. Indeed, he views this *Kampf* as a manifestation of necessity itself, as the unavoidable outcome of the logic of history, even, and above all, as a inevitable consequence of Platonism itself. The struggle against Platonism, the attempt to bring art back into the political community, and the founding of Bayreuth itself—each, Nietzsche says, originates in Platonism. Each is a necessary response, neither arbitrary or accidental, to the language of abstraction, and each is an attempt, necessitated by language's flight into ideality, to return language to the world and restore its long severed tie to humanity. More than anything else, Bayreuth aims to reestablish language's connection to things, free from the abstractness, arbitrariness, and accidentality of the Platonic tradition. It aims to recover a language capable of expressing "the powerful impulses of feeling [*starken Gefühlsregung*]" (§5) that guarantee its meaning and communicative force. This language, Nietzsche writes, would "correspond to the real needs [*den wirklichen Nöthen entsprechen*]" (§5) of

<sup>12</sup> On Nietzsche's "eternal battle," see *The Birth of Tragedy*, §17.

<sup>13</sup> On Nietzsche's attempt to overturn Platonism, see Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. I: *The Will to Power as Art*, 151-161, 200-210. For Nietzsche's description of his own "philosophy" as "overturned Platonism [*umgedrehter Platonismus*]," see *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, VII, 199. For a general discussion of Nietzsche's contest with Plato from the perspective of a defender of Plato, see Laurence Lampert, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).



sensuous, suffering human beings, freeing them from "*convention* [Convention]" (§5) and binding them to necessity.<sup>14</sup> The discovery of this language is Wagner's principle achievement, and its recovery makes Bayreuth—the home of real language and the site of "true art"—a theater of necessity. Wagner, Nietzsche writes in the opening section of his essay, has "an eye for necessity," and in the final meditation, Bayreuth becomes the non-arbitrary, unavoidable starting point for a great political struggle against the inheritance of Platonism.

The concept of politics that defines this struggle, like the concept of art it depends upon, is extraordinarily expansive. It wages its battles not only against "the spheres of violence and injustice, the state and society [*die Sphären der Gewalt und Ungerechtigkeit, an Staat und Gesellschaft*]," but against "power, law, tradition, contract, and the whole order of things [*Macht, Gesetz, Herkommen, Vertrag und ganzen Ordnungen der Dinge*]" (§4). Its ultimate target is the structure of sensibility itself, the sphere of needs and desires and the "collective sensibility [*Gemeinsinn*]" (§5) that expresses them, and it is here, at the very heart of the human sensorium, that Nietzsche's battle against Platonism begins. Above all, it aims to restore the rights of sensibility, purify the sphere of interiority from convention, and liberate the individual and the collective alike from the "monstrous sickness" (§5) produced by language's estrangement from humanity. If, as Nietzsche writes, winning this battle depends on overcoming the "artificial alienation and unintelligibility [*künstlichen Entfremdung und Unverständlichkeit*]" produced by conventional language—and the final meditation declares that it does—and if, at precisely this moment in the essay, Nietzsche turns to Bayreuth for an antidote to the conventional, then it is because Wagner's "true art"—"the enemy of all convention" (§5)—is capable of combating the effects of alienation with the unconventional language of the music-drama. In Wagner's art, Nietzsche argues, a path is opened up that leads beyond the arbitrary and accidental norms of modernity, and this path ends, or ought to end, in the creation of a new society and a new political order grounded in necessity and purified of convention.

<sup>14</sup> On the problems resulting from language's alienation from the human being, see Tracy Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), xxiv-xxv. On the problem of "convention" in *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*, see Julian Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Art*, 57.

## The Commonality to Come

Wagner's art contributes to the creation of a new sociopolitical order by setting a peculiar process of enlightenment in motion. Like Plato's philosophical enterprise, this process of enlightenment is designed to end "blindness" (§6) and increase understanding by freeing thought from the confines of convention—the shadowy world of the "cave" (§6)—but in Nietzsche's account of its movements, the artist—not the philosopher, "the theoretical man" (§9)—leads the way, and art—not the dialectical development of concepts—serves as its medium.<sup>15</sup> In contrast to the pale abstractions of the concept, Wagner's *Ring*—"the new bringer of light [*dem neuen Lichtbringer*]" (§6)—lights up the world and serves the cause of cognition with a necessity and expressive force unknown to conventional language, and in the dramatic art of Bayreuth—Nietzsche calls it "an immense system of thought without the conceptual form of thought" (§9)—this cognitive capacity is deployed to strip the world of its film of familiarity, break the habits of perception that truncate experience, and reveal realities inaccessible to the theoretical project.<sup>16</sup> Everything in Nietzsche's essay depends on this process of unveiling, of dislodging the congealed layers of sedimented meaning that obscure understanding, and the *Ring* accomplishes this unmasking operation by taking leave of the world and estranging itself from conventional culture. "Wagner's art," Nietzsche writes, "momentarily transports us outside this culture" (§10), opening up a strange, new perspective on the world in which the "ordinary appears uncanny [*unheimlich*]" (§7) and "the usual and commonplace" are transformed into something "unusual and complex" (§4). It presents us with a reality in which "we no longer recognize the most familiar [*das Bekannteste*]" (§7) and are compelled to "learn everything anew" (§4). These effects—Nietzsche calls them "alienation [*Entfremdung*]" (§7) effects—distance the spectator from the world, delegitimizing the authority of reality

<sup>15</sup> On Nietzsche's complex relation to the project of enlightenment, see Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Seabury, 1972), 44.

