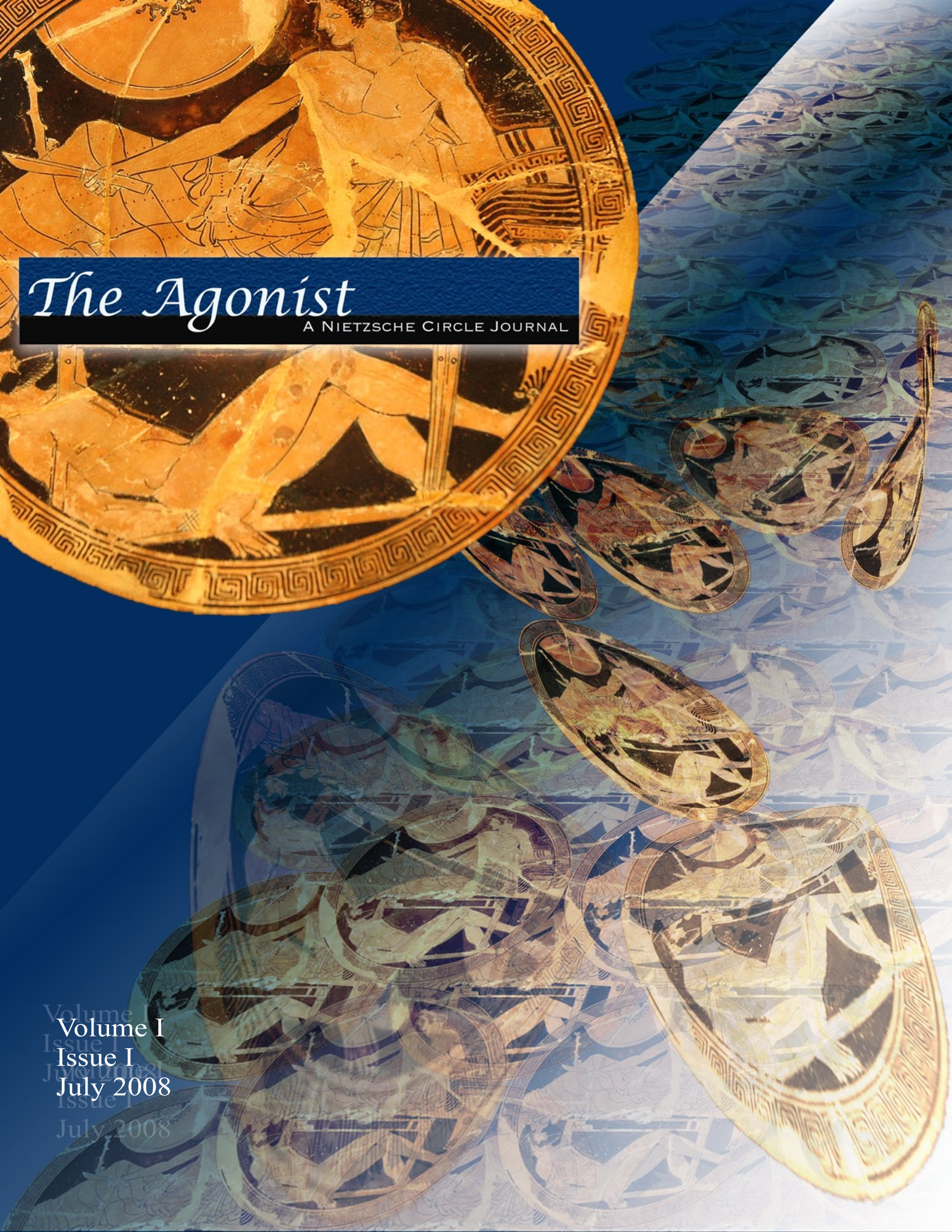

The Agonist

A Nietzsche Circle Journal

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Letters to the editors are welcome and should be emailed to: nceditors@nietzschecircle.com.

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Call for Papers

Exegeses of Nietzsche for *The Agonist*

To further practice reading as an art and to foster rumination, what Nietzsche believed "modern man" has not properly cultivated, *The Agonist* is seeking exegeses of Nietzsche's texts. "An aphorism, properly stamped and molded," Nietzsche urged, "has not been 'deciphered' when it has simply been read; rather, one has then to begin its exegesis, for which is required an art of exegesis" (GM: P §8).

The Agonist is interested in exegeses of individual aphorisms, bearing in mind that they fold into Nietzsche's entire corpus and are not entities that one can consider in complete isolation. We are particularly interested in exegeses of aphorisms from *Morgenröthe* and *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, two of the more neglected books of Nietzsche's oeuvre, but welcome exegeses on all the published works as well as the *Nachlass.* In this act of ruminating on individual aphorisms within the orbit of Nietzsche's entire philosophy, we want to promote careful philological reading, the art of "reading well, that is to say, reading slowly, deeply, looking cautiously before and aft, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers" (D: P §5). If Nietzsche demanded for his work "only perfect readers and philologists," it is incumbent upon us to learn, as he insisted, to read him well. For a section strictly devoted to exegesis, we seek work that strives to fulfill this task.

"A book like this, a problem like this, is in no hurry; we both, I just as much as my book, are friends of *lento*" (D: P §5).

For all submissions of exegeses, the editors can be contacted at:

nceditors@nietzschecircle.com.

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"The Culture of the Muses"

by Arno Böhler (University of Vienna)

1.1 Disturbing effects of the enlightenment tradition

> In some remote corner of the universe, poured out and glittering in innumerable solar systems, there once was a star on which clever animals invented knowledge. That was the highest and most mendacious minute of 'world history'—yet only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths the star grew cold, and the clever animals had to die. One might invent such a fable and still not have illustrated sufficiently how wretched, how shadowy and flighty, how aimless and arbitrary, the human intellect appears in nature.[1]

By these gloomy thoughts Nietzsche famously opens his text *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense* in which the human race appears as clever animals haunted by the manic delusion to be the center of the world—as if the world would pivot around man. The same hyper illusion a mosquito has when it "floats through the air […], feeling within itself the flying center of the world." [2]

In this somber fable—emphasizing the delusional character of life and the human intellect in particular—Nietzsche posits himself in direct opposition to most philosophers of his time: to Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Marx and others, who all prized reason as a faculty, precisely capable of overcoming the illusionary nature of life. Therefore, all of them embraced enlightenment as "man's release from his self-incurred tutelage"[3] in asking us to use reason in order to overcome

1 "In irgendeinem abgelegenen Winkel des in zahllosen Sonnensystemen flimmernd ausgegossenen Weltalls gab es einmal ein Gestirn, auf dem kluge Thiere das Erkennen erfanden. Es war die hochmüthigste und verlogenste Minute der‚Weltgeschichte': aber doch nur eine Minute. Nach wenigen Athemzügen der Natur erstarrte das Gestirn, und die klugen Thiere mussten sterben. So könnte Jemand eine Fabel erfinden und würde doch nicht genügend illustriert haben, wie kläglich, wie schattenhaft und flüchtig, wie zwecklos und beliebig sich der menschliche Intellekt innerhalb der Natur ausnimmt;" *Friedrich Nietzsche, Ueber Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne, Collected Works, Kritische Studienausgabe Volume 1*, Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Eds.) (München/Berlin/New York, DTV de Gruyter: 1980): 875. Cited as KSA by volume, section and page number.

