

Zarathustra and the Children of Abraham

by James Luchte

Zarathustra's Nietzsche: From Guilt to Innocence

Despite the fact that Nietzsche and his family considered his *magnum opus* to be blasphemous, and feared a backlash from the religious and political establishments, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*¹ was never banned. Indeed, not much notice was taken of it until well after Nietzsche's collapse.² In our era, this idiosyncratic work seems to stand in a paradoxical place, all its own. On the one hand, it is a work that is very well known and referenced with respect to some of its most famous phrases and words, such as 'God is dead', the 'Last Man', 'Overman' and 'eternal recurrence of the same.'³ On the other hand, it is a work that is little studied, either in literary, theological or philosophical contexts. The present essay seeks to redress this neglect through an exploration of the polemical context of Nietzsche's charge of nihilism against monotheistic religions. Such a focus will allow an intersection of literary, theological and philosophical perspectives in a broader interpretation of the significance of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as a challenge to both traditional, and radical, religious orthodoxies.

It could be suggested that Nietzsche appropriates the name of Zarathustra in a vain attempt to subvert and go beyond Zoroaster, the inventor of good and evil.³ This attempt is vain, in a

1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Penguin, 1978).

2 Since its publication, the work itself has travelled a rather crooked path, being a cult classic for the likes of Stephen George, the 'Nietzscheans' of the Dreyfus Affair, a companion to German soldiers, a text of the death of god movement in theology, and a manifesto for post-structuralist philosophy. To this day, the work is still homeless as it sets in an uneasy relation to not only the dominant philosophy of our era, but also to religious, theological, and literary studies. Indeed, it could be suggested that its style and content exhibits an ambiguity that challenges our clear and distinct divisions of intellectual labor. Cf. *Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra: Before Sunrise* for a volume of contemporary essays on the philosophical significance of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ed. J. Luchte (London: Continuum International Publishing, 2008).

3 It is well-known that Nietzsche chose Zarathustra, in one instance, since, as a historical and mythological figure, the latter is attributed with the original articulation of the severance of good and evil. For even though we can retrospectively witness the ossification and nihilism of his progeny, his act was that of a creator – even if only a creator of nothingness. We can begin to understand the significance of his choice if we consider, for instance, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R.J.Hollingdale (New York: Penguin, 1988):18, or of the ranting of the madman, in the *Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974) that "God is dead!" —these texts seek neither a mere repetition of the teachings of the

mocking challenge to the preacher of Ecclesiastes, as it asserts that there is something new under the sun, or at least that this something—novelty—is at least possible—beyond a metaphysics of an eschaton. For Nietzsche, the monotheistic eschatons⁴ unfold, each as the self-same suppression of Life, as repetitions of the erasure of the moment of becoming. In this way, Nietzsche will not only risk this vanity in an attempt to think differently,⁵ but will also affirm the possibility of a transfigured existence of radical innocence. It is an affirmation of innocence which displaces the disciplinary regimes of radical guilt. Indeed, ‘guilt’ is the crux of each of the eschatons; yet, guilt is only a moral interpretation of the phenomenon of life which remains merely upon the surface. Nietzsche gives us a clue to his strategy of displacement of these masques with his intimation of a deeper, hidden bind that ties life together (the Dionysian). Zarathustra sings in ‘The Other Dancing Song’,

One!

Oh man, take care!

Two!

What does the deep midnight declare!

Three!

I was asleep—

Four!

From a deep dream I woke and swear:

Five!

The world is deep,

Six!

Deeper than day had been aware.

Seven!

Deep is its woe;

Eight!

Joy—deeper yet than agony:

Nine!

Woe implores: Go!

Ten!

“Old Wise Man”: C.G.Jung, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1934-1939* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988): 282, nor a project to resurrect or retrieve an *originary* oneness or unity prior to the beginning of duality.

4 I have written *eschaton(s)* in the plural not only to underscore the divisions between the various monotheisms, but also to intimate the pluralising event of the ‘death of God’ which will no longer allow for a conception of a metaphysics of presence in terms of a universal notion of the divine witness or of a logic of a one that is other.

5 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1979). The old sin against the regime of guilt is pride, self-love – vanity. Yet, such brings light, it discloses the terrible truth of innocence. “God is a crude answer, a piece of indelicacy against us thinkers—fundamentally even a crude *prohibition* to us: you shall not think!” (21)

But all joy wants eternity—
Eleven!
Wants deep, wants deep eternity.
Twelve!⁶

This is an instance of one of Zarathustra's many evocations and gestures of reversal and revaluation: that the 'truth' of existence must be intimated in the hidden recesses of life. The depths when brought to the surface become disfigured by the procedures of disclosure, by which the intimacy of the singular and its self-interpretation and expression is assimilated within the theistic devaluation not only of the depths, but also, of life and embodied existence. Intimate, indigenous expression is displaced, crowded out by the grand narrative of the eschaton, by the Word of God. For Nietzsche, in this light, the most difficult task is the attempt to go under into the depths. If truth loves to hide, we would destroy her if we forced her to stand naked in the panopticon of our inspection regime. If we do indeed love the truth, we must travel into the hidden—forbidden—so as to find her there—in her truth. She must speak for herself.

For Nietzsche, and later for Bataille⁷, Blanchot⁸ and Irigaray,⁹ and others, it is poetry, music and 'detours' which facilitate a descent into the depths, giving glimpses of truth in her own domain. It is poetry of the dithyramb, as well as music, which can go under into the depths, and which will express the hidden tie that binds together the knot of eternity. Poetry attempts to bring truth into the Open without turning her into ashes. With the implosion of the antithetical regime of consciousness and existence, of subject and object, of concept and intuition (and of God and Creation), we find that poetry, even if conceived as a type of conceptuality, is, for Nietzsche, a self-expression of the phenomenon of life.¹⁰ The poets were removed from the Light of the polis

6 *Zarathustra*, Part Three, "The Other Dancing Song."

7 Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, trans. Bruce Boone (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1994).

8 Maurice Blanchot, *The Step Not Beyond*, trans. by Lycette Nelson (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992).

9 Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

10 There is a long development from Nietzsche's earliest writing to his latest which traces a poetic and artistic thread, that is, from his earliest poems to his last "mad" (is it as mad as Hugo Ball?) scribbling—and including all that emerged in-between. We can trace this thread from one of his first poems (1858) "Birthday", through to "On Truth and Lying in the Extra-Moral Sense," again through *The Birth of Tragedy*, and in light of the period of reflection and experimentation in *Human All Too Human*, *Daybreak* and the *Gay Science*, the emergence of Zarathustra as a work of philosophical (and historiographical) creativity in *Zarathustra*. It is noteworthy that Nietzsche to some extent seeks to hide the *lowly origins* of his work—his selection procedure is well known—as is the constructed character of his works. Nietzsche hides his own depth through a strategy of limited revelation. He does include poetry in his works—but not all of his poetry, some of which stands as a counterpoise to Nietzsche's self-portraiture as a *hard man*—a *radical aristocrat*. For instance, there are many instances of grief and sadness, of tears and anguish, of suicidal despair, which rarely surface in the published works—or at least, only in *Zarathustra*. His poem about his father's death, 'The Homecoming', while intimating the death of God, is far from the laughter and dancing of a festival celebrating a marriage of light and darkness. It resembles more closely the rantings of the Madman or the Soothsayer, of a passionate, anguished soul.

in that they implored the people to remember the song of the earth resonating below the regimentation of the polis. Plato charged that poets lie too much—that they spoke in ways which made the true false and the false true—that poetry itself was merely the idle chatter of the ephemeral realm, a logos of untruth. However, Nietzsche reminds Plato in the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil* that his attempt to create a ‘Good in itself’ is a self-negating attempt to deny perspective, to refuse Life—in other words, that his lust for an otherworld is a duplicitous attempt of escape, of nihilism—indeed, a lie, a mask for a will to power. Zarathustra laughs, agreeing that the poets do lie too much—but he tells the troubled youth on the mountainside, “Zarathustra too is a poet.”¹¹ It is perhaps in his use of poetry, of art, a lie, which is uniquely suited to tell the truth, that Nietzsche’s challenge to theoretical philosophy and theology is at its most subversive. For, not only does he throw off the protocols of science and logic, but writing in a style that resembles each of the three monotheistic texts, Nietzsche not only intimates the all-too-human creative root of each of the texts, but also sets forth an alternative teaching, a doctrine which seeks, by returning to the roots of the trajectory of our own era in Zoroaster and Abraham, to counsel human beings in their own self-overcoming of nihilism.