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of art's relation to knowledge in Nietzsche's writings, see Mark Warren's writings on "Art and *Wissenschaft*" and "Art and Ideology," in *Nietzsche and Political Thought* (Cambridge, MA.: MIT, 1988), 183-189. See also Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. I: *The Will to Power as Art*, 142-150, 211-220; Peter Pütz, "Nietzsche: Art and Intellectual Inquiry," trans. Roger Hausheer, in *Nietzsche: Imagery and Thought*, ed. Malcolm Pasley (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 1-32.

over its subjects and alienating them from its conventions.<sup>17</sup> Nothing is more important to Nietzsche's project, for by alienating alienation—by establishing a critical distance between the spectator and the world of convention—Wagner's music-dramas explode the social totality and free art from its affirmative duplication of the existing world.<sup>18</sup> "Liberated art" (§6)—this is the term Nietzsche uses for an art form that refuses to imitate petrified conventions—has this critical force, and by breaking with the conventional, it opens up a path to a "true human society" (§8) and a new political order.

Nietzsche insists on this possibility in the final *Untimely Meditation*. He insists on the possibility of art effecting social and political life, and even on the possibility of Wagner's art so thoroughly transforming society that it would become a true society. The sign of its truthfulness would be the necessity of its foundation—its lack of contingency and freedom from the distorting effects of power—and more than anything else, the search for this foundation drives the final *Untimely Meditation* and defines its central problematic. This same problem lies at the core of Wagner's music-dramas and the founding of Bayreuth, and in the *Ring*, Nietzsche argues, it takes center stage. The problem of foundations, the problem of their necessity and legitimacy, of their authority and validity—each is staged in the *Ring*, and each emerges in the struggles of its heroes as an inescapable, concrete dilemma. Nietzsche says as much—and a good deal more—when he claims that the "tragic work of art at Bayreuth" stages "the struggle of singular individuals [*Kampf der Einzelnen*] against everything that confronts them with seemingly invincible necessity [*scheinbar unbezwingliche Nothwendigkeit*], with power, law, tradition, contract, and the whole order of things [*Macht, Gesetz, Herkommen, Vertrag und ganzen Ordnungen der Dinge*]" (§4). This image—an image of fighters who struggle against

<sup>17</sup> On this alienation effect, see Graham Parkes, *Composing the Soul: Reaches of Nietzsche's Psychology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 112-113. See also Ernst Bloch, "The Impulse of Nietzsche," in *Heritage of Our Times*, trans. Neville and Stephen Plaice (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 325-331. On the work of art's necessary, polemical distance from the world, see Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 177.

<sup>18</sup> On affirmative art and Nietzsche's relation to it, see Herbert Marcuse, "The Affirmative Character of Culture," in *Negations*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (London: Free Association Books, 1988), 88-133.



modern society, who contest its legitimacy and oppose "the seemingly inevitable necessity" of its conventions—this image places the problem of necessity at the center of the *Ring*. It asks, without so much as saying so, what would be necessary to realize a true human society, to guarantee its legitimacy and validity, to found it and sustain it through time. Each of these problems is posed by the struggles of Wagner's tragic heroes, and Nietzsche finds their solution in the peculiar logic which guides their battles and determines their outcome. This logic—the logic of struggle, opposition, and conflict—is alone capable of bridging the distance between art and life, art and politics, and art and society, and once it is exposed, the gateway to necessity can finally be crossed.

Nietzsche turns to the struggling heroes of the *Ring* in his search for a necessary foundation for a new society, because their struggle follows the logic of necessity itself. Their struggle is fought in the name of necessity, in the name of a position which would be shorn of every trace of arbitrariness and purified of all voluntarism. This struggle, as Nietzsche makes clear, is a battle against subjectivism, individualism, and perspectivism, against the conventional, accidental, and solipsistic, and it can only be won by acceding to a standpoint that would be so true, universal, and necessary, that it would be free from all partisanship and devoid of any self-interest. Everything in Nietzsche's presentation revolves around the struggle for this elusive, difficult position, and yet it is the difficulties of the struggle—not its successes—that the final *Untimely Meditation* emphasizes. The logic of struggle, the logic of overcoming and transcendence, of transgression and crossing—this logic necessitates certain unavoidable difficulties, and in the struggles of Wagner's heroes against society, they come to light. Wagner's heroes struggle with all their will to transcend the norms of social convention, to overcome individual limits, exceed the fragile bounds of human reason, and bridge the gap that separates the partiality of the individual from the truth of "the universal" (§4). This conflict—the conflict between the willful, heroic individual and "the universal knowledge of things" (§4)—defines tragedy for Nietzsche, and in Wagner's music-dramas, its ruthless logic is exposed.<sup>19</sup> As Wotan teaches in the *Ring*, "arrogant, heroic willing [*heroisch-übermüthigen Wollens*]"

<sup>19</sup> For an interpretation of this conflict from a perspective that does not originate in Nietzsche but shares his problematic, see Ernesto Laclau, "Universalism, Particularism, and the Question of Identity" in *Emancipation(s)* (New York: Verso, 1996), 20-35.