2 "…als ob die Angeln der Welt sich in ihm [um ihn herum] drehten." Einer Mücke gleich, die mit demselben Pathos" durch die Luft schwimmt und in sich das fliegende Centrum der Welt fühlt." Friedrich Nietzsche, *KSA Vol.1*, §1, 875.

3 "Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit." Immanuel Kant, *Beant-*

the irrational delusions of life. *"Sapere aude!* Have courage to use your own reason!" [4] This sentence was the famous motto of enlightenment formulated by Kant in his text "What is Enlightenment?" in 1784.—a slogan addressing itself to each one of us in asking us to get rid of the accidental nature in men.

To realize such a government of reason, each single member of human society is called to participate in the process of freeing us from irrational myths by the use of everyone's mind. It is obvious that this general call is the birth of modern citizenship and civil societies. A call, directed not only towards society in general but towards each member of it personally: singular/plural, to quote the title of a book written by Jean-Luc Nancy.[5]

Since this very moment, wherever a crime against the dignity of man takes place, every mature member of such an "enlightened" society is called to denounce it, stand up against it in public and resist it independently of the cause of such a violation of human right; either it should be the act of an inhuman God, of an unjust state or the act of a citizen who violates the dignity of man while treating others inhumanly, in inappropriate ways.

Reflecting this wise definition of man, one starts to question—to be more precise—we "Good Europeans" start to question ourselves. "What should be wrong with this idea? Could one imagine even any nobler, more accurate, more advanced, more human picture of man, anything greater in dignity than this humanistic concept of man, brought forward and enforced most powerfully by enlightenment philosophers? Can there be anything greater than this?—: being addressed by others as a free person?—as someone being able to posit one's own goals rationally in order to make them true and become a reality? What should be wrong with this modern picture of man? Is it not pure madness to call this "universal truth" a myth, a tragic moment in world history, like Nietzsche does in his gloomy fable, when he calls the invention of the human intellect "the highest and most mendacious minute of 'world history'?"

1.2 The restless being of modernity

Let us hear what Nietzsche himself has to say against these far reaching accusations. Does he actually have a strong counter argument against this picture of man, drawn by enlightenment philosophers?

I read the following passage, "On Modern restlessness," in *Human All Too Human. A Book For Free Spirits*, as such a strong counter argument.

> On modern restlessness.—The farther West one goes, the greater modern agitation

wortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung? (Stuttgart, Reclam Verlag: 1974): p. 9.

4 "Sapere aude! Habe Mut dich deines eigenen Verstandes zu bedienen! ist also der Wahlspruch der Aufklärung." Immanuel Kant, *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* (Stuttgart, Reclam Verlag: 1974), p. 9.

5 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Être singulier pluriel* (Paris, Éditions Galilée: 1996). English Edition: Being Singular Plural, tr. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (Stanford California, Stanford University Press: 2000).

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> becomes; so that to Americans the inhabitants of Europe appear on the whole to be peace-loving, contented beings, while in fact they too fly about pellmell, like bees and wasps. This agitation is becoming so great that the higher culture can no longer allow its fruits to ripen; it is as if the seasons were following each other too quickly. From lack of rest, our civilization is ending in a new barbarism. Never have the active, which is to say the restless, people been prized more. Therefore, one of the necessary correctives that must be applied to the character of humanity is a massive strengthening of the contemplative element. And every individual who is calm and steady in his heart and head, already has the right to believe that he possesses not only a good temperament, but also a generally useful virtue, and that in preserving this virtue, he is even fulfilling a higher duty."[6] *[emphasis added]*

Nietzsche's answer concerning the threat, inherently at work in the picture of man drawn by the myth of modernity, is clear and distinct at this point. As long as the dignity of man lies only in man's capacity to make something out of his own life, this well-known picture of the self-made-man, the self-made-woman, will produce cultural conditions in which the value of the contemplative part of life will finally be ruined. The authority of this mystical "calling," powerfully enforced by the enlightenment tradition, thus is not only an act that releases man from "self-incurred tutelage," but will be the beginning of a tragic moment in world history as well to Nietzsche, in which the human race starts to be driven, captured, and damned precisely by this discourse of modernity to work all day long without having leisure and idleness anymore.—a new form of modern slavery, which finally will end up in an "enlightened" society inhabiting the human figure of "workers" only: subjects, apparently capable of producing themselves out of themselves, either in a solipsistic way, like in modern liberal societies, or in a communitarian way, like in modern socialistic societies, in which the entire human race assumes the form of a worldwide labor force capable of shaping the material world that surrounds it according to the rational needs of the human race.

Taking all this into consideration, Nietzsche's critique of modernity obviously has nothing to do with pessimism, fatalism, or resignation[7] but with his appreciation of the contemplative, receptive aspects of life as virtues, generally more useful for the sake of a higher culture than the

6 "Die Moderne Unruhe—Nach dem Westen zu wird die moderne Bewegtheit immer größer, so daß den Amerikanern die Bewohner Europas insgesamt sich als ruheliebende und genießende Wesen darstellen, während diese doch selbst wie Bienen und Wespen durcheinander fliegen. Diese Bewegtheit wird so groß, daß die höhere Kultur ihre Früchte nicht mehr zeitigen kann; es ist, als ob die Jahreszeiten zu rasch aufeinander folgten. Aus Mangel an Ruhe läuft unsere Zivilisation in eine neue Barbarei aus. Zu keiner Zeit haben die Tätigen, das heißt die Ruhelosen, mehr gegolten. Es gehört deshalb zu den notwendigen Korrekturen, welche man am Charakter der Menschheit vornehmen muss, das beschauliche Element in großem Maße zu verstärken." Friedrich Nietzsche, *KSA Vol.2*, §285, 232.

7 Concerning the question of "re-signation" as the highest expression of human lives far from any fatalism see: Theodor W. Adorno, *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft II* "Resignation" (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag: 2003): pp. 794-803 and Arno Böhler, Politiken der Re-Signation: Derrida—Adorno, in: *Eva Laquieze-Waniek/Erik Vogt* (Eds.), *Derrida und Adorno—Zur Aktualität von Dekonstruktion und Frankfurter Schule* (Wien, Turia & Kant: 2008): pp. 167-188.

so called active parts of life, which, on the contrary, are always close to subtle forms of barbarism to him.

In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche repeats the argument that the human race needs leisure and idleness rather than a worldwide globalization of the figure of the "busy men" in order to survive in the literal German meaning of the word "survival": *über*-leben.[8] Because *über*leben, survival, means more than just following one's own "will to live" (conatus) to Nietzsche. It rather executes a "will to power," a step beyond the status quo of ones life in order to stretch, extend and cultivate its limits virtually.[9]

> Leisure and idleness.—There is an Indian savagery, a savagery peculiar to the Indian blood, in the manner in which the Americans strive after gold: and the breathless hurry of their work—the characteristic vice of the New World—already begins to infect old Europe, and makes it savage also, spreading over it a strange lack of intellectuality. One is now ashamed of repose: even long reflection almost causes remorse of conscience. Thinking is done with a stopwatch, as dining is done with the eyes fixed on the financial newspaper; we live like men who are continually 'afraid of letting opportunities slip.' 'Better do anything whatever than nothing'—this principle also is a noose with which all culture and all higher taste may be strangled. And just as all form obviously disappears in this hurry of workers, so the sense for form itself, the ear and the eye for the melody of movement, also disappears.[10]

One is ashamed now of repose; long reflection almost causes remorse of conscience, we live like men who are continually afraid of letting opportunities slip. Better do anything whatever than nothing. Pertinent, if not prophetic sentences which presage by 130 years this contemporary dilemma.