Zarathustra and Abraham: The Destination of the One

Zarathustra, that personage straddling the precipice of history and legend, stands at the *beginning* of a long line of quite familiar religious assertions. He is reputed to be the “first”, not only to posit the distinction betwixt good and evil, but also to describe the significance of the world as a *moral* event. In terms of the mytho-theology of the Avesta, the war between good and evil first emerged as a diremption of an archic deity, Ahura Mazda into Vohu Manō and Angrō Mainyush. In this way, the specific horizons of his assertion of difference, and of his remembrance of an *originary unity*, Ahura Mazda, describe a world constituted not only by an “ethical”, but also a “metaphysical” opposition between contradictory principles of existence. It is in this

At the same time, however, not all is hidden—even Nietzsche’s musical composition and song writing have always been well known—though seldom heard. Despite Nietzsche’s secretiveness, it is simple to apprehend that his poems, such as the ‘Dionysian Dithyramps’ and ‘Wit, Tricks, and Revenge’, provide the lost horizons and contours—indeed, the birthplace of Nietzsche’s philosophy. For a complete English translation of Nietzsche’s poetry, cf. *The Peacock and the Buffalo: the Poetry of Nietzsche*; a bi-lingual edition is forthcoming from Continuum in 2010.

11 Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1968): 127. It is well known that Nietzsche also—or primarily, as some may contend—wrote poetry—and composed music. Indeed, with a reading of his poetry, we find that it is indeed a hidden garden, mountains and desert, of his entire work. While one could describe his aphoristic writings, as they were etched into notebooks during his wanderings, as a *typology* of poetic writing, Nietzsche has left a labial body of poetic work which lies far beyond the domain of contemporary philosophy. Never abandoning the original kinship of poetry and philosophy as offspring of *poiesis*, Nietzsche includes poetry in most of his major works—never however disclosing the wellspring of his hidden poetic enterprise. Indeed, it is his poetry which may provide the clues to his broader thematic directions and pre-occupations—his work is not organized according to logical and analytical criteria—but, as indicated, by a *poetic topology*.

way that the *makeshift* regime of good and evil constitutes the fundamental reality and *raison d'être* of the world. Such a regime is neither an endless Heraclitean opposition, nor an alchemical marriage. For Zarathustra, or Zoroaster as he is also known (and still finds hundreds of thousands of adherents to this day), the specific metaphysical opposition is not stagnant. It is a war of attrition, in which, amid the heat of battle, ground, territory, is gained and lost.¹² Yet, for Zoroaster, this war exhibits a singular destiny, which is an eschatological overcoming of evil by good—but a purely ethical good that would have no need any longer for the ladder of metaphysics. In this manner, the ultimate destiny of the world, made manifest by Zoroaster, is its mystical transcendence *as such* through the dissolution of the metaphysical antithesis of which it was constituted. This antithesis, and the world it manifests, must, moreover, be overcome by man himself as he affirms his own destiny. For Zoroaster, this destiny achieves its eschatological and post-historical fulfillment by means of an explicit affirmation of one principle over another, good over evil, as counseled in the *Avesta*¹³ in the prescription of “Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds”. For Zoroaster, the meaning and destiny of the world is accomplished by a retrieval of the originary state, of Ahura Mazda.

Islamic thinkers in Iran have questioned Zoroastrian ‘duality’ with respect to the status of the two principles, especially with regard to Ahraman, the deity of evil. As is affirmed repeatedly throughout the Qurān, there is only one ultimate principle, that of Allah, who is omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent (merciful). From this perspective, the dichotomist schema posited by Zoroaster, even though not originary, not only constitutes a blasphemy against the power and unity of the divine, as is the case with the Christian trinity (*a monstrous blasphemy*), but also raises the implicit possibility that an alternative principle of ultimate “reality”, that is evil, is at least possible. Zoroaster may rejoin that while he begins with such a metaphysical opposition amid phenomenal existence, the eschaton of this conflict would be similar to that of the standard monotheistic equation. Amidst the discord of the world, Zoroaster seeks to retrieve an originary unity of the Good, of the One.¹⁴

The Islamist contends that Zoroaster errors in giving metaphysical independence to evil in the constitution of the world, and freedom to created, temporal beings in the fulfillment of the eschatological destiny of the world. Indeed, one gains the strange impression, in the Qurān (and the Torah, as in the story of Job), that Allah (or God) is deploying evil as a weapon and a test, as a dissimulation. In the Sura, ‘The Cow’, the angels of Allah, who refer to themselves as ‘We’,

12 Cf. Mao Tse-Tung, *On Protracted War* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1967).

13 James Darmesteter, trans., *The Zend-Avesta (Sacred Books of the East)* (London: Routledge, 2001).

14 Indeed, considered from the perspective of the Neoplatonist philosopher Plotinus, for a moment, it could be argued that evil is such a state of indeterminacy that it can never properly be designated a principle, and can never therefore *be* an alternative to the Good or the One. Zoroaster himself would be shoulder to shoulder with the Islamists, especially in the context of the question of evil, an assessment, in the context of the fundamental decision of one principle over the other, of the remembrance of the one over the other. Zoroaster seeks the re-integration of Ahura Mazda in a transcendence of the world. All things, as the story goes, will return to Allah.

close the ears and seal the eyes of the unbelievers—hardening their hearts, and thus assuring their doom. In their response to the one who does not believe and obey, evil, hardly an independent or threatening force, is simply a temporal worldly phenomenon, deployed against the unbeliever and even encouraged for those who are, within this scenario of pre-destination, beyond hope and mercy. The angels taunt the unbeliever—go ahead and enjoy your unbelief—run riot in the time you have left, in ignorance and blindness—for, in the end, everything and everyone, shall return to Allah.

In the end, Zoroaster shares, with the three monotheistic assertions, a logic of the One, of an eschaton, which, whether it be the ‘End of Days’ of the Jews (Numbers 24:4), the Apocalypse of the Christians (Revelations), or the Last Judgment of the Muslims (Qūran), signifies the end of the temporal world as a fallen state in which good is opposed by evil. In this way, Zoroaster, as the father of the conquest of evil by the good, of the world of many by the eternal return to God, stands in a remarkable situation of resemblance to Abraham¹⁵, who remains the official patron of faith of the one God by each of the monotheistic assertions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, each portrayed by Nietzsche as typologies of nihilism. Indeed, Zarathustra shares much ambiguity with Abraham in that each is a transitional figure who had to enact violence in order to create a place for his new assertion. And, while other spiritual formations such as Buddhism, Bahai, and modern day Zoroastrianism do not regard Abraham as their point of departure, from the perspective of Nietzsche’s genealogy of religious nihilism, there is a deep metaphysical kinship between all these assertions, one which constitutes, to borrow from Wittgenstein, a distinct family resemblance.¹⁶ In this way, it is Abraham who may serve as an archetype for any metaphysics of nihilism.