(§7)—individual self-assertion—leads not to insight, triumph, and freedom, but to defeat, loss, and the sufferings of fate. The self-sufficient, willful subject has no place in tragedy, and efforts to transcend human limitations on the basis of will power alone inevitably fall prey to a hubristic transgression of insight and ability alike. Wagner's music-dramas have no other purpose than to distance us from our faith in the omnipotence of the will and alienate us from the concept of the individual it supports. This, Nietzsche argues, is the fundamental lesson of the *Ring*, and if it exposes the inadequacy of the will as a necessary basis for human deeds, it also reveals a new, entirely different foundation for action and struggle. This foundation—the foundation for action outside the theater and beyond the confines of the aesthetic sphere—is wholly necessary, and though it is not to be found in the human will and the heroic efforts of Wagner's fighters, it nevertheless comes to light in their failed struggles.

Wagner's heroes disclose this foundation by revealing a certain contradiction, a certain inescapable, tragic discord, endemic to the individual and unavoidable for humankind. Nietzsche calls it a "tension"—"the horrible tension [*furchtbaren Spannung*] (§7)—and he locates it in the conflict between "the universal knowledge of things and the intellectual and moral capacities of the individual" (§4). Wagner's heroes disclose this conflict in their relentless strivings for pure self-sufficiency and perfect self-identity, and though their monumental efforts end in a certain interruption, suspension, and finally breaking of their will—in the *Ring*, we read in the last section of the final meditation, Wotan's "will breaks up [*Wille bricht sich*]"—this very breaking apart of the aggressive, heroic individual reveals for Nietzsche an authentic concept of subjectivity and a new ground for action.<sup>20</sup> This moment, the most important moment in the *Ring*, is a moment of painful inadequation, of incapacity and insufficiency, and in Wagner's tragedies, Nietzsche writes, it is felt as "something sublime [*etwas Erhabenes*]" (§4, §7). When the titanic efforts of individual heroism fail to measure up to the demands of the universal, when their strivings prove insufficient and a "feeling of inadequacy [*Gefühle des Ungenügens*]" (§4)

<sup>20</sup> The best interpretation of the limits of the will in Nietzsche's thought is found in Werner Hamacher's "'Disgregation of the Will': Nietzsche on the Individual and Individuality," in *Premises: Essays on Philosophy from Kant to Celan*, trans. Peter Fenves (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 143-180.

sets in, a dawning awareness of something unrepresentable makes itself felt, of something sublime and unknowable, beyond the limits of the individual and inaccessible to the strivings of the will. In the sentiment of the sublime, a certain negative knowledge makes itself felt, a knowledge of something exceeding the capacities of human reason and resisting the efforts of philosophical conceptualization. This non-theoretical, non-conceptual form of knowledge—Nietzsche calls it "an entirely new mode of understanding [*einem ganz neuen Verstehen*]" (§9)—is sentimental, sensuous, and immanently bodily, and yet it is not for this reason subjective, conventional, or purely personal. It is the providence of no one in particular and accessible to all, and so Nietzsche calls it "something suprapersonal [*etwas Überpersönlichem*]" (§4). Tragedy, the final meditation argues, attunes us to something suprapersonal, to something that stands over (*über*) us and outside of us, to something that can be thought but never perfectly comprehended—truth, the universal, "the laws of life [*den Gesetzen des Lebens*]" (§4) themselves. With the non-concept of the "suprapersonal," Nietzsche identifies "something" that resists all conventionalization and transcends every norm, and though it comes to light only through the "personal inadequacy [*persönliches Ungenügen*]" (§4) of Wagner's heroes, it nevertheless forms the sole adequate basis for Nietzsche's new concept of subjectivity and new foundation for struggle.

This new concept of subjectivity—this new form of identity and individuation—is an effect of Wagner's sublime art. The sublime, Nietzsche argues, is a force for reform, an affect which transforms subjectivity and attunes it to something beyond itself. It makes itself felt in "effects on the human soul [*Wirkungen auf menschliche Seelen*]" (§8), in effects that alter the structure of "inner nature [*Nature...nach innen*]" (§6) and leave us "transformed into tragic human beings [*zu tragischen Menschen umgewandelt*]" (§7). This concept of the human being is less the absolute origin of its fate or the perfect master of its destiny than a split subject, an individual suspended in a state of tension, conscious of its limits—its unavoidable, tragic inadequacies—and yet attuned to a truth and universality that resist theoretic determination and exceed all positive knowledge. Nietzsche places this tension, this schism and division, at the foundation of his new, tragic concept of subjectivity. This subject rests on "suprapersonal" grounds, on a foundation that is



insecure, unstable, and always just out of reach. It cannot be known, and yet it makes itself felt in the sentiment of the sublime, in a non-subjective, non-personal feeling that elevates the individual beyond the illusions of the will and over the limits of convention.<sup>21</sup> The sublime, Nietzsche writes, is "the enemy of all convention, of all artificial alienation and unintelligibility between human beings [*die Feindin aller Convention, aller künstlichen Entfremdung und Unverständlichkeit zwischen Mensch und Mensch*]," and in the final meditation, it constitutes the sole "correct sentiment [*richtige Empfindung*] (§5) in an age of convention and alienation.<sup>22</sup> Once truth, universality, and necessity become inaccessible, once philosophy, theory, and the concept become inadequate to their ends, the sentiment of the sublime alone remains true, universal, and necessary. In it, the negativity, lack, and absence at the heart of humanity makes itself felt, and on this impossible foundation—on this groundless ground of the sublime—Nietzsche roots his tragic individuals and gives them a basis for struggle.