Obviously Nietzsche himself still had enough time and idleness to develop the seismic sensibility that allowed him to anticipate and foresee, in a creative way, the lack Europe will factually experience in the centuries to come: the loss of leisure and idleness. He was the first

8 On the notion of sur-viving see: Jacques Derrida, Leben ist Überleben (Vienna, Passagen Press: 2005).

9 On the connection of "virtus" and "virtuality" in Nietzsche see: Arno Böhler, Nietzsches virtuelleWanderung im Sprachzeitraum des 'Gefährlichen Vielleicht', in: *Nietzscheforschung, Jahrbuch derNietzsche-Gesellschaft, Volume 11* (München, Akademie Press: 2004): pp. 251-264.

10 "Muße und Müßiggang.—Es ist eine indianerhafte, dem Indianer-Blute eigentümliche Wildheit in der Art, wie die Amerikaner nach Gold trachten: und ihre atemlose Hast der Arbeit—das eigentliche Laster der neuen Welt - beginnt bereits durch Ansteckung das alte Europa wild zu machen und eine ganz wunderliche Geistlosigkeit darüber zu breiten. Man schämt sich jetzt schon der Ruhe; das lange Nachsinnen macht beinahe Gewissensbisse. Man denkt mit der Uhr in der Hand, wie man zu Mittag isst, das Auge auf das Börsenblatt gerichtet, —man lebt wie einer, der fortwährend etwas 'versäumen könnte'. Lieber irgend etwas tun als nichts'—auch dieser Grundsatz ist eine Schnur, um aller Bildung und allem höheren Geschmack den Garaus zu machen. Und so wie sichtlich alle Formen an dieser Hast der Arbeitenden zugrundegehn: so geht auch das Gefühl für die Form selber, das Ohr und Auge für die Melodie der Bewegungen zugrunde. " Friedrich Nietzsche, *KSA Vol.3*, §329, 556.

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one, probably, to clearly understand that a new specter haunts Europe to-day:[11] the silent, and therefore mostly unheard and displaced demand of a new politic of idleness which finally allows us, us other "Good Europeans," to get and stay in touch with the muses again: the messengers of joy, pleasure and gay cheerfulness, producing life-affirming values in a soul whenever they touch it.[12]

1.3 Old Europe

At this point of my text it may be wise to remember that Nietzsche's untimely call for a new culture of leisure and idleness, as the indispensable means to prepare somebody in such a way that one regenerates the capacity to be amused of life again, was, on the one hand, almost a one-man vigilance committee against the hype of enlightenment philosophies during his time. But, on the other hand—being a professor of classical ancient philology— Nietzsche knew better than anybody else that his call for a new politic of the muses was untimely only within the context of his times, while, on the other hand, it was a simple quote[13] of the most ancient Greek concepts of the political.

A fact that becomes obvious in particular whenever Greek philosophers speak about "amousia": a status, in which a person or society in general has lost contact with the muses. The effects of such an unpleasant state are, at least in the view of ancient philosophers, absolutely predictable. What necessarily follows such a condition is a cultural decline towards barbarism, ignorance, corruption and decadence.—a "culture" of resentment, in which the muses, the sources of corporal amusement, creativity, and gayness have been replaced by the uncanny guest of (European) nihilism.[14]

11 "A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of Communism. All the Powers of old Europe have enteredinto a holy alliance to exorcise this specter: Pope and Czar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals andGerman police-spies. Where is the party in opposition that has not been decried as Communistic by itsopponents in power? Where is the Opposition that has not hurled back the branding reproach ofCommunism, against the more advanced opposition parties, as well as against its reactionary adversaries?"Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto,* (London, Bildungsgesellschaft für Arbeiter:1848).

German version: "Ein Gespenst geht um in Europa - das Gespenst des Kommunismus. Alle Mächte des alten Europa haben sich zu einer heiligen Hetzjagd gegen dies Gespenst verbündet, der Papst und der Zar, Metternich und Guizot, französische Radikale und deutsche Polizisten. Wo ist die Oppositionspartei, die nicht von ihren regierenden Gegnern als kommunistisch verschrien worden wäre, wo die Oppositionspartei, die der fortgeschritteneren Oppositionsleuten sowohl wie ihren reaktionären Gegnern den brandmarkenden Vorwurf des Kommunismus nicht zurückgeschleudert hätte? Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels, *Das Manifest der kommunistischen Partei* (London, Bildungsgesellschaft für Arbeiter: 1848).

12 On the notion of touching see: Jacques Derrida, On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy, Werner Hamacher(Ed.), tr. by Christine Irizarry (Stanford California, Stanford University Press: 2005).

13 On the gesture of "quoting history" see: *Judith Butler, Excitable Speech A Politics of the Performative* (New York, Routledge: 1997) and Jacques Derrida, *LIMITED INC* (Illinois, Northwestern University Press: 1st edition 1988

14 Concerning the function of the muses in ancient Greek culture see Walter F. Otto, *Die Musen und der göttliche Ursprung des Singens und Sagens* (Düsseldorf-Köln, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: 1955): p. 68.

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In his Politeia Plato referred to this state of "a-mousia" in a passage in which Socrates expresses his concern that everybody who has failed to stay in contact with the muses will finally become weak, deaf, blind, and insensitive.[15] And in respect to somebody who really has lost any sense for the muses, Socrates even proclaims that such a person will become entirely irrational and incomprehensible in the end, since losing one's sense for the rhythm of things would make a soul entirely tact- and graceless, out-of-tune and barbaric, until such a person, finally, will have lost any means to solve his/her problems other than by savageness and brutality.[16]

1.4. Nietzsche's Politics of a New Dance Culture

What ancient philosophers called "amousia," the barbaric lack of any sense for the rhythm of things, is precisely what Nietzsche had in mind when he developed his own concept of decadence as the condition of somebody who has been corrupted physiologically.—a theory deeply combined with Nietzsche's critique of a certain Christian heritage that has separated man from his bodily instincts and finally taught us to misunderstand our bodies and reject our corporeal being while putting everything "natural," "instinctive," and "resolute" under quotation marks. After two thousand years of Christianity, modern man necessarily expresses a contradiction of values to Nietzsche. Not only discursively but even bio-physiologically, because the incorporation of the discourse of Christianity has poisoned and corrupted our corporeal status up to a point where everything "natural" and "corporal" has been replaced successively through discursive practices till this second, cultural nature has become a first one.

> For since we are now the products of earlier generations, we are also the products of their aberrations, passions, mistakes, and even crimes. It is impossible to loose oneself from this chain entirely. When we condemn that confusion and consider ourselves released from it, then we have not overcome the fact that we are derived from it. In the best case, we bring the matter to a conflict between our inherited customary nature and our knowledge, in fact, even to a war between a new strict discipline and how we have been brought up and what we have inherited from time immemorial. We cultivate a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature, so that the first nature atrophies.