Abraham, as the name given to Abram in the wake of his unambiguous demonstration of faith, stands or could stand implicitly, as I have suggested, as the exemplar of faith for any eschatology that sees its fulfillment in a destination toward the One. Indeed, this trajectory is exhibited in the practical metaphysics of Abram in his unquestioning submission and commitment to the will of the one God. In the narrative of Genesis, one that is explicitly shared by each of the monotheist assertions, Abram is portrayed as having a longstanding relationship with the divine, one

15 On the historical interaction and possible influence of Zoroastrianism upon Judaism, see Charles David Isbell. “Zoroastrianism and Biblical Religion,” *The Jewish Bible Quarterly*, Vol. 34, Number 3 (July-September, 2006), Jamsheed K. Choksy, ‘Hagiography and Monotheism in History: Doctrinal Encounters between Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Christianity,’ *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*. Vol. 14, No. 4 (Carfax Publishing, October 2003).

16 Conversely, it could be suggested that Wittgenstein may have borrowed this phrase from Nietzsche as he speaks of the ‘spell of definite grammatical functions’ in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Part 1, Section 20:

The singular family resemblance between all Indian, Greek and German philosophizing is easy enough to explain. Where there exists a language affinity it is quite impossible, thanks to the common philosophy of grammar—I mean thanks to unconscious domination and directing by similar grammatical functions—to avoid everything being prepared in advance for a similar evolution and succession of philosophical systems: just as the road seems to be barred to certain other possibilities of world interpretation.

that began implicitly, as a Child, when he smashed the idols of his father, telling the latter when asked, that the idols had fought amongst themselves. Such a faith is sufficient in its incipience for Abram to deny the traditional polytheistic faith of his ancestors. Abram is willing to confront his father and mother and deny their religion—indeed, to break with all that has come before and to begin a new genealogy. Abram was approached by his new God, who initiated a series of tests of faith for him, the first being to leave his traditional home. This was the beginning of the New Covenant in which Abram, in exchange for his faith, was promised a new homeland and the protection of his offspring. After the passage of years and growing aged, however, Abram worried that he still had no children. He was told by his God that his aged wife Sarah would bear him a son. This prophecy aroused an incredulous laughter in Abram and his wife. The laughter soon ended, however, as the seemingly impossible happens, and the faith of Abram grows stronger. At the same time, the rejection of the traditional divinities and homeland of his family, although important for the latter day adherents of monotheism, does not in itself constitute the act which is sufficient to merit the change of name sufficient to found a new genealogy, and to complete the New Covenant. The act which serves as the culmination of his test of faith is not parricide and matricide, but his willingness to sacrifice his own son Isaac. Kierkegaard speculates in his *Fear and Trembling* on the various scenarios which could explicate the meaning of such a divine command for Abram, as the latter himself does not say a word in response to the demand for the sacrifice of the son given to him by his God. With an attitude of religiosity, he simply hears and seeks to obey. Abram makes ready for the sacrifice and sleeps one last night in the knowledge, the pre-monition, that with the daybreak he will sacrifice his only son. With the return of the dawn, he departs with Isaac to the altar on the mountaintop, again without a word to his son or to his wife Sarah. In response to a question from Isaac as to the location of the sacrificial lamb, Abram responds reticently that God will provide. As the narrative is fulfilled, Abram places Isaac upon the altar and raises a knife over him—Isaac witnesses the terrible truth—but at that moment beyond decision, the angel Gabriel intercedes telling Abram that he need not act—he is let off the hook as the narrative becomes a comedy (the laughter returns).¹⁷ Abram has passed the test of faith, and with his new name, Abraham, is promised progeny who will outnumber the stars. Through his demonstration of faith, Abraham has allowed a new world destiny to be born. The same story is retold, but at a higher level, when God sends his own son into the world as a sacrificial lamb. Through the death of Jesus, God undertakes that which he does not even demand of Abraham.

But, what is the philosophical significance of this eschatology, of this destiny of the One? As diagnosed by Nietzsche, such a destiny is that of nihilism, or, in other words, it is an eschatology which seeks, with its purported lust for the annihilation of the world, to deny the myriad and creative diversity of Life. With his valuation of the ephemeral character of temporal existence,

17 I mean the word ‘comedy’ in the ‘minor’ sense of that which seeks an escape from the tragic double bind, or in the ancient sense, as that which ends a narrative with a happy ending.

Abram would willingly sacrifice his only son for his God—none of this is sufficiently real to matter, he would perhaps whisper. Yet, for Nietzsche, God is dead—he dies with Abram’s whisper—God is stillborn, in his admission that the creation itself is without value—it is nothing at all in relation to the God who has been established as the seat of all value. This new god resembles a Saturn who swallows his children—and chokes to death on them. Such a transference of the seat of value into the negation of this world of temporal existence is a flight into the Otherworld—it is a nihilism that fails to see world and earth as the only topos of affirmation, as the place of the artwork and of lived existence, of life...

It will happen, however, that the adherent of such a destiny will, in good faith, question Nietzsche’s diagnosis of nihilism. He will respond to Nietzsche, this physician of culture, with the demand for a second opinion. How, he will ask, is such a reversal possible by which the exemplar of faith is turned into its opposite, into the very annihilation of all affirmations of value, by which a faith in the invisible, in the transcendent, in God, is transformed into nihilism, an inner void of mere nothing? Indeed, was not Abram’s seminal submission and commitment to God not in fact the extreme opposite of nihilism or any seduction to the powers of nothingness? Is not the divine itself the fount of all being, value, of all meaning, radically other to this fallen world of fragmentation and decay? Who would dare to suggest otherwise? How is it possible that the hope for a Kingdom of God is a symptom of nihilism? Such an adherent would regard any such suggestion as simply preposterous.

The Death of God: The Seeds of Its Own Destruction

If we consider the obverse perspective of Abraham as the archetype of faith in light of his commitment to a logic of the One, to an eschaton of negative alterity, we are struck by another Abraham, one who tore the mythological tapestry of Pagan sacred affirmation into threads. From this perspective, Abraham is the great destroyer. Born from the cutting of ties with his family and gods, Abraham is the first, or, a first—he is an initiator of a discursive formation, a beginner, an Adam. All future history, moreover, will be merely the unfolding of his essence, which is projected as the limit of the past and the horizon for that which will be. He abides in-between, holding this undecidability within himself—even in his decision for the One. The openness of ambiguity, of the ambivalence of a truth event remains traced in his decision. Abraham is privy to the mystical foundation of authority in his declaration of independence from the Pagan world, an event which is simultaneously an unambiguous assault on the world and religion of his father and mother. He destroys so as to found a new beginning, a new world order. Just as he looks into the abyss, however, he covers over and supplants, with his artwork, the undecidable, this openness of temporal possibility. The phenomenon of the mystical foundation is suppressed, displaced via spectacles, events, and histories.

If a beginning in violence cannot completely and intensively erase the last trace of its

violent [origin]¹⁸, any such attempt at eradication will merely provoke a repetition of this trace. This violence, as with the shadow, is inescapable—the irrepressible repetition of the project of eradication does not serve the ostensible program of erasure, but of a repetition of this situation of conflict, through which this project and program are reproduced and augmented. The program becomes an alibi, one that is cultivated for its own sake. It is not foremost significant that a cycle of violence becomes repeated and maintained for the good, but that a repetition of violence is itself the metabolism of a violent ‘good’. A beginning in violence must live violently if it is to live at all—it must ceaselessly repeat this ‘event’ of its catastrophic [origin].

The trauma of the violent destruction by Abraham of the gods and goddesses of his ancestors, the idols of his father and mother, becomes repeated not only in his own willingness to sacrifice his late-born son Isaac, but also in the trajectory of his offspring, who in this covenant, countless as the stars, exist in the repetition and perverse fulfillment of that original trauma. More deeply considered, this event of trauma in the midst of Abraham is itself only a repetition of that more original trauma of the expulsion of Adam [and Eve] from the garden of immortality and delight. Miranda has suggested that the creation myth of Adam and Eve was itself a redaction which served as the founding myth and genealogy for Abraham himself.¹⁹ In this way, the transgression by Abraham against the gods of his family is provided a mythical alibi and re-inscription in the narrative of the Fall. This event of transgression by the Adam and Eve inaugurates the passage from innocence to guilt, from grace to punitive expulsion, and thus, erects an archetype, which serves to define the essential character of ‘human nature’. How could Abraham have acted otherwise?