The sublime serves the cause of struggle by making the need for struggle known. In the sentiment of the sublime, something that exceeds subjectivity is felt, "something" that not only alienates us from convention, but from our claims to truth, universality, and necessity. The sublime registers our inalienable distance from truth, our inevitable failure to colonize the universal, and once this sublime, "suprapersonal" truth is acknowledged, Nietzsche insists, we are placed in a state of tension and inadequation that needs to be

<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche's critique of the will in "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth" must be understood in the context of his critiques of Schopenhauer and Wagner. Wagner follows Schopenhauer in making the will the essence of reality, and Nietzsche's rejection of the will is at once a rejection of this metaphysical assumption and a rejection of Wagner and his famously aggressive will. For Wagner's allegiance to Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will, see his *Beethoven*, in *Richard Wagner's Prose Work*, vol. 5, 57-126.

<sup>22</sup> On the political importance of the sentiment of the sublime in our age, see Stephen K. White, *Political Theory and Postmodernism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 83-90. See also Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 77-81; Jean-Francois Courtine et al., *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Albany: State University of New York, 1993); Paul de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, 105-128; Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 122-147; Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 196-9, 241-246. For Wagner's own concept of the sublime, see his *Beethoven*.

overcome. So long as this state of tension exists, so long as we remain inadequate to the universal—and for Nietzsche, inadequation is the very destiny of humankind—struggle is necessitated. "Bayreuth," Nietzsche writes, "signifies the morning consecration on the day of struggle [*Morgen-Weiße am Tages des Kampfes*]" (§4), and it is this struggle that is announced in the true language of the Wagnerian work of art. Wagner's music-dramas speak the language of the sublime, the "language of correct sentiment [*Sprache der richtigen Empfindung*]" (§5), and this language—the language of lack, inadequation, and tension, the language of suffering itself—makes itself felt as a need for struggle. We feel this need for struggle when Wagner's heroes attune us to something suprapersonal, to something that stands over us and outside of us, beyond all convention and always outside our reach, and we feel this same need, Nietzsche insists, when we hear the dissonant, discordant tones of Wagner's music. Wagner's music-dramas are music too, and in the sublime sonority of their in consonant compositions, a "discord," "conflict," and "strife" (§9) can be heard that is the very embodiment of conflict, tension, and struggle. In Wagner's harmonic revolution—in his emancipation of dissonance—struggle itself can be heard, and it issues in an imperative to reorganize society and found the state anew.<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche hears this call in Wagner's music, and in it, he hears Wagner himself calling for a new culture and a new political order.

"Help me," thus he calls out to all that who can hear, "Help me discover that culture that my music, as the rediscovered language of correct sentiment, foretells; reflect on the fact that the soul of music wishes to form a body for itself, that through you it seeks its path to visibility in motion, action, institution, and morality!" There are people who understand this call, and their number is constantly increasing; they also understand what it means to found a state on music [*den Staat auf Musik zu gründen*—something that the ancient Greeks not only understood, but also demanded of themselves; these same understanding people will condemn the contemporary state just as unconditionally [*dem jetzigen Staat ebenso unbedingt den Stab brechen werden*]. (§5)

This goal—to condemn the contemporary state and found it anew—is the "new and yet not unprecedented goal" (§5) that Nietzsche's meditation brings out into the open. It is, Nietzsche argues, a necessary goal, an unavoidable goal, demanded by the irresolvable

<sup>23</sup> On the Wagner's emancipation of dissonance, see Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 65-69. See also Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 43, 61.

dissonance at the heart of humanity that no will can conquer and no convention can render consonant. Wagner's art announces this necessary task, and by making it heard, his art becomes a moral art, an art of necessary imperatives and unavoidable demands that tell what ought to be done and announce what humans need. Above all, this dissonant, discordant art announces the need for a new type of state, a new form of society, and a new thought of community. Each would be attuned to the irreducible excess at its core, to its distance from truth and dependence on something inaccessible and suprapersonal, and this distance and dependence—this abysmal ground and foundationless foundation—would in turn demand their endless perfection and perpetual improvement. Wagner's sublime art—Nietzsche goes so far as to call it "ultra-sublime [*Ueber-Erhabenen*]" (§3)—attunes human sensibility to this moral demand by attuning it to something suprapersonal, to something that continually tests its limits and demands more, and on the basis of this suprapersonal "attunement [*Stimmung*]" (§7), the generalized reform of the state, society, and community would become possible for the first time. Wagner's art, Nietzsche insists, has this reforming effect, and "real reform [*wirklichen Reform*]"—starting with the "reformation [*Reformation*] of the theater"—would end by "introducing innovation everywhere [*überall...zu neuern*]" (§4). Human sensibility would itself be "reformed [*reformirt*]" (§4) by this reformation of art, and the reformation of human sensibility would in turn restore the political community's own sensibility. More than anything else, it would free it from alienating convention and attune it to the necessary, inalienable inadequacy that constitutes its "common sense [*Gemeinsinn*]" (§5) and *sensus communis*, and by attuning it to its necessary inadequacy, it would restore the sense of tension, division, and non-coincidence with itself that no just political community can do without. "Someone who lives in Plato's republic," Nietzsche writes in the seventh section of his essay, might do without the artistic reforms that would attune the political community to these foundational inadequacies, and this same "someone" might even be justified in persuading the reforming artist to leave the community and "go to another republic." "The rest of us, however, who do not live in this republic, but in states of an entirely different sort" (§7), need the artist and the artist's reforming power, and we need them, Nietzsche insists, to overturn the inheritance of Platonism and realize a true society, a just state, and a genuine community.