15 "Wie aber, wenn er nun gar nichts anderes tut noch mit irgendeiner anderen Muse irgend Gemeinschaft hat? Muß nicht, wenn auch etwas Lernbegieriges in seiner Seele war, dieses, da es keine Kenntnis noch Untersuchung zu kosten bekommt, an keiner Red noch anderer Musik teilhat, notwendig schwach, und taub und blind werden, da es weder aufgeregt noch genährt wird, noch seine Wahrnehmungen gereinigt?—So verhält es sich." *Platon, Politeia, in Collected Works,* tr. by F. Schleiermacher, Vol.2, 3rd Book 411d-e (Hamburg, Rowohlts Enzyklopädie: 1994): p. 309.

16 "Ein Redefeind, meine ich, wird also ein solcher, und ein ganz Musenloser; und mit Überredung durch Worte weiß er nichts mehr anzugreifen, sondern nur mit Gewalt und Wildheit wie ein Tier will er alles ausrichten, und in Unverstand und linkischem Wesen, taktlos und ohne Anmut lebt er." *Platon, Politeia, in Collected Works*, tr. by F. Schleiermacher, Vol.2, 3rd Book 411d-e (Hamburg, Rowohlts Enzyklopädie: 1994): p. 309.

A recently published philosophical approach on the fundamental function of leisure and idleness for our lives one can find in Hans-Dieter Bahr, Der Babylonische Logos (Vienna, Passagen Press: 2004) and Christoph Wulf/Jörg Zirfas (Eds.), Muße, in: *Paragrana, Internationale Zeitschrift für Historische Anthropologie, Vol.16, Book 1*, (Berlin, Akademie Press: 2007).

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> It is an attempt to give oneself, as it were, a past a posteriori, out of which we may be descended in opposition to the one from which we are descended.[17]

Even though Nietzsche vitally criticizes this process of replacing the powerful "natural" [18] instincts of our bodies by a discourse that treats bodies as if they would be the devil themselves, this weak, deaf, blind, to wit decadent status of our modern bodies does not just indicate a sad bio-cultural condition to him. It can notify the condition of somebody too who is able, to wit, actually on the way to transform this fate into a gift. Like Nietzsche did himself, when he supposed that his "sickness prevented him from conforming to the expectations placed upon him by his family, religion, profession, or society."[19] He recovered from Christianity himself precisely because his sickness compelled him, autobiographically, to resist the expectations placed upon him by the Christian environment he was born in. The regular dysfunctions of his corporal condition were nothing else than the driving force that forced him to overcome the status quo of his corporal weakness to regain a health stronger and more powerful than the health of those who think that they have no need to resist expectations in order to overcome themselves.

Taking his own formula for greatness in human beings, amor fati,[20] autobiographically,[21] serious in applying it in his own life on his own life,[22] Nietzsche transfigured his bodily pain into a fate while embracing it. As Katja Brunkhorst expressed this issue in her book. Nietzsche's "genius was at its strongest as when making a virtue of a necessity, turning his personal suffering into art."[23]

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17 „Denn da wir nun einmal die Resultate früherer Geschlechter sind, sind wir auch die Resultate ihrerVerirrungen, Leidenschaften und Irrthümer, ja Verbrechen; es ist nicht möglich, sich ganz von dieser Kettezu lösen. Wenn wir jene Verirrungen verurtheilen und uns ihrer für enthoben erachten, so ist die Thatsachenicht beseitigt, dass wir aus ihnen herstammen. Wir bringen es im besten Falle zu einem Widerstreit derererbten, angestammten Natur und unserer Erkenntnisse, auch wohl zu einem Kampfe einer neuen strengenZucht gegen das von Alters her Angezogene und Angeborne, wir pflanzen eine neue Gewöhnung, einenneuen Instinkt, eine zweite Natur an, so dass die erste Natur abdorrt. Es ist ein Versuch, sich gleichsam aposteriori eine Vergangenheit zu geben, aus der man stammen möchte, im Gegensatz zu der, aus der manstammt —" Friedrich Nietzsche, *KSA Vol.1*, Unzeitgemäße Betrachtung II §3, 270.

18 A body, as a will to power, and not merely a will to survive in a certain status quo (conatus), follows itsvery own nature as long as it moves beyond itself, stretching and extending the borders of its very ownbeing-in-the-world. It is this act of re-signing ones very own corporal existence as a singular mode in whicha will to power survives, and not only the human race or the common place of a rational being, thatNietzsche embraces when every he asks us to affirm a life in an all embracing act of a great affimration:amor fati.

19 Kimerer L. LaMothe, Nietzsche's Dancers (New York, Palgrave Macmillan: 2006): p. 103. Reviewed byArno Böhler, *Nietzsche Circle Reviews* [http://www.nietzschecircle.com/review14.html].

20 "My formula for greatness in a human being is amor fati: that one wants nothing to be different, notforward, not backward, not in all eternity." German original: "Meine Formel für die Grösse am Menschenist amor fati: dass man Nichts anders haben will, vorwärts nicht, rückwärts nicht, in alle Ewigkeit nicht."Friedrich Nietzsche, *KSA Vol.6*, Warum ich so klug bin §10, 297.

21 On the auto-bio-graphical aspect of Nietzsche's corpus see: Arno Böhler, Der auto-bio-graphischeKörper, in: *GRENZ-film (Ed.), Philosophy On Stage, Double DVD* (Vienna, Passagen Press: 2007).

22 On the difficulties that occur in applying a general formula on a proper name see: Jacques Derrida, As if Iwere Dead (Vienna, Turia + Kant: 2000).

23 Katja Brunkhorst, 'Verwandt-Verwandelt' *Nietzsche's Presence in Rilke* (München, IUDICIUM:

From this one can learn that the decadent status of a body, denoted by ancient Greek philosophers by the word "a-mousia"—a body, which has lost any contact with the muses—is an ambivalent condition in itself, since "a-mousia," "Un-bildung," can indicate two things to Nietzsche. It can be the bodily expression of a corrupt and weak corporeal status. But it can, as well, denote the status of a body ready to revolt against its own unpleasant state in order to overcome it. "Today there is perhaps no more decisive mark of a higher nature, […] than that of being divided in this sense and a genuine battleground of these opposed values."[24]

Once, the revolt against the displacement of the muses factually takes place in a body, a Dionysian power has started to ex-scribe[25] and overrule its former condition in order to become somebody else: a Dionysian body, liberated from all kinds of bio-politics[26] which denounce Earth and the corporality of our human, all to human being-here.

In *Nietzsche's Dancers* (2006) Kimerer L. LaMothe has shown that dance, dance as a bodily practice, is precisely the muse Nietzsche was longing for to induce this physiological transformation in modern (wo-)man in order to newly regenerate the corrupt status of our bodies that have been enslaved and suppressed by both cultural strains dominating Western Europe: Christianity as well as its secular arm, the enlightenment tradition which disciplines everybody to make one a decent member of a worldwide economic labor force: a homo oeconomicus.

To realize such a historical fate in which one begins to ex-scribe these traditional misunderstandings of the "natural" needs of our bodies, one has to become a free spirit first to Nietzsche. Someone "unbound by convention, tradition, or habit," someone who has "the vitality and discernment needed to do what is necessary for her own health. One who finds in the death of God an occasion to love her bodily becoming."[27] However, every artist per se is "a person who has not forgotten his bodily becoming, and who, in making art, speaks to the artist in each of us"[28]—what is special about a dancer is that the dancer communicates bodily movements, kinetic signs rather than semantic significance only.