Amid the perspective of this reversal, the polytheistic religion of the father and mother of Abraham is re-branded as a condition of idolatry and transgression against the one true God of Abraham. Moreover, the seed of transgression, although facing the onslaught of Divine wrath, remains alive as the trace or taint of original sin. One has sinned and has been punished, but due to the basic existential character of the human being after the Fall, one will sin again in the perverse fulfillment of human nature. History is composed of the anecdotes of sin. Indeed, this feature of the divine ordination of sin emerged with an erotic twist with the Heresy of the Free

18 I have placed the term 'origin' in brackets, in the manner of Husserl, so as to underline the problematic character of the term—and in the present context, to intimate the violence inherent in the founding act of an authoritative truth regime. For a detailed discussion of the violence of the founding act of law, see Derrida, Jacques (1992) "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'" in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, edited by Drucilla Cornell, Michael Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson. For a complementary discussion of the murderous intent and religiosity of Abraham in relation to Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, see Derrida, J. (1995) *The Gift of Death*, trans. by David Wills Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

19 José Porfirio Miranda, *Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression*, trans. John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1974). Indeed, this pattern of trauma and repetition intimates a deep narrative logic not only for *Genesis*, and on throughout the Hebrew Torah and the Christian Old Testament, the Christian New Testament and the Muslim Qūran. Moreover, it is the triune of transgression, punishment, and atonement, established in *Genesis*, which lays out the *modus operandi* of the fragmented monotheistic dispensations.

Spirit who incorporated sexual acts into their remembrance of the Last Supper, a celebration of the God of Love. Of course, in keeping with the strategy of trauma, these heretics, such as *Marguerite Porete*, were burned at the stake.²⁰ It is the Fall and its inexorable repetition, which implicates a naive self-interpretation of the phenomenon of human existence within a regime of guilt. Before the Fall, there were no humans. There was no before...

The taint of original sin, this seed of transgression, plays itself out throughout Genesis in myriad ways. There is the overwhelming question, in the first instance, of incest in the augmentation and perpetuation of the line of Adam. While some would wish to give deeper esoteric meanings to the fables in Genesis—or to de-mythologize these texts altogether—it is instructive to read off the implications of a text in situ—a text which, we must recall, still serves as a fundamental source for the very constitution of world-time, world history, and political history. While there is explicit reference to incest in the case of Lot's daughters after the destruction of Sodom and the death of Lot's wife, there is an implicit indication of incest with the question of the identity of the wife of Cain. Who was she... but Eve herself (if not Lilith, who does not make it into the final proofs of Genesis)? A daughter is born to Adam, but very late. While this alternative explanation would not itself escape from the labyrinth of incest, the basic implication of Genesis is an incestuous relationship between Cain and his mother Eve. In light of the irresistible resemblance to Oedipus in the play by Sophocles, the subsequent humiliating fate of Cain intimates the tragic destiny and terrible truth of human existence—as creatures of the Fall. This trajectory of sin plays itself out in the subsequent trajectory of the genealogy of Adam in its eventual corruption in the time of Noah. In this case, the One God decides to destroy all humanity and every living creature except for the family of Noah and the animal and seed stock that Noah is instructed to preserve on the Arc(he). The state of wickedness of human beings is given a more specific content with the punishment and annihilation of Sodom and Gomorrah and in the divine strikes at the Tower of Babel. In the former case, that which offends is the subversion of the sexual archetype of Adam and Eve as the progenitors of humanity. The latter case demonstrates the impossible desire of the one God to maintain his hegemony in the face of his creation at any cost. Lucifer, his prize creation, had already revolted against Him, a rebellion that not only sets a precedent for alterity to the logic of the One within the biblical narrative itself, but also harbors the trace of the terrestrial suppression and erasure of the Pagan ethos, the religion of the older gods. This trace of the terrestrial usurpation of the idea of the Holy remains submerged, however, within and without the narrative of guilt—of transgression, punishment and atonement.

The supplantation of polytheism by Abraham et al. is suppressed within and by the genealogy of Adam, through a displacement of the hubristic deed in an act of concealment. Terrorism dwells in a narrative of original Fallenness. One can blame oneself, one can detect in oneself an original sin and capacity for transgression, but the root of this original evil, after Abraham, is located not in the supplantation of the gods, but in the narrative of disobedience to the one God. In

20 Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1993).

other words, the act of supplantation of the Holy, of the gods does not implicate the one God—the guilt of transgression is instead projected upon his enemy, and the fallenness of creation, but in a way that falsifies and shreds this founding act. From the perspective of the ancestors of Abraham, this event is the death of the gods. Abraham has committed mass deicide. Abraham gives birth to evil. But, simultaneous with this child of evil, is the distortion and re-presentation of its origin—it is re-branded as its opposite—it is hidden in the counter-offensive of accusations of primordial guilt, original sin. God becomes the good, the gods become, if anything at all, demons within the new myth. From this perspective, Abraham’s God is an event of *truth, beauty, and good*.

One will recall the diatribe of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra that the old gods laughed themselves to death in the face of this God who claimed that he was the only god. For Nietzsche, it is laughter that will free us from the unlimited bondage of a “divine” which is an imposture and mask of a will-to-power, which is disguised as a will to nothingness. Yet, such laughter is most difficult amidst the lacerations of the whip, shackle and the stake. One will remain a convalescent or aspire to exist in such a state of convalescence. These wounds run deep, the scars of the surface remain burned upon my soul. Psyche²¹ crouches in her own excrement in the tunnels and chambers of an old, dark castle—her visitors decipher tattooed narratives and symbols sliced across her skin. We are condemned to read these inscriptions as well—but, upon our own souls, to decipher not only our own inscription by the logic of the One, but also to fathom the destruction of the Pagan ethos and the culture built upon this event.

In the face of all stands an imposture, a mask, of the one God who is other. The sins of the father become replayed, re-activated—repeated—in the children as they seek to maintain this regime of discipline and surveillance—purification, cleansing, life-negating power—the heritage and legacy of their ancestors. Abraham supplants his own ancestors, his mother and father, but with his displacement and re-presentation, he re-appropriates the Law of the Ancestors—however, with the proviso that he himself is the First of a New Covenant. One must understand that through the labor pains of Abraham, humanity is born again. While this supplantation of the old gods resembles the recurrence of overthrow in the Mycenaean tapestry, that of Ouranos by Kronos, and the latter by Zeus, the destruction of Abraham stands at a radical distance from the threads of kinship of dynastic succession exhibited in the mythological tapestry of the Pagan gods. This radical distance is constituted by the assertion of Truth by Abraham in his destruction of the gods of his father and mother. This assertion of Truth supplants any indigenous criteria or scenario of transfiguration of an existing mythos. “Truth” brings Abraham and his monotheistic genealogy onto the tenuous ground of historicity. Again, “God” resembles Saturn. Yet, it is not clear if he will vomit up the other gods and goddesses.

History begins, the story goes, amid a radical breach with traditional mythological narrative. This breach need not however imply that such a position, that of history, escapes from the

21 Alberto Savinio, ‘Psyche’, in *The Lives of the Gods*, trans. James Brooks and Susan Etlinger (London: Atlas Books, 1995).