This society, state, and community would be defined by an overwhelming feeling of commonality. It would be a kind of *sensus communis*, a community of sense and an affective community, less a matter of sharing a particular identity, common homeland, or set of conventions, than of a common feeling of loss, withdrawal, and dissolution. In modernity—the age of nihilism, historicism, and generalized disorientation—the historically effective bonds of the community dissolve, the ideals that once bound people together withdraw, and substantive community becomes impossible. These bonds, ideals, and substances—these historically effective values—are swept away in modernity, Nietzsche writes, by a "flood of revolution" (§10), and in their place, a new "idol" emerges to found community. In "Schopenhauer as Educator," Nietzsche identifies it with the nation-state, and in "Richard Wagner and Bayreuth," it is coterminous with the spheres of "violence and injustice" (§4). Nietzsche's notion of commonality shares nothing in common with the modern nation-state, and he contrasts it with a form of being-together that transcends the bounds of nation and state alike. This uncommon form of commonality cannot be contained by the empirical determinations of people or place—the nation and state—and it cannot be comprehended with a concept of community based in family, faith, or fraternity. Indeed, Nietzsche's concept of "commonality [*Gemeinsamkeit*]" (§7) is not a form of community (*Gemeinschaft*) at all, but a shared experience of community's indeterminacy, undecidability, and unraveling.<sup>24</sup> In the experience of commonality, community responds to something uncommon, to a sense and a sentiment that attunes it to something other than itself, to something that opens it up and keeps it open in an experience of non-identity and inadequation, and this "something," Nietzsche says, is "suprapersonal." In the final meditation, the suprapersonal is the indeterminate, non-personifiable basis of community,

<sup>24</sup> The thought of commonality opened up by Nietzsche has been recently pursued in a series of rigorous investigations into the possibility of community today. See Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, trans. Pierre Joris (Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 1988); Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (New York: Verso, 1997), esp. 79-82; David Carroll, "Community After Devastation: Culture, Politics, and the 'Public Space'," in *Politics, Theory, and Contemporary Culture*, ed. Mark Poster (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 159-196.

"something" that opens the community to an experience of what exceeds it, endlessly withdrawing as it endlessly draws humanity in. No one can escape the pull of this sublime "something," and so no one escapes membership from Nietzsche's sublime commonality. It cannot be appropriated by a particular people, and it is "too expansive," Nietzsche writes, "to be enclosed within the boundaries of any one nation [*nationalen Wesens*] (§10). The call for this expansive, non-nationalist community—for this new form of commonality—can be heard in Wagner's dissonant, discordant art, for this art, Nietzsche insists, "speaks not to peoples [*Völkern*], but rather to human beings [*zu Menschen*]" (§10) as a whole. Like the suprapersonal itself, Wagner's art is supranational and even "supra-German [*überdeutsch*]" (§10), and in the call it announces, a demand is heard to burst the bounds of the nation, rethink the basis of community, and struggle for a new form of commonality. Each of these demands is contained in Wagner's cry to found the state anew, and if the contemporary state ultimately appears as a weak vessel for the realization of these tasks, then the future alone must determine the form they will take.

And Nietzsche does leave these tasks up to the future. He leaves them up to "*human beings of the future* [*Menschen der Zukunft*]" (§10), to human beings who hear the dissonant call of tragic art, and he leaves it up to them to decide how to respond to Wagner's call and the demands they announce. This call takes the form of an imperative, of a call for help, discovery, and invention—"Help me," thus he [Wagner] calls out—but it provides no program, theory, or blueprint to guide the struggles it demands, and it announces no criterion for determining their final conclusion. The thought of commonality is too fragile to be schematized into an image for its realization, and if it is given shape at all in Nietzsche's meditation, then it is through its dissociation from the modern concept of nationality, the contemporary form of the state, and existing modes of community and society. Each of these—the modern concept of nationality, the contemporary form of the state, and existing modes of community and society—depends on a thought of the will, a desire for power, and a need for self-assertion, and each is united in its search for an ultimate identity, a self-enclosed purity, and a perfect self-knowledge. Nietzsche's "great fighters [*grossen Kämpfer*]" (§3)—his future fighters for the commonality to come—refuse the thought of self-adequation, of personal self-sufficiency and self-identical individuation,

and in their refusal of these thoughts, they respond to another need, another desire, and another thought. This thought is the thought of the suprapersonal—the thought of the non-personal, impersonal, and non-personifiable—and in Nietzsche's meditation, it makes itself felt as a need to refound community and fulfill the desire for a genuinely universal mode of being-together. Each of these—the thought of the suprapersonal, the need for community, and the desire for universality—obey a law in Nietzsche's meditation, and this law—this necessary, unavoidable law—is the law of inadequation itself. Inadequation—endless, permanent, infinite—is alone announced in the imperative issuing from Wagner's art, and its law alone determines the course of the great political struggle announced in "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth." It formalizes all of the paradoxes defining the commonality to come, and it takes the negative form of an aporetic injunction: no political community is ever perfectly adequate to itself, no people or person is ever perfectly adequate to its ideals. According to this negative prohibition and its paradoxical logic, adequation—political, personal, or communal—depends on inadequation, and being adequate depends in turn on a responsible response to the inadequation that haunts every deed, knowledge, norm, or identity. Nothing less is demanded by the moral demand announced in Wagner's tragic dramas, and it is this paradoxical morality—this supra-moral, unconventional morality—that Nietzsche places at the center of his meditation as the groundless ground and foundationless foundation of his new thought of commonality.