A dancer works with the physiological aspects of a signifier rather than with its fixed semantic meaning, with tensions rather than with fixed extensions, with intensive corporal rhythms rather than with things located at a distinct place. Therefore Jean-Luc Nancy could simply call it a tension. "A body is therefore a tension. And the Greek root of this word is '*tonos*', the ton. A

2006): p. 147.

24 "Man könnte selbst sagen, […] dass es heute vielleicht kein entscheidenderes Abzeichen der 'höheren Natur,' der geistigeren Natur giebt, als zweispaltig in jenem Sinne und wirklich noch ein Kampfplatz fürjene Gegensätze zu sein." Friedrich Nietzsche, KSA Vol.5, Erste Abhandlung §16, 285-286. See too:Kimerer L. LaMothe, *Nietzsche's Dancers* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan: 2006): p. 82.

25 Concerning the concept of ex-scribing a body see: Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus* (Paris, Éditions Métailiè:2000).

26 It is Michel Foucault, of course, who did analyze the governmentality of biopolitics in contemporarypolitics. Michel Foucault, Naissance de la biopolitique: cours au Collège de France 1978-1979 (Paris,Gallimard & Seuil: 2004).

27 Kimerer L. LaMothe, Nietzsche's Dancers (New York, Palgrave Macmillan: 2006): p. 56.

28 Kimerer L. LaMothe, Nietzsche's Dancers (New York, Palgrave Macmillan: 2006): p. 98

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body is a ton […] A body is a tonus."[29]

Since bodies are capable of experiencing, intensively, the tensional aspect of ex-tensional things, they are the local tonos of worldwide strings (ex-tensions) in the precise ancient Greek sense of the word "mousikós." Their seismic capacity puts them into a position in which they are able to detect the movements of corporal things so that a body, in itself, becomes a kind of "thoughtful," fragile being, being exposed to the physical eruptions of others.[30]

Since dance is a praxis that weights the significance of a body while moving it from one place to another (Greek: metaphoréo), it finally becomes the most primordial means to Nietzsche to evaluate the "real" weight, significance and value of things, at least in the corpus of his latest works.

> For one cannot subtract dancing in every form from a noble education—to be able to dance with one's feet, with concepts, with words: need I still add that one must be able to do it with the pen too—that one must learn to write?[31]

From this point of view one can even read his Zarathustra as the story of somebody who wants to make his body dance. In teaching the human race to educate its senses, to believe in Earth and our bodies, Zarathustra invites everybody to resist ascetic ideals, at least in the priestly sense of this word, in order to learn to see, think, speak and write anew while performing an artistic kind of asceticism that does not denounce but refine the sensuality of our corporal existence in a noble way.

> You have to learn to see, you have to learn to think, you have to learn to speak and write: in all three cases the goal is a noble culture.—Learning to see—accustoming the eye to rest, to patience, to letting things come to it; learning to defer judgment, to encircle and encompass the individual case on all sides. This is the first preparatory schooling for intellectuality: not to react immediately to a stimulus but to take in hand the inhibiting, isolating instincts. Learning to see as I understand it, is almost what is called in unphilosophical language 'strong will': the most important thing about it is precisely not to 'will', to be able to defer decision. Every lack of intellectuality, every vulgarity is based on the inability to resist a stimulus—you must react, you follow

29 "Ein Körper ist folglich eine Spannung [tension]. Und die griechische Wurzel des Wortes ist 'tonos', derTon. Ein Körper ist ein Ton. […] Ein Körper ist ein Tonus." Jean-Luc Nancy, Corpus (Berlin, Diaphanes:2003): p. 124.

30 Calling himself a dynamite, a kind of earthquake, Nietzsche's corpus can largely be read as a testimony of his seismographic body by virtue of which he was able to sense, check, and evaluate the corporal sound of things with the well tuned "hammer" of his senses, especially of his ear that was capable to reveal the unheard, forbidden truth of things while testing the sound of their corporal tonos.

31 "Man kann nämlich das Tanzen in jeder Form nicht von der vornehmen Erziehung abrechnen, Tanzenkönnen mit den Füssen, mit den Begriffen, mit den Worten; habe ich noch zu sagen, dass man es auch mitder Feder können muss, — dass man schreiben lernen muss?" Friedrich Nietzsche, KSA Vol.6, Was denDeutschen abgeht §7, 110. See too: Kimerer L. LaMothe, *Nietzsche's Dancers* (New York, PalgraveMacmillan: 2006): p. 93.

every impulse.[32]

It is this artistic practice of a sensomotoric asceticism that makes the receptors of our bodily sensory noble ones because one has learned to resist stimuli already on a corporal level almost immediately when they take place. Such a noble mode of sensual perception therefore is always already a re-flected one. A corporal form of "thinking," not in the sense of a conscious, rational judgment, as enlightenment philosophers interpreted thinking in an intellectualistic way, but as a passive, receptive way of cogitatio that widely takes place unconsciously: via passive synthesis rather than through intentional acts, according to the necessities of our corporal needs rather than according to intellectual needs. "There is more sagacity in your body than in your best wisdom. And who could know wherefore your body requires your best wisdom?"[33]

1.5 Aristocratic democracy

It was this promising "Ode to Joy," devoted to the muses, that once moved Europe almost enthusiastically, in which somebody still has leisure and idleness enough to discover a receptive, joyful form of "thinking" that takes place in the seismic sensitivity of every body that has learned to resist, almost immediately, external stimuli in a contemplative way.

In fact, once there were times in which Europe indeed was amused by this aristocratic vision of a "great politic," a politic of the muses, prizing the contemplative part of life more than the so called "active" one, represented by the unholy alliance of two figures in modern times: the figure of the "worker" and the "businessman" as the real proponents of a global, bourgeois labor force.[34]

If one considers these historical circumstances we are in right now, one may be compelled to ask oneself, at least in silence: "Isn't it a shame what contemporary Europe has made out of this Old European dream that once laid at the bottom of ancient Greek philosophy and the

32 „Man hat sehen zu lernen, man hat denken zu lernen, man hat sprechen zu lernen: das Ziel in allen Dreienist eine vornehme Cultur. — Sehen lernen — dem Auge die Ruhe, die Geduld, das An-sich-herankommenlassen angewöhnen; das Urtheil hinausschieben, den Einzelfall von allen Seiten umgehn und umfassenlernen. Das ist die erste Vorschulung zur Geistigkeit: auf einen Reiz nicht sofort reagieren, sondern diehemmenden, die abschliessenden Instinkte in die Hand bekommen. Sehen lernen, so wie ich es verstehe, ist beinahe Das, was die unphilosophische Sprechweise den starken Willen nennt: das Wesentliche daran ist gerade, nicht ‚wollen', die Entscheidung aussetzen können. Alle Ungeistigkeit, alle Gemeinheit beruht auf dem Unvermögen, einem Reize Widerstand zu leisten — man muss reagieren, man folgt einem Impuls." Friedrich Nietzsche, *KSA Vol. 6*, 108-109.

33 "Es ist mehr Vernunft in deinem Leibe, als in deiner besten Weisheit. Und wer weiss denn, wozu deinLeib gerade deine beste Weisheit nöthig hat?" Friedrich Nietzsche, *KSA Vol.4, Also sprach Zarathustra I,Von den Verächtern des Leibes, 40*.