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of the tragic assertion of the One, is disseminated as the narrative and congregational discordance of the progeny. The very tools of the trade associated with this Will to Truth, moreover, become targeted upon the assertion of the One, but only in the auspicious Moment of its triumph. That which is exposed in the Socratic maxim of the ‘theoretical man’ that the unexamined life is not worth living is the assertion that the One itself rests upon a mythos that stands, as Nietzsche contends, opposed to life. The razor of historical criticism begins the self-lacerating project of unearthing its own roots. In its enactment of an inherited Will to Truth—it kills God.

Reiner Schürmann counseled that the death of an idea always takes much longer than its birth.²³ It took almost two millennia for the God of History to be subjected to the procedures of historicism, methodologies, which were born alongside itself as its spear and shield. We have killed God. We are the Ugliest Man. But, we have killed him with the gifts that he himself has given us. The triumph of the essence of this God of Truth is at once his fulfillment and death. The Will to Truth that destroyed the old gods, honed and refined over eons, turns upon itself in a final project of self-examination and annihilation. But seeing nothing but itself and its ubiquitous historical actuality, it finally denies that there is any truth upon this earth. Indeed, it is always already elsewhere. In keeping with this otherworldly disorientation, it decides that this life is not worth living, and thus, it seeks its own annihilation—it seeks to fulfill the implications of its own exposed untruth. The God of History dies because He is exposed as merely historical. The God of Truth dies in that His will to violence pales in the face of the impossible task of constituting Himself as the only Truth, as the totality of existence, as I am that which is. The world and earth is always His shameful, embarrassing remainder, reminder, always His poison chalice.

Novelty under the Sun: Two Notions of the Will and Will to Power

The Preacher of Ecclesiastes would have us believe that a creative life is lived in vain, that there is nothing new under the sun. Indeed, any assertion of novelty in this world of finitude is vanity in light of the homeless fate of such expression and exertion. The Master and Slave are each fated to Death—the one is no more significant than the other—they meet in the End. All works perish or are appropriated by the latecomers. All is vanity. There is nothing left to do but drink a little wine and pass the time with one’s fellows as this is our God-given portion. Amidst this double bind of finitude and hope, one need, and can only wait - for Death... for God.

At the end of the day, the ‘metaphysics’ of this Preacher is the same as that of Abraham. That same dichotomy persists between this visible world of decay and fragmentation and that eternal, invisible Otherworld. For both of these figures, it is the latter which holds all value and

23 Reiner Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy* (Indiana University Press, 1987). He writes: “When questions are raised about principles, the network of exchange that they have opened becomes confused, and the order that they have founded declines. A principle has its rise, a period of reign, and its ruin. Its death usually takes disproportionately more time than its reign.” (29)

abides all hope. The willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his late-born son Isaac is, as I have suggested, merely a repetition of his own fateful supplantation of the earthly gods of his father and mother. His faith is given to a god that is out of this world, in the facelessness of which this world is without value, the only significance of which is its own insignificance. Yet, even as this world is, with Zoroaster, something that is to be overcome, it remains, as with the barren island of Delos, the birthplace of Apollo, the point of departure and negative image of the destination of the invisible. This faithful Abraham would find a kindred will in the willingness of the Preacher to forsake any earthly project or destination as vanity. Both Abraham and the Preacher close their ears to the song and dance of the earth: each abandons the vanity of earthly things, gods and works—each harbors a will that seeks its own ultimate reason and purpose—its highest value—in a beyond or behind of things—in the transcendent, in the No-thing. This Will to Nothing, as it finds no ultimate meaning in the world and thus does not resist the void that stalks at the perimeter, is the soil for a ‘metaphysics’ of antithesis and hierarchy, for a ‘logic’ of the one. Indeed, for Abraham and the Preacher, this Will to Nothing is but one overwhelming Will—that of God—a Will that is already always expressed in the inscriptions of a revealed logos upon the old law tablets.

The Will of God is the a-topos for the expression of this revealed Truth, which explicitly asserts that It is the only True Will, one that is elsewhere, beyond this fallen world, there in that No-thing. In light of his resistance to a trajectory of the One, Nietzsche proclaims that this Will to Nothing is a radical attack upon, and falsification of, the phenomenon of Life. He juxtaposes another narrative of Will in Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Representation* in an incessant unbinding of the strands of the exclusivity of the One God, One Will. While we will fathom that the Will in Schopenhauer is singular and alone—and thus, another variant of the logic of the One (hence, his ethical conclusions)—the very possibility of such a Will immediately disrupts the exclusivity of the monotheistic assertion. The Will, a primal power, is explicitly conceived as the raging heart of the world, as the non-conscious striving of Life. For Schopenhauer, it was not through the clarity of the concept or the light of another world, but instead through music, poetry and dance that the Will is intimated, disclosed. In its insatiable emanations, or objectifications, the Will seeks to satisfy its overwhelming desire for self-knowing and self-expression. While Schopenhauer will, through his ethical pessimism, ultimately expose himself as a nihilist, closely aligned with Abraham and the Preacher, he has nevertheless disclosed the existence of an alternative conception of Will, as a Will to Life, existence, survival, a will to expression and self-understanding. Even if Schopenhauer prescribes a pessimistic negation, this Will, or that which is indicated with this sign, exhibits an intense resistance to the Will to Nothing. Just as the persistence of the trace of memory of the destruction of the Pagan ethos by Abraham germinates the seeds of the death of god, the antithesis of a Will to Nothing and a Will to Existence explodes the pretension that there can only be the one Will. It is in this context that Nietzsche, speaking through Zarathustra, moves beyond the various logics of the One to the pluri-vocality of the will-

to-power.

Each of these notions of the Will indicates a great longing. Yet, even in their apparent opposition, both of these positions imply, for Nietzsche, a radical rejection of the possibility of an affirmation of a creative Life. For Abraham, this world is not properly Real—its actuality, he would emphasize, discloses that everything solid melts into air. One can be clear and certain only in God and his New Covenant. For Schopenhauer, the very futility of the bad infinite disclosed in the Will to Survival, while an adequate description of existence in specific respects, serves to refute life and the world—which for Nietzsche seeks not to survive—it already has that—but power and creativity, health. The system of needs and the radical absence of satisfaction underlines, for Schopenhauer, the pointlessness of exertion and expression which only achieve the persistence of a state of unsatisfied desire. Schopenhauer judges, as did Mani, that our only response to the futility of life must be the silencing of the Will in ourselves through an ethical—and reproductive—negation of individuality. The world of the ego, as with Buddhism, is a world that is not properly Real, it persists as a house of cards of borrowed thoughts and vague self-awareness. The ego, which is the mask of the Will, must be broken apart in order for the Will to be detected and then silenced. The striving and suffering of the Will must be denied, if there is to be oneness and repose. Both of these doctrines, each in its own way, set out a temporary metaphysic of duality, as with Zoroaster, that, in its strategic polarity, reveals an eschatology of the One, and in both cases the eschaton lies elsewhere from the World—this topos of illusion, futility, and our impossible insurrection against nothingness. The One need only acknowledge the Other as long as the creation remains alienated as Other. In and of itself, the World has no meaning, it is as the skin shed by a snake, of no consequence, not left behind—but, secretly assimilated, eaten as forbidden fruit.

However, a voice of distress calls out in the Night about the Earth, our fair Sister. This voice declares, in opposition to the previous assertions of will, that We must remain true to the earth. The voice of yet another Other, of an insurrection against not only the regime and aroma of Nothingness, but also against mere Survival, against unsatisfied, frustrated expression, indicates a willing that is anterior to the incestuous wills of negation and repetition. In the face of this will to annihilation sounds the voices of impossible striving, which although subjected and suppressed, still ceaselessly exist, inexorably creating beyond themselves, playing out this dice game of chance.

Yet, with this proliferation of Wills, each seeking to be All, we sense that we must step back from this notion of ‘will’ as it is itself merely a veil that has been cast over all things, another fiction that dances over myriad events, tying, suturing them together, in order to fashion a singular fiction—this world. It has chased the poets away with its edifice of Truth, but it has also exposed itself as ‘only a fool, only a poet’.²⁴ If these wills collapse into the same, it is the striving amidst the earth that remains for Nietzsche that which exceeds and explodes the bridges and

24 *Zarathustra*: 300.