### Justice, Love, and Freedom

Nietzsche's new thought of commonality is just that: a thought, a thinking and a rethinking, on and around the concept of commonality. The final *Untimely Meditation* is perhaps nothing more than a thoughtful mediation on the possibility of commonality, on the possibility of a form of community that is never perfectly exemplified by a particular community and never perfectly theorized with the instruments of theoretical labor. Nietzsche's meditation is driven by something that proceeds the planes of theory and empirical examples alike, and this something is the sentiments, needs, and desires that set thought in motion and attune it to the sphere of sensibility. In "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth," this motion and motivation is the "violence and injustice" of contemporary



political and social institutions and the feeling of "suffering" (§4) they produce. Wagner's art speaks of this suffering as well—of the inadequacy of existing institutions and the need to change them—and in its sublime language, it holds out the possibility of a form of being-together that would decrease suffering and increase "happiness" (§7).

The sentiment of suffering, then, drives Nietzsche's thought of commonality in his final meditation, and as he meditates on its possibility in its final sections, a series of concepts fall into place that accord with the law of inadequation and guide the difficult struggle it sets in motion. These concepts take aim at the "spheres of violence and injustice"—"the state and society" (§4)—and they break with those "theories of the state [*Lehre vom Staat*]" that justify violence by remaining resolutely "*apologetic* [*apologetischen*]" (§6) towards existing institutions. These theories are theories of reconciliation—Hegel is their great representative for Nietzsche—and they see no tension between ideality and reality and leave no room for perfecting the political community. Nietzsche opposes them not with a new theory, but with a new form of art that calls for struggle and makes the irreconcilable gap between the real and the ideal felt in concrete sentiments. This art registers our distance from any suprapersonal ideality, and in Nietzsche's meditation, it transforms the struggle against contemporary political and social institutions into a "battle for justice and love [*Kämpfe um Gerechtigkeit und Liebe*]" (§4). Justice and love—these are the concepts guiding Nietzsche's "great politics" in the final pages of his final mediation, and if they demand that "great fighters" (§3) do justice to the tragic tension irreconcilably separating them from any final perfection, they also insist that these fighters become lovers of a very peculiar sort. Nothing else, Nietzsche writes, is announced in the music-dramas that get this struggle off the ground—*The Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser*, *Die Meistersinger*, *Tristan and Isolde*, and the *Ring of the Nibelungen* itself (§11)—and in their call for love and justice, they articulate the two concepts that define the future of commonality. The commonality to come will do justice to the limits of human willing and the failures of individual cognition by reflexively integrating them into a new concept of community, and the recognition of these limits and failures will in turn transform human beings into lovers of the non-personal and suprapersonal. Love, Nietzsche insists, takes over when the desire for "power" (§11)

reaches its tragic limits, when the impotence of the will makes itself felt and "shuddering arrogance" (§7)—love of one's self—gives way to a longing desire for the non-personal and other. In the final meditation, love appears as the desire for others, as the desire for happiness with others and as the desire for the happiness of others. This desire, Nietzsche insists, is none other than a longing for the "happiness of commonality [*Glück der Gemeinsamkeit*]" (§7), the longing for being together with others without will, power, or violence. Love, Nietzsche insists, does without these, and so it does justice to others—to their irreconcilable distance and infinite unapproachability—just as it does justice to the experience of commonality that draws others in even as community withdraws. Commonality—the "uncanny" (7), fragile experience of community's withdrawal—draws the lovers of distance together, and this love of distance—the "love of the most distant," as Nietzsche will one day write—opens up the moral community of the future and does justice to its demands.<sup>25</sup>

Love and justice, then—these are the guiding concepts of Nietzsche's thought of the commonality to come. They demand that we respect others and stand in solidarity with them, however distant they remain.<sup>26</sup> These demands have perhaps always existed and perhaps always will exist, and though Wagner's art makes them heard for the first time with an uncanny clarity, it is not in order to bring them to a close and end the struggle for a perfectly just political community. Wagner, Nietzsche writes at the end of his long essay devoted to the future, sees no end to the demand for justice or the need for love. He is "no utopian," and his music-dramas do not prophesy an "ultimate ideal order" (§11) just over the horizon. In the final section of his meditation, Nietzsche sees something else just over the horizon, and this something is not "an immobile rainbow" of "superhuman goodness and justice," but the real possibility of human "evil [*Bösen*]" (§11). Wagner's moral imperative—his demand to rethink community on the basis of justice and love—risks the possibility of human evil by leaving "the morality of tradition [*die Sittlichkeit des*

<sup>25</sup> *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Baltimore: Penguin, 1975), 87.

<sup>26</sup> On the concept of love as solidarity in Nietzsche's thought, see Adorno's comments in "Discussion of a Paper by Ludwig Marcuse on the Relationship of Need and Culture in Nietzsche," *Constellations* vol. 8 (no. 1. March 2001), 134.

*Herkommens*]" behind and departing from the conventional distinction between "good and evil" (§11). Nietzsche does not only not shrink from the implications of Wagner's departure, but he emphasizes—and this emphasis is just—that one *must* depart from convention and leave tradition behind if rigorous concepts of justice and love are to be possible. Justice and love, rigorously conceived, demand more than the flux, impermanence, and arbitrariness of convention or tradition, and this "more," Nietzsche insists, is human "freedom" (§11). Freedom is the final concept demanded by Nietzsche's law of inadequation, and freedom alone—free from power, free from the will, the state and nation, free from the arbitrary and accidental—makes a just and loving response possible to what that exceeds tradition and convention, knowledge and the concept, theory and philosophy. This freedom, Nietzsche writes, is the "freedom of what is necessary [*das Nothwendige*]" (§9), a freedom that acknowledges its necessary limits and incapacities, just as it acknowledges tradition's necessary distance from anything suprapersonal and universal.<sup>27</sup> Necessity does not guarantee the best, but it prevents the worst, and if it opens up the possibility of evil at all—if it opens up the possibility of error, blindness, and endless inadequation by leaving the certainty of the past behind—it nevertheless also allows us "to be honest [*Ehrlich-sein*]" (§11) about this possibility for the first time. This is the final demand of Wagner's imperative, of his new, extra-moral imperative, and by demanding honesty in moral matters, it holds out the hope of a "distant, merely possible, but not demonstrable future" (§8) of justice, love, and freedom with others.