34 Since these times, in which the restless people are most prized in our societies, in fact we all became"independent" in a certain sense. Now we are all "free" and "self responsible persons"; free to install thesoftware of our computer alone, to manage our bank accounts ourselves via internet banking, to earn themoney oneself needed to make our own living, to educate our children, to provide our family with healthinsurance etc., etc., etc. In fact—actually we all have become "mature, self responsible persons in a freeand open society." Free in the sense that we are compelled and enslaved to be productive all the time.

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most primordial myths of ancient Europe: Hesiod's Theogony and Homer's Hymn to the Muses. Hasn't it been entirely replaced, meanwhile, by the dream of the self-made man and self-made woman? A modern dream that has started to occupy and 'enlighten' Europe in the very moment the values of idleness have been devaluated and the contemplative values, most prized in former Europe, have been replaced by the overvaluation of the active part of life?"

But if there should be any truth in Hegel's and Heidegger's concepts of historical origins: that the chronological beginning of something is the archeological opening of all possibilities which inherently constitute the form of the arriving guest—the political promise of ancient politics necessarily would still haunt Europe to-day.

It is clear that in postmodern times, the historical circumstances we are living under right now, such a vision has to sound foolish—at least totally sentimental—especially once one would start to believe in it politically. Since these ancient times, at least for postmodern times, have gone forever.

It is true. Within a postmodern world, globally installing the homo oeconomicus everywhere on Earth, an aristocratic form of democracy has no chance to become a real political force. Indeed one would have to get rid of these conditions and replace them by a better, namely a more aristocratic, form of democracy in order to make this alternative dream happen.

From this perspective another sentence of Nietzsche starts to make sense. "You don't think that by leisure and idling I'm talking about you, do you, you lazybones?"[35]

35 "Ihr meint doch nicht, daß ich mit Muße und Müßigkeit auf euch ziele, ihr Faultiere?—" Friedrich Nietzsche, KSA Vol.2, §284, 232.

The Agonist
A Nietzsche Circle Journal

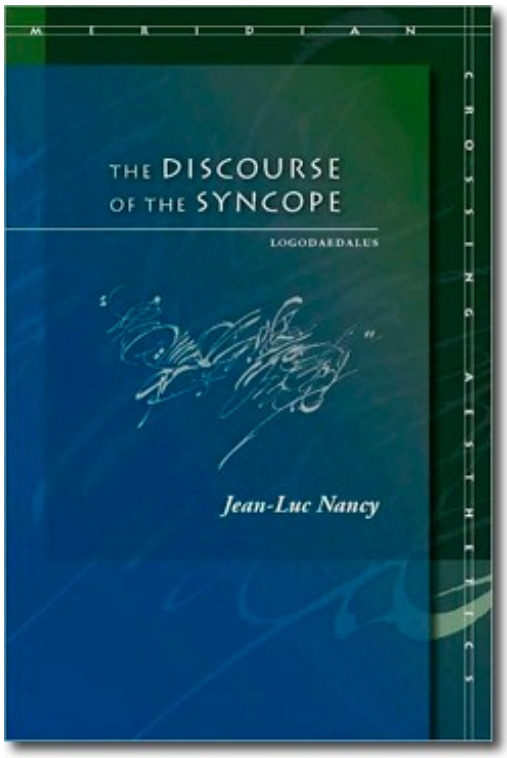
Book Review of

The Discourse of the Syncope: Logodaedalus

by Jean-Luc Nancy (Lexington Books, 1976)

reviewed by Nicholas Birns

The Cunning Kant



In the summer of 1985, I, for perhaps the only time in my life, held in my hand a physical copy of the Sunday *Boston Globe*. Perusing the newspaper on the grass during a fine July day, I found the Magazine section contained *a* column by (I assumed) a longtime regular for the Magazine. He was a middle-aged man, the type who writes charming familiar essays about the whimsies of middle-aged men, whose ultimate point is to show life is neither too perfect nor too troubling. In this column, he described his son's first semester at college. The son, perhaps a few weeks into the semester, had written his father, bespeaking his frustrations with reading Kant in his Intro to Philosophy class. The son wrote something like this: "I was trying to analyze why I find Kant so indigestible, and I have come to this conclusion: all language requires metaphor—we cannot describe something in itself but we have to use imagery and comparison to do so. Kant's abstractions are not readable because they are not metaphoric." The father, writing in the column, commented more or less, "Aw shucks—isn't this great, this is precisely why you send your kids off to college, to get this sort of discovery. Gosh, that kid sure is thinking thoughts his old man never could."

Immediately, one saw manifold problems here. First of all, intellectual self-confidence is a good thing to instill, encourage, or solicit in the young. But for a college freshman to believe that he just blew Kant out of the water sets up a kind of hubris that is not only riding for a fall but in a sense is so complacent that it is lucky if it ever gets sufficiently hubristic in absolute terms to even be eligible to ride for a fall. Second is the father's evident delight in this postulated "elimination"

of Kant from the canon of meaningful linguistic expression. Do you send your son to college so he circumvents, through convenient and precipitous dismissal, one of the major figures of world philosophy? Third, and in a sense most urgent, is that, as I am sure the reader of this review has already discerned, the very structure of the son's dismissal of Kant is done in terms remarkably Kantian. Kant was *par excellence* not knowing the absolute in itself but only through apprehensions of the absolute; we project or postulate or (Kant's Humean legacy) infer from these apprehensions; we discern where they are going even as they fade out asymptotically on the horizon. The framework by which we know that we cannot know the absolute also constitutes the only categories in which we possibly can even have an inkling of it. Kant himself would agree that any attempt to distill the absolute truth *sans* linguistic interference is wrong.

But the son's comment, and the father's ready acceptance of it, was, in its underlying meaning, perhaps not exclusively about Kant, or even about philosophy. It was about literature, and literary language, and it explains a good deal of why people outside the academy have, for the past 30 years, rejected recent developments in literary theory. If one were to look at the various aesthetic manifestoes of the past two centuries, one would think that the bourgeoisie has a fear of the aesthetic, that the inability of what Théophile Gautier called "l'art pour l'art" to be efficient in the realm of commodity culture, to have its expenditures be credited with ready meaning, led those concerned with practicality to scorn it. This should not be underestimated. But it may well be that a certain amount of metaphor is fully tolerable by mainstream society, as long as it is conclusively walled off from other kinds of meaning. To say all language is metaphorical *seems* destabilizing, but *is* not so, as what it is saying is that the linguistic is the metaphorical and is by definition not vulnerable to or inflected by the material or the inelegant. People outside academia tend to want to hold onto an idea of literature as concerned with language and form, not with politics and materiality, because to confine literature to a metaphorical level puts it into a box, renders it unthreatening, with the additional fillip that those who praise it get the bonus of seeming to be sensitive to the presence of art and beauty.