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fences stretched across her skin and her rivers. The persistence of the trace of resistance to the grand narrative of any conception of the will shatters the aura of a monocratic explanation of Ultimate Reality. With the utter fragmentation and deconstruction of the nomenclature of the Will as a Unity—whether God, primal surge or ding an sich—there emerges the other event(s) that indicate the intimacy of an impossible insurrection against Nothingness and Survival, a willing that is Other than Will. Or, in other words, the genealogy of the Will, that Great Lie that almost fooled everyone, becomes traced to a deeper origin in the more primal events of creation and transfiguration. Zarathustra exclaims in ‘On Self-Overcoming’,

Indeed, the truth was not hit by him who shot at the word of the ‘will to existence’: that does not exist. For, what does not exist cannot will; but what is in existence, how could that still want existence? Only where there is life is there also will: not will to life but—thus I teach you—will to power.²⁵

That which has characterized the operation of the monotheist assertion is, in tandem with the state and the military, the suppression of all that is heterogeneous.²⁶ For the former, it is the other gods, specifically female goddesses (and their devotees) and the erotic ontology of sensuous existence. Monotheism, in other words, has already operationalised the aspirations of its own, masked, will to power, a will that is couched in the rhetoric of Otherworldly desires, in an ultimacy that is elsewhere. It has fulfilled its longing at the cost of sacrifice—of Life, and of affirmation of all that gathers together as World and Earth. It denies new creation in its lust to be the last of all creations—it is the black snake in your throat. It even denies its own responsibility and capacity for creation as its laws and its very historicity are attributed to Revelation. It forbids all will to creation and thus camouflages its own will to power as the negation of all will to power. Yet, its hatred for the world and flesh reveals its desire for the Same (although it always awaits the End, in one form of the other). It substitutes Repetition for Creation. It seeks to put a halt to the possibility of new creation as any novelty would stand as a question mark over its claims to ultimacy. Novelty screams as an exception to its privileged status.

The truth of the monotheist assertion is exposed in the final sentences of Nietzsche’s posthumously edited and published fragments, *The Will to Power*, “This world is will to power—and nothing else besides? And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing else besides.”²⁷ In its duplicity, the monotheist will to power postures as being a will to no-thingness, a will which seeks to transcend power, to annihilate will, to return to a God who is beyond the world and earth. Yet, as it does not act quickly to vacate itself from the face of the earth, to die at the right time, or let a new world be born, this rhetoric of beneficence is exposed as merely a masque for a specific type of will to power that seeks merely to perpetuate itself as long as it can.

25 Ibid.: 115.

26 On the distinction between homogeneous and heterogeneous forces, see Bataille, ‘The Psychological Structure of Fascism,’ *Visions of Excess* (University of Minneapolis Press, 1992).

27 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufman (Vintage Books, 1967): 550.

However, as intimated, the cost of such a perpetuation of its own will to power, especially in its bad faith, is the sacrifice of any new will to creation, of any differing will to power, and more specifically that which is an eruption of this innocence of becoming, this Dionysian power of life, death and rebirth. The power of life is the power of creation, a power of creative effervescence that gives forth novelty under the sun. Zarathustra exhorts the crowd in the marketplace—he is a madman shouting:

I say unto you: one must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star. I say unto you: you still have that chaos in yourselves.

Alas, the time is coming when man will no longer give birth to a star. Alas, the time of the most despicable man is coming, he that is no longer able to despise himself. Behold, I show you the last man.²⁸

It is precisely this chaos that the monological assertion seeks to suppress, to eradicate, annihilate—the rattle of this dice throw of chance must be silenced, the very possibility of creation in this realm must be destroyed. But, as every act of destruction is also one of creation, that which is created via the destruction of the Dionysian power of life is the Last Man, the nihilist, the impotent consumer incapable of new creation or self-overcoming, much less self-sufficiency—he is suppressed, contained, and anonymous in his anonymity—he forgets just as soon as he thinks, chewing his cud in blissful ignorance. But, this ignorance is sculpted via burned flesh—not simply a tabula rasa, but a complex construction of a simulacrum and discipline—via the fire the Last Man learned to say ‘I will’—but not as a will that is an affirmation of will to power, to new creation, but as a submission to a will that is other, to a stratagem of torture, indoctrination and regimentation—he wills in that he is willed, in that he should, in his obligation—for after all, he is woman, he is guilty. That which in a previous epoch was worshipped as the irrepressible power of the fertility of life in a ceaseless dance of novelty is given a new status, a new value, devalued, destroyed via the violence of a radically other repository of significance. The Otherworld is the latest fashionable delicacy of the Last Man. New creation becomes at best a mere vanity amid an expendable world of utility—at its worst, new creation is heresy, evil... New creation is a threat to the regime of monocratic assertion. New creation, and the very physiological possibility of such new creation, must be annihilated. Possible creators of the future must be made sick, so that they will be able only to serve the legacies of the past. Their innocence must be turned to guilt, their health to disease, their strength to weakness. Order and form suppress the Dionysian power of life and inaugurate the conditions of weakness, which will be expressed as a will to nothingness, as a will that has been made weary by its own regime of suppression. The suppression of this chaos in one’s soul in the monotheist assertion sings the same tune as the excess of order and of morality not only Plato’s Otherworldly hypothesis, but also, as a microcosm, via the discipline,

28 *Zarathustra*: 17.

regimentation and surveillance of the ‘theoretical man’. It is bad enough that those who sought to articulate this power of life, the poets, were excluded from the city—on the grounds that they lied too much—but it is worse that this entire arrangement of the polis rests upon the precipice of a Noble Lie—the Big Lie. The order of the polis will be maintained at all costs, the unity of the One is to be pre-eminent to any of its many parts or to anything that shall be excluded in the limit situation of its founding arche. Music and song become suspect—poiesis is only cultural, never having the status of praxis.

Nietzsche claims that it is precisely this obsession with ‘unity’—or what could be described as an attempted annihilation of the Dionysian by aesthetic Socratism—is itself already a symptom of weakness, a weariness of life. It longs for that which is radically other as it cannot stand this life. It calls for a sacrifice to Asclepius as death will heal it from its sickness. Yet—and this is where we clearly see the will as a masque—even its will to no-thing is still an expression of its will to power—its perverse and repressed ‘affirmation’ of this life. The Dionysian power of chaos that tears through life, shattering the household in the tragic event, will no longer be allowed to run amok amid the polis. It will be rooted out in a realm of a pure Good in itself, one in which this perspectival character of life, innocent, before good and evil, will be annihilated. From the enforced, and thus universalized, perspective, tied inside the panopsis of the Good—the Dionysian power of life, the chaos at the heart of the creative act, is renamed “Evil”. But, as with Schelling, Nietzsche warns that such an uprooting will serve ironically as the death-knell of such a project of purification and unification. Zarathustra awakens the youth on the mountainside,

But it is with man as it is with the tree. The more he aspires to the height and light, the more strongly do his roots strive earthward, downward, into the dark, the deep – into evil.²⁹

In the masquerade, Life itself will be poisoned, postponed—any trace of this power of life will slowly suffocate under the weight of Repetition, this ceaseless re-assertion of that logic of the One. It is the Overman, who resists this will to a destitute future, who will bite the head off the snake which eats its own tail. Nietzsche poses the question in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: Who will be the one who will grasp hold of chance, in the moment, and exclaim, ‘Thus I willed it’? If this is not to be the faceless repetition of the arche, and if it is to be an opening which gives, makes or takes space for new creation, it must be the creator, the Child, who affirms this legacy of accidents as it finds these amidst an innocence of becoming. With the event of lightning, light that shatters the old law tablets, the creator erupts into the aura of the creative event. In this ecstatic openness of possibility, novelty erupts under the sun.