Wagner's art tells of this possibility, and if Nietzsche is to be believed, this telling is "a foretaste, a fore-experiencing, of joy and life of the highest sort" (§9). This joy is the happiness of commonality, of being-together with others and being in love with others, and this same joy is the happiness of being free and being just—with all of its risks, difficulties, and dangers. Tragedy—and tragedy, more than any other aesthetic genre, brings these risks to light and teaches us to respect them—gives us a taste of this joy and a feeling for this happiness, even as it holds them out for the future. And tragedy does hold them out for the future, for the future—the future of ideal love, justice, and freedom—

<sup>27</sup> This concept of freedom has been rigorously pursued in Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Experience of Freedom*, trans. Bridget McDonald (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).



never quite arrives. Wagner's tragedies announce this endless delay as well, even as they give us a "foretaste" of a joy to come, and by announcing this delay, they assign to humanity its endless task. Wagner's tragedies demand that free beings endlessly struggle to perfect the political community and increase the happiness of humanity, and they demand that these free beings freely respond to a "suprapersonal" sentiment that opens them up and transforms them into something more than individuals. This too is announced in Wagner's *Ring*, for its tragic heroes never were just struggling individuals (*Individuum*). These heroes were all along "singularities [*Einzelnen*]" (§4), caught in the "tension" (§4) between their finite limits and the infinite demands of "something suprapersonal," and in their struggle against convention—in "the struggle of singularities [*Kampf der Einzelnen*] against everything that confronts them with seemingly invincible necessity, with power, law, tradition, contract, and the whole order of things" (§4)—these singular beings—these non-programable, non-repeatable fighters—testified to the inaccessibility of the universal and inscribed it in the very heart of their deeds. These deeds define the commonality to come, the commonality always in excess of itself, always inadequate to itself, and they make singularity the necessary corollary of commonality. The commonality to come is a commonality of singularities, and no longer a community of individuals. Commonality consists in nothing other than one singular being being with another singular being, and this commonality—were it to be realized—would be a just, loving, and free form of being together with others, without mastery, power, or will. This is the lesson of tragedy in the final *Untimely Meditation*, and it is this lesson that Nietzsche bequeaths to us. It asks that we recognize the fragile ground of the singular deed and do justice to its demands. And it asks, even demands, that we take responsibility for the future commonality it supports. This task, Nietzsche writes, is the "supreme task" and "one guarantee for the future of humanity" (§4). It promises not nations, nation-states, or self-enclosed communities, but a commonality of singular beings—free, just, and in love without violence. This goal is utopian, and if Nietzsche, like Wagner, is "no utopian," he nevertheless holds it out as the only moral response—the only supra-moral response—to the unraveling of community in modernity. This is the promise of "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth," and Nietzsche leaves it to us to decide if it will have a future.

CHAPTER VIII  
THE FUTURE OF NIETZSCHE'S IMPERATIVES

Become who you are!  
—Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

After writing "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth," Nietzsche ended his friendship with Wagner. In the works that followed, his comments on the composer are increasingly critical, culminating, at the end of his authorship, in a series of blistering polemics, intended to insure his distance from the inventor of the "music-drama" forever. Nietzsche's break with Wagner was also a break with Bayreuth and all that it had come to represent in the young *Reich*. It signaled the end of his dream of a rebirth of tragedy and tragic culture, of his hopes for a cathartic cleansing of nationalist sentiment from Germany, of his belief that the German *sensus communis* could be purged of the values of the nation-state.

Nietzsche articulated, on more than one occasion, his reason for breaking with Bayreuth and the man who had created it. Summarizing his motives in *Ecce homo*, he wrote: "What did I never forgive Wagner? That he *condescended* to the Germans—that he became *reichsdeutsch*."<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche's break with Wagner after completing his *Untimely Meditations* represents a break with everything *reichsdeutsch*, with the German nation, the German *Reich*, the German nation-state, and, more than anything else, the German nationalism that defined their identity and helped determine their ends. In the years between 1870-1876, Nietzsche could still hold out the hope that the *Reich* and the Germans, along with the nation-state they formed, might be salvaged, that their parochial insistence on "German" identity might bow before an experience of justice and open to the non-identity at its core. In the writings that appear after Nietzsche's break with Wagner, this vision of collective transformation is no longer nourished by historical signs of progress, and so it gives way to the less ambitious task of isolated, individual self-perfection.