Jean-Luc Nancy, in this, for a 'poststructuralist' approach, surprisingly early (1976) book on Kant, confronts the allegedly non-metaphorical, inelegant nature of Kant's language, its 'will to being a discourse, by definition, *without* style" (146). Nancy does this not to dismiss it but to affirm its value as a mode of exposition. In doing this, Nancy almost passively refutes the contention that Kant does not employ metaphor; not that he employs metaphor the same way as everyone else, but that his non-employment of metaphor constitutes a particularly crafty—Daedalian!—employment of metaphor, a labyrinth of phrasing whose rigor is at once an irremovable wall and a tantalizing tease. It is to Nancy's great credit that this book, appearing in Stanford's prodigious Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics series under the supervision of Werner Hamacher, situates its assertions about the 'renunciation' (38) 'disappointment' (39), and 'undecideability' (59) of Kant's language specifically within the site of Kant's textuality itself. This is, by implication, a book

The Discourse of the Syncope: Logodaedalus

reviewed by:

Nicholas Birns

about philosophy and language as such. But more specifically it is thoroughly, albeit playfully, a book about Kant. Indeed, at times Nancy strips the philosopher's name of its capital letter, partially to signify that 'kant' in German is a past participle of the verb *kennen*, to know, perhaps to signify a certain irreverence towards the monument of Kant with a capital K, which has tended to forestall explicit questionings of time-honored premises about Kant and language.

The preface by translator Saul Anton meditates lengthily on the un-translatability of '*tenir un discours'*: "to make a speech: but also 'to hold a position": there is a sense both of exposition and sustenance. Anton variously translates *tenu* as 'spoken' and 'held up.' Anton is right to not project any single English equivalent, yet there is one that comes close to—yet very far from—being appropriate. Surely "to hold forth upon" is idiomatic in English, and keeps the tactile, prehensile aspect of *tenir*. Yet the English phrase implies precisely a non-philosophical discourse, what the blowhard at the next table at the restaurant bloviates about; 'holding forth' is apodictically short of the philosophical, especially the Kantian-philosophical. I am not suggesting Anton should have used 'to hold forth,' merely observing that it is in the possible field of linguistic reference here and that its narrow-miss inappropriateness says something about the entire problem of translating this sort of text into English.

There is also the related verbal motif of 'tenacity," of holding on to something in a kind of dogged effort, and 'tenacity' and 'eloquence' tend to be registered in inverse variation. Anton's point about *tenir un discours* being untranslatable into English gains heft when one considers how dissociated tenacity is from any idea of intellectual brilliance—would one ever describe Einstein (as suggested by Roland Barthes' piece on his brain in *Mythologies*), Riemann, or for that matter Nancy as 'tenacious'?—and indeed that the word is at times applied with a certain condescension. *'Tenir'* in French also has a temporal element; we have only to realize that *maintenant*, the French word for 'now,' refers to the hand being held out, as if to signify a discrete moment of presence but also to suggest the passage of time, which makes every 'now' also a gesture. And tenacity is just that which persists through time, despite challenges. Often when one considers questions of translation one is supposed to meditate on the original language and how it poses unsolvable enigmas, but here it is what the enigmas tell us about English that is perhaps most intriguing. Anton should, incidentally, have been credited on the cover page with the translation. Anton did a thorough and creditable job on a hybrid, shape-shifting text, made even more difficult, as Nancy implies in his own 2006 preface, by an awareness of the later course of the author's thought, difficult to exclude when translating such an early text. Stanford University Press should make sure to credit him more prominently in the second edition.

Anton, incidentally, refers to this work as *Logodaedalus*, even though the publisher gives *The Discourse of the Syncope* upper-case treatment and gives the subtitle only in inconspicuous lower case. This book is indeed only the first part of a two-part project, but the other part, *Kosmotheoros*, was never completed. This structure—of course in itself mirroring the Kantian trope of the observable as a graspable instantiation of an absent whole—employs both the idea of

the microcosm and the microcosm—*Logodaedalus* pertains to verbal artifices and the slippages of its putative absence, *Kosmotheoros* would have, if ever written, pertained to the regulative, 'geometric,' categorical side of Kant and of the discourse ancillary to or epiphenomenal of Kant. This division into diptych is emblematic of the two major senses of syncope, in French and even *mutatis mutandis* in English. Syncope is the odd word best known for either its medical or musical pertinence. In medicine, syncope refers to a pause in a normal biological process, most principally a loss of consciousness. Anton helpfully adds that *avoir un syncope* is colloquial French for 'have a heart attack,' presumably in the colloquial, largely figurative sense in which one would say "I had a heart attack when I saw the prices on the menu" and so on. Syncopation in music is an emphasis (or lack of emphasis) where none is expected. It is a disruption of the normal beat. In music, syncopation is essentially something you want to happen; it adds friction and interest to the beat. In medicine, syncope is something you emphatically do not want to happen. The syncope is not a lacuna or a caesura. It is not, at least in the most pedantic use of the term, a negation. Nancy even goes so far as to say the syncope is a sort of synthesis—we might say it is a bump on the road to synthesis that is irremovably on that road yet prevents its course from ever amounting to conclusive synthesis in the way we usually think of the term.

The Kantian trope of the veil as a limit to knowledge means that exposition and beauty cannot be subsumed into one totality. What is interesting is that the term is familiar in both medical and, even more so (at least in English) musical discourses, yet its meaning in each has not necessarily infiltrated the other—lending heft to the integrity of the *Logodaedalus-Kosmotheoros* dyad, in other words, grounding it lexically and not in any a priori distinction between the natural and social sciences. Even more striking is that the syncope, though certainly an effect of linguistic disruption, is a different sort than an aporia or a fissure. The syncope is a bump, not a gap. Its spatial corollary is not absence, but spin. And it is not the generalized effect of linguistic instability *an sich*, but a phenomenon specific to Kant's discourse—a sort of literariness that comes from the effort to deny literariness, that is, nonetheless, and *pace* our father-son duo, literary, but is rendered by the rigor of Kant's style and the internal struggle of his parergal discourse with that rigor's specific *kind* of literariness. Nancy speaks of the "undecideable inscription of absence" (158) as meta-mathematical and not 'dubious" (8), which is a move reminiscent of the later work of Alain Badiou.

This conceptualized undecideability underlies the association of the syncope with the extreme craftsmanship of logodaedalism and even the *Witz* or *bon mot,* a favorite subject of Nancy's, whose contradictions are given further pressure by the containment of epigrammatic poise, which is yet disruptive to presumptions of uncomplicated exposition. The *Witz*, in nearly a Freudian sense, offered embarrassment or exposure as well as simply being witty in the more presentable sense; in other words it represents both the ultimate in conscious formulation of language and the limits or self-undoing of that conscious formulation. What Nancy extrapolates from Kant's mode of linguistic self-awareness that was not merely Romantic expressiveness or its modern update in

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the psychic automatism of the Surrealists. Another way of theorizing linguistic instability without fetishizing or sentimentalizing it must be found: and Nietzsche, Bataille, Leiris, Heidegger (for all his political problems), Sartre (for all *his* political problems), Derrida, Foucault, Nancy, Nancy's late collaborator Lacoue-Labarthe, all made efforts—Derrida of course most famously in *Glas*, published the same year as the French original of Nancy's Kant book—to pursue this line of thinking. The important point here, as Anton indicates in a different way in his prologue, is that all this was not simply a result of May 1968 or a certain impasse in mid-1960s structuralism but had its basis in an intermittently subterranean channel (rhizome?) of thought that extends much further back.