29 Ibid.: 42.

Eternal Recurrence of the Same: The Affirmation of the Overman

If the willingness of Abram to sacrifice his son Isaac indicates a metaphysics of nothingness, nihilism, the innocent creations of the Dionysian power of life, of the Overman, intimate an affirmation of the eternal recurrence of the Same. Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions emphasize truth as the criterion for their overthrow of the polytheism of their fathers and mothers. Yet, truth became a hydra, its many mouths biting into the supplanter. Not only does “science” subvert and displace its own myths, but its own methods, such as hermeneutics, are turned on the creator—upon religion and its historicity. With the displacement of the hegemony of the One, there opens a topos for the self-expression of many voices. If truth is no longer to be conceived in a positivist, but in a mytho-phenomenological sense, the meaning of affirmation after the death of [God] exhibits its specificity in the letting be of this Dionysian power of life. It is this power of life that is the eternal recurrence of the Same, and this is the umwelt of the affirmation of the Overman.

The Dionysian annihilates himself and destroys the household which contains his destiny, as he knows that he will be born again as the Same. The Christian flees from this power of life as his kingdom is not of this world. The death of Jesus the Nazarene, as told by a Christian, such as Paul, is the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic eschatology in that the Son of God—God himself—becomes the sacrificial lamb. The son, unlike Isaac, is sacrificed, no angel is there to save him in the end. He will rise again, but only to return to his father, to himself. The metaphysics of alterity is re-affirmed and completed, as the sacrificial lamb is reborn as the Other. The death of Jesus, as told by the Dionysian (certainly not the story related in the New Testament, which Nietzsche abhorred), is that of the Bacchanalia, the dismemberment and rebirth of the power of Life, of the Same, in the dramatic exposition of a Dionysian pantheistic polytheism.³⁰ This will to destruction is creative in the sense of a first-born attempt—an affirmation amidst the overwhelming powers of Life, which, as with Origen, are independent of meaning. In this alternative scenario, the first attempt of affirmation of the hidden powers of life, of Love, by a Dionysian Jesus, clears the space for the birth of the creator, for the Overman. Yet, the Overman, despite such an imposing designation is simply the Child. The Child, whom Jesus did not send away, affirms the play of life without sacrifice, as a gift. The Child is the one who can be laughed at without any provocation of shame. It spurs him or her on in escalating play. Laughter is the echo of an excessive affirmation. We are pressed and shamed to take the monotheistic allegory seriously—and this seriousness is enforced by the proliferating cults of the one god. Yet, the Overman, the child of Zarathustra, can be a fool—an idiot amidst this event of affirmation. He

30 This tentative formulation arises out of exchanges with Deirdre Daly and Graham Parkes at the Conference on Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* at the University of Wales, Lampeter on 14-16 November 2008. The intent behind this suggestion is the inscription of the narrative of Jesus into the mythological tapestry of Dionysus, in light of not only the affirmation of all that was and is implicit in the notion of eternal recurrence, but also, the poetic freedom unleashed in the notion of a creative future.

provokes laughter without intention. This is the topos where his excessive power seethes, this un-self-conscious creator innocently destroys that which seeks to curtail his own creativity. [God] no longer has a patent on creativity.

While Nietzsche attempts, in his posthumous fragments, *The Will to Power*, to lay out a cosmological articulation of the eternal recurrence of the same, it will be illuminating to distinguish this exoteric surface of recurrence from that which can be discerned as its esoteric depth. If there is a finite Kosmos, and if an eternity of time has already elapsed, and if there is another eternity beckoning from the future, and if the gateway of the Moment indicates a mere Circle, a gathering into a Same of bad infinities, then how could this specific event of my life not have been repeated eternally? On the face of it, this story presents a seduction to the lonely one in that it gives a cosmological *raison d'être* for its destiny in the framework of a purposive teleology, or even as a rival eschatology. However absurd, the lonely one is given meaning in the enigmatic, though seemingly logical, proposition of eternal return. If we think along with this conditional, syllogistic, reasoning, and if we accept its premises, then, perhaps, we could regard this proposition, this conjecture, as a real possibility—perhaps as a ‘theory’ of temporality. It is entirely possible that even the most intimate and intricate simplicities of our lives have been eternally repeated. Yet, such a seemingly logical system, despite its paradoxes, is merely one interpretation, variant of the eternal recurrence, an assertion of a specific will to power. The question still hovers as to that which is absent, erased via this purposive teleology of eternal repetition. Indeed, following Otto, we could, on the contrary, affirm eternal recurrence as a possibility of dysteleology, ‘in’ the moment (*Augenblick*).³¹

The esoteric meaning of the eternal recurrence, on the other hand, a meaning which remained unsaid in Nietzsche’s writings (perhaps it was whispered to the goddess Life in “The Other Dancing Song” in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*) implodes the entire edifice of the exoteric interpretation of a temporality of return. Eternal recurrence as the unhistorical opens as a playspace for the singularity of the free, very free spirit. Such an emphasis upon the esoteric dimension of the eternal return plays out as a counterpoise to such higher men as Blanchot,³² who is shattered by the proliferation of thought without a present, inexorably repeated and infinitely mirrored in his language. As if death, through him, distracted itself. The notion of eternal recurrence, in its

31 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (New York: Penguin, 1959): 79.

32 Maurice Blanchot, *The Step Not Beyond*, pp. 11ff. There is much to be praised in *The Step Not Beyond* which could contribute to an exploration of creativity as a multi-voiced phenomenon. At the same time, however, it is precisely such a ‘temporality of return’, of repetition, that is, following Klosowski’s *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle* (London and New York: Continuum, 2005): 55, unmasked as a mere parody, simulacrum, ape, of the dominant narratives of the *eschaton*. In this way, it could be argued that Blanchot remains upon the seductive surface of paradox. Eugen Fink, in his *Nietzsche’s Philosophy* (London: Continuum International Publishing, 2003), also seems to remain on the surface as he seeks a theory of time in Nietzsche’s doctrine. The difficulty is that neither he nor Blanchot (and others) seem to understand that phenomenologically, the ecstasis of the future is not annulled for the questioner, regardless of the seeming necessity of a future that has always already been dissolved at the level of the surface, of the exoteric. In this way, creativity or the novel is not annulled by the eternal recurrence, even if that of a mere fluctuation of impulses, if considered from the perspective of its esoteric depth.

exoteric interpretation, is another of Nietzsche's jokes, mocking the eschatologies of nihilism. Zarathustra is the spider who has woven an exquisite web, a game, his cave, to ensnare the Higher Man. Yet, once they are there in his cave, Zarathustra wishes nothing better than to get some good air. He steps beyond the cave—outside - among his animals and the earth and sky—into the open air of a starry night, to become what he is. Time itself is imploded in this affirmation of a singularity of be-ing here, of an innocence of becoming—becoming this dice throw of chance, a self-propelled wheel. Zarathustra, in the final section, 'The Sign' becomes one with that which is, with his animals, with the lion, as his face turns to bronze. He is the premonition of the type that which be fulfilled with the event of his children.³³ We must first traverse the pathway to this event, to this final act of affirmation so that we can descend through the exoteric mask into the esoteric truth of the abyss of singularity. It is the Child in its singularity who affirms the Dionysian general economy of life as it 'is'. Ostensibly, this is the meaning of the eternal recurrence of the Same.