Nietzsche's break, after 1876, with everything *reichsdeutsch* was complete, as was his renunciation of his hopes for the *Reich* and *die Deutschen*. His shift in position,

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<sup>1</sup> *Ecce homo*, "Why I am so Clever," §5.

however, does not represent a break with the essential impulses that motivated his writings from 1870-1876. In those early writings, Nietzsche articulated a vision of political life that never was simply a matter of the creation of a *Reich* or the political unification of the Germans, however important those events were to his reflections on ancient and modern life. Rather, his concern all along was with the possibility of moral community, of a "commonality," as he often put it, that could not be conceived of exclusively along nationalistic or statist lines, because it was grounded in more fundamental conditions of life that transcend the divisions separating nations and states. It is these conditions—properly tragic conditions—that find expression in the moral imperatives that people Nietzsche's works at decisive junctures. However much the German people may have ignored the problems they announce—problems of self-knowledge, of collective life, of meaning and purpose in modernity—they do not recede in Nietzsche's post-Wagnerian writings. Indeed, they become more prominent, and the linguistic form that Nietzsche chooses to express them—the imperative, the urgent command to act, in response to an unavoidable problem—becomes increasingly important in his later works. It appears, for example, in the imperative Nietzsche derives from Pindar in *The Gay Science*, "'You should become who you are' ['*Du sollst der werden, der du bist*']," a reworking of the imperative from *Schopenhauer as Educator*, "Be yourself [*sei du selbst*]!", itself a precursor to the categorical command announced in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "Become who you are!" In each case—and there are many others—the imperative form is used to announce a universally valid command, an "ought," legitimated and necessitated by the withdrawal, in modernity, of universally accepted conceptions of who we are and of what the self is. This problem, originating in the parallel phenomena of modern nihilism and the philosophical critique of reason and the natural sciences, cannot be solved by appeals to the nation, the nation-state, or nationalism. Their principles, whether ethnic or civic, remain subject to the problems that give birth to Nietzsche's imperatives, for these problems are inscribed in the very structure of human finitude. The imperative form, and even more, the form of the categorical imperative—the absolute command—are our only available response to these problems, for they dispense with claims to truth and tell what ought to be done once truth claims are robbed of the authorities needed to justify them.



In one of Nietzsche's last writings, *The Antichrist*, he provides a categorical imperative which sums up this situation. It not only takes the form of a categorical imperative—an unconditional demand—but it calls on individuals to create their own categorical imperatives: "Each should invent *his own* virtue, *his own* categorical imperative." This, of course, is what Nietzsche did in his writings from the years 1870-1876. In these works, he invented, and also discovered, categorical imperatives that told him what ought to be done in the absence of the traditional guideposts for action and collective life. Like the categorical imperative to invent one's own categorical imperative, these early imperatives are concerned with what is one's own, with what the singular individual "ought" to do to remain singular. This "ought," as Nietzsche already made clear in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, is always a matter of "being yourself," of doing justice to one's own life and, consequently, to life as such. It requires obeying the laws of life after historically effective modes of conceptualizing those laws have lost their authority, and however much this loss may appear to authorize the very worst, however much it may appear to encourage the creation of any and all categorical imperatives—"each should invent his own form of killing" would be an extreme example of such license gone afoul—the very opposite is in truth the case: A categorical imperative that commands us to create imperatives that revere life, that do justice to its manifold possibilities, that advance its perfection and, as Nietzsche puts it in *Beyond Good and Evil*, extend our "responsibility" to life.

Nietzsche's imperatives, then, respond responsibly to the new and unparalleled conditions of life in modernity, to the loss of those horizons of value that have defined humanity in the West for millennia, to the collapse of traditional systems of meaning and the tendency to solve these problems by huddling together in defensive collectives. His moral "oughts" respond to these problems, to the terror of nihilism and the terror of nationalism, by teaching us to revere what is left over after nihilism has taken its toll and nationalism has run its course: Life itself, bare life, naked and homeless. In the writings where he first formulates the imperatives needed to guide humanity out of the desert of modernity, he tests the various paths along which life might make its escape. These paths run through the political sphere, but they also run through regions of life that do not

immediately correspond to those of the state: Culture, art, history, philosophy, language, and style. Nietzsche's imperatives politicize these phenomena and impart to them a moral content. They become part of a vast project that he later calls "great politics." Great politics is a politics of values and evaluating, a politics which advances the value of life and furthers the cause of what Nietzsche calls, in a discussion of his first book, "the new party of life [*neue Partie des Lebens*]." <sup>2</sup> From the start—from *The Birth of Tragedy* onwards—Nietzsche allied himself with this "political" party. Indeed, he can justly be said to have discovered it. This discovery takes place in his first writings, where Nietzsche announces his allegiance to life and the imperatives it imposes upon collective life. In the writings that follow, this allegiance is confirmed and its imperatives are extended and refined. One result of this refinement, first articulated in *The Gay Science*, is the thought of "the greatest weight"—the thought of the eternal return of the same. It too takes the form of a categorical imperative, for it says: "Whatever you will, will it in such a way that you can also will it eternally." <sup>3</sup> It was this command, which makes every decision count, that finally emerges from Nietzsche's command to "be yourself!" It is ultimately rooted in the Delphic imperative to "Know thyself!" first examined in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and it was this imperative that led Nietzsche, after completing his final *Untimely Meditation*, to seek distance from Wagner and finally abandon him altogether. Nietzsche's imperatives freed him from Wagner's life-denying pessimism, and though they forced him to abandon the composer of *Parsifal*, they insured that he remained true to the end to the "party of life."

<sup>2</sup> *Ecce homo*, "The Birth of Tragedy," §4.

<sup>3</sup> On the eternal return of the same as a categorical imperative, see Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 68; Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity*, trans. Charles F. Wallraff and Frederick J. Schmitz (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 359-360; Keith Ansell-Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as a Political Thinker: The Perfect Nihilist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1994), 113, 217.

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