With the fulfillment of the esoteric singularity of existence, the exoteric snakeskin will be shed, left behind as an artifact of self-overcoming. The notion of the eternal recurrence places great demands upon Zarathustra. The great weight of the idea shatters, crushes him in his own attempt to make the greatest affirmation of existence. He sits as a convalescent, waiting for the sign which will beckon him to not merely articulate, but effectuate, the teaching of the eternal recurrence. Zarathustra laughs and calls his animals fools as they chatter on about his destiny as the Teacher of the eternal recurrence of the Same. The animals only know the exoteric story. Zarathustra laughs as he knows that his fate is not to be a mere teacher of an exoteric doctrine, but that he must seek to give birth to novelty under the sun, that he must become a Child. He must attempt that which is most difficult—he will give birth to himself.

The exoteric formulation of the doctrine of the eternal recurrence of the same, if considered detached from any question of its cosmological significance, discloses for the singular mortal being a topos of decision—it stands as the Gateway of the Moment. Everything will return, each in its singularity, exactly as it is and has been eternally. Such a narrative forbids any novelty in its assertion of the monotonous circle. Yet, from the perspective of the esoteric variant of eternal recurrence, the tale of the animals of an endless circle dissolves as, for the free, very free spirit, the future is revealed as the undetermined, as the agon of contestation, as the place where

33 In her insightful article, 'Sensing the Overhuman' (JNS, 30, Autumn 2005): 102-114, Jill Marsden questions whether anyone can ever become the *übermensch*, but instead suggests that which we can achieve is the experience of the *übermenschlich*, of that which she translates as the *overhuman*, an ecstatic (though disinterested) experience which she likens to Kant's aesthetic discourse upon the sublime. While this comparison is illuminating, it may be a limited perspective as it would seem that Zarathustra is seeking, as a Dionysian, other humans with which to share his transfigured state of being, and thus to achieve a way of life that falls prey to neither the Last Man (technology), nor to the recurrence of those seeking an escape (religiosity). In this way, as with Schopenhauer's revisionary consideration of the sublime in *The World*, the body and our way of life becomes the site for a *very interested* hermeneutics of existence, and thus, in Nietzsche's dissident sense, for an affirmation of a new body and an *ethos* that, as a way of being for a community, remains true to the earth.

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novelty can be, or—and returning to the joke of the exoteric reading—anything we choose to do is legitimated simply as it has already happened eternally. In this way, too, am I innocent, even if I kill my father and marry my mother. How could it have been any different?

Returning to the esoteric perspective, the dys-eschatology of eternal recurrence, as it intimates the ecstatic openness of the future, does not incite the repetition of the monotheistic conjecture. Yet, in his affirmation of the Dionysian power of life, Life sets forth an ordeal which must be confronted and fulfilled by Zarathustra. The moment of decision (Augenblick) of the exoteric doctrine is the gateway to the possibility of a deeper affirmation of existence. It provides the singular mortal being the possibility and actuality of free creation, an event of affirmation that seeks to overcome the historical malady of nihilism and guilt, a conjuring of the possibility of an unhistorical transfiguration of life. This, I suggest, is akin to the moment of anticipatory resoluteness (vorlaufende Entschlossenheit) in Heidegger's *Being and Time*³⁴ or the revolution of the heart, in Kant's *Religion*, in which a decision is made for the *eigentlichkeit* of existence—over against the generic homogeneity of everydayness. Yet, for Nietzsche, such a moment of vision is a necessary prelude to a turn to the deeper esoteric affirmation of eternal recurrence, a letting-be of creativity. The Augenblick, and the decision that it provokes, in this way, is not sufficient for the affirmation of the Child.

We dread the repetition of the Same, in its exoteric formulation, as we are burdened by that which has been, and by that which is—and never will be. If a single thing is chanced, or if there is a wish for any single thing to be different, then all is cast into question. Conversely, if one ever affirmed any single thing, then she must affirm everything—as All is caught in the Stoic web of continuum. But, where is Ariadne's thread which will lead us from this labyrinth of repetition? For we must, in the exoteric scenario, affirm all that which is, seeking to complete, to give meaning, to take responsibility for, all that which has been, is, and will be—and even this future always has already been. That which is is to be affirmed in all of its *minutae*. No escape, no exit, will be permitted, no nirvana, no outside—the actively nihilistic intentionality of this exoteric assertion plays itself out as a mockery of eschatological doctrines of escape, sleep, death, the One. Yet, the comic, exoteric shell, skin, of eternal return falls away as one ascertains that the scenario of eternal repetition is absurd. Far from the farce of eternal repetition, and the unexamined assertion of this repetition, is the disclosure that such a fatalistic scenario of repetition implodes amid a *topos* of silence, in this instant of chance. From a purely logical perspective one could question an eternal Repetition in that, after the death of God, there would be no external vantage point that could determine the discrete identity of repeated cycles. Indeed, this is the ground of a farce in which any and all acts would be blessed as innocent (or at least as necessary). This redemption by the comedian (in the burst of laughter) clears the space for the affirmation of an innocence

³⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).

of becoming. From the esoteric perspective, Zarathustra calls us to affirm by becoming creators who will laughingly play amidst chance as a child.

The Sisyphean gesture of the exoteric interpretation of the eternal recurrence serves as a litmus test for any metaphysical doctrine of transcendence. Despite this absurdity of his destiny, Sisyphus does not paralyse himself in otherworldly hopes. He is guilty. However, with the implosion of the farce of the metaphysical arche of existence, there is disclosed an esoteric significance to this doctrine of repetition. If it is impossible to distinguish one life from another via the illusory vantage point of an abstract observer, then, it is necessary to assert that there is only one life. The most difficult thought is not that of eternal repetition, but of the singularity of chance. The geometric form of the circle subverts the possibility of an authentic future, and thereby, annihilates the chance of the affirmation of the Child. The exoteric form of the doctrine is merely an electuary, a spoonful of sugar, but one which turns bitter with the disclosure of the terrible truth. Sisyphus does not escape, he does not leap down the other side of the mountain to freedom. He does not rebel from his predicament, as it is only the auxiliary narrator who says that he is unhappy and without joy.

The affirmation of an eternal recurrence, of singular and creative existence, has been prescribed as the medicine for the malady of nihilism, for the metaphysics of nothingness diagnosed as an array of symptoms. As with the other metaphysical doctrines of escape, eternal repetition removes the singular mortal from the hook—it gives meaning to existence in a meaningless scenario of Repetition. Such a possibility removes the singular mortal from the moment of risk, from the tenuous space of self-understanding. The evocation of eternal recurrence, understood esoterically, however, is a call to the singular mortal to become what one is, to fathom itself out of its own genealogy and life, and to liberate itself from its topos of origin through the ecstatic innocence of new creation. The call invokes the singular mortal to return to this truth of life, and to attempt the unhistorical, to become untimely, to be a creator. With the dawn of an awakening to this singular chance, the mortal begins to understand the urgency of a life on death row. The Overman, who has undergone convalescence from the malady of nihilism, is the one who is unthinkingly prepared to affirm this most difficult thought. This is not a detached speculation of a sculptor who hammers out his piece and then goes to sleep for the night. The sculptor is able to walk away. The task of self-overcoming, an affirmation of all that which is, is a situation of violent intimacy – affirmation is a task of wakefulness. This singular chance of existence erupts amidst the not-yet of demise – we exist as free, very free spirits, awake to the terrible truth of existence, but awake also to the voluptuousness of the abyss. Yet, while we can bear this burden, we can laugh amidst its terror, we can affirm our fate with the cry: ‘Thus I Willed It... (followed by laughter)’ Such an affirmation celebrates a festival of free existence which, amidst an imperative of death, is awake to its own dangerous possibilities. Zarathustra exhorts us to follow ourselves—while we are set free to create the future, we must also affirm that which has made us what we are. As very free spirits, one task is necessary—to overcome ourselves as mere conva-

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lescents of nihilism in an excessive affirmation of life that ecstatically creates novelty under the sun, a novelty of innocence that has overcome the violence and duplicity of the logic of the One. This is our Fate, which we should and can love as the next page of the story has not yet been written.

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