One hallmark of this thought-strand is not to enforce artificial distinctions between expository and imaginative language of the sort that ultimately are able to subtend the Sunday familiar essays of the world. Kant's era saw a merging of philosophy and poetry—most obviously in Schiller and, as Nancy (with Lacoue-Labarthe) has shown in *The Literary Absolute*, the 'Jena Romantics.' Though far removed from 'normal' Romantic expressivism, Kant was not entirely *not* of it. Nancy asserts that exposition is not just unfettered discourse or rendered speech, but a linguistic mode that has its own pitfalls. Presentation (*Darstellung*) is indeed not the same as *Dichtung* (poetry). Kant's prose, Nancy suggests, is 'beautiful' in the way that a Mondrian painting or a Breuer chair is beautiful; the beauty is in the uninflected nature of the exposition that does not foreground the visible presence of beauty. But wait: this exposition, for Nancy, is not wholly successful; in attempting to hide beauty as a product in favor of the beauty of the process (itself a paradox), a new, stranger kind of beauty is revealed. In transparently parading the product, there is a gap, a bump—a syncopation—by which the non-present beauty is insistently, surreptitiously, manifested. The syncope is that which rhetoric takes in, hides, and, virtually 'behind closed doors,' discloses.

This syncopation does not make Kant metaphorical in a way that the *Globe* columnist's son wanted him to be, but it does mean that within the dryness of Kant's *Darstellung* there are deposits of covert *Dichtung,* "the rest of literature," both potential treasure and potential waste. And yet *Dichtung,* the kernel of creative expression, is not strictly identical to writing, or the production of that expression; the *Schriftsteller*, the author, is on the other side of *Darstellung* from *Dichtung,* and that would apply not just in the first place to the philosopher but to any kind of actual literary work, which need to be propelled by the trace of their production if the inner mystery of their *Dichtung* is to be displayed.

Nancy makes a simple yet very important assertion, far more declarative than most of what he says in *Logodaedalus*: that Kant wrote philosophy in German in *a day when* (155) "German [wa]s a language not very much written"; in other words, when scholarly writing by Germans was done in French or Latin. Kant in a sense is rendering the philosophical equivalent of Luther's Bible, putting philosophy into language for really the first time. Thus the hesitancy of the prose is a part of this; in a way we should compare Kant's German more to say the English

of Hobbes or perhaps even Hoccleve than of Hume. Given the engrafted, virtually adaptive relationship between *Also Sprach Zarathustra* and Luther's Bible, recently demonstrated by Graham Parkes in his Oxford translation, perhaps we can see Luther, Kant, and Nietzsche as three major non-demonstrative as Nancy might say, automonstrative, instances of the difficulty of even writing in German, and the rare and dangerous insights won through this difficulty. Nancy cryptically announces that "Logodaedalus is also Zarathustra" (159).

This makes Kant more prophetic, Zarathustra, or his programmer, more cunning. Perhaps we can see Luther, Kant, and Nietzsche as three major non-literary (in the first instance) excavators of a space that a belated German literary language could fill. As a longtime professor in the liminal region of Strasbourg, Nancy knows well the complicated relationship between French and German languages, territorial and otherwise, and the dangers of any too-totalizing a solution of them. This once more puts him in the tradition of Nietzsche and Bataille, whose only solution of the endemic problems here may be a hyperaware self-consciousness of them. There is, by the way, a special aspect of Kant's name which treads particularly 'wittily' across the Franco-German fold, K is a letter that is virtually nonexistent in French and its rare appearance in the language accrues comic overtones. Nancy quotes Kafka's *Trial* in such a way as to make it seem K stands for Kant, and in turn one wonders whether the incongruity of K in Romance languages is part of what Kafka was gesturing at in his metafictive use of his own initial letter. This is just one extrapolation afforded by the self-conscious weft of Nancy's exposition.

Nancy's book knows itself as a production in another way as well. The book is not just a treatise on Kant, but what the medieval would have called a '*cento*' or patchwork of quotations about Kant—jokes, imprecations, tributes, citations from various hands—in fact the book, for all its density, is about two steps away from being, in one direction, a coffee-table book (if accompanied by pictures of Kant and the people who contribute the quotes about him) or in another a "How Kant Can Change Your Life" pop-manual. In the right context, this potential popularizing can be a disruptive move. It is so here, as Nancy takes us past the monumental Kant of our accustomed reception-history and shows us a Kant who was popular in his own day and who astonished younger foreign visitors such as Thomas de Quincey (21) by talking of essentially popular matters. Of course, to say Kant is 'mainly' popular is the same as saying he is 'mainly' metaphorical—impossible.

That Nancy parades the popular Kant also cajoles us to accept Kant's essential unpopularity. What Nancy is trying to do is leaven Kant's staid transmitted persona with just enough of the popular and metaphorical elements that are there, even as minority strains, in order to show us the plural, distended performance—the syncopation—of Kant's language. But the quotes embedded by Nancy in his own *Darstellung* also show us why Kant, after his death, has been at once so inescapable and so continually *un*popular. Several of the sampled authors—people as different as Michelet and Artaud—imply Kant lacks masculinity, that he is, in Artaud's words (xxiv) 'a little girl.' There is, among Nancy's sampled texts, a persistent will to envision Kant as sexually incon-

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gruous, preposterous, or nonfunctional. The lengthiest and funniest example of this in Nancy's book is an excerpt from Louis Guilloux's 1935 novel *Le Sang Noir*. In the novel, a misbehaving student in a high school class is called out by Professor Cripure; the student asks derisively if Kant was a virgin, but not before calling Kant the author of the **"*Cripure* *of Pure Reason.*"**

The 'Cripure' parapraxis, like the opening scene of *Madame Bovary,* illustrates the endless fun to be had with proper names by children, a fun which improvises upon an inherent syncopation between name and referent. In calling Kant the author of the *'Cripure of Pure Reason*' the child is substituting a personal name for a philosophical term, someone known to him in person of someone known to him only in a book, the medium of intellectual instruction (his teacher) for the substance of the instruction (his book). But even as the student embarrasses himself with this confusion, his question about Kant's virginity actually, like the later pedagogic response of the *Globe* columnist's son, represents an aspiration towards the conventional. With our knowledge that Kant was a lifelong bachelor, the reader seeks his sexual affect—in a way, part of Kant's proclaimed difficulty to the 'general reader' is less intellectual than excited by the peculiarity of his apparent asexuality, whether known from his biography or merely 'inferred' from the 'dryness' of his prose. There is the sense that there is a certain connection between the seeming desiccation or abstraction of Kant's prose and a lack of sexual fruition. There is a double bind here: The great philosopher must be sexless, both out of a mystique of the purity of the intellect. Yet this is set off by a resentment that Kant is already smarter, invincibly systematic, and, to boot, more 'logodaedalic' than us—that in fact our only advantage is the postulated likelihood of having more achieved sex lives. To believe that Kant was a sexual being as well as an intellectual one would rob us of the one bit of *Schadenfreude* we can muster with respect to him. But there is also a worry about the asexual thinker, cognate with the earlier mentioned worry that the artist is economically unproductive, that the expenditure of art is inherently wasted. In this way, we want the thinker to have a 'fulfilled' sex life because we can see him or her enrolled in a libidinal economy. This will constrain one kind of pleasure—the aesthetic—in the name of another—the sexual. Thus the key point in the Guilloux text that the student is trying to make a point about Kant's asexuality that he thinks will ingratiate himself with his teacher, which the verbal matrix reveals by the unintentional use of the teacher's name. Kant's pure *Critique* is unpurified by association with the prosaic pedagogue Cripure.

"Shouldn't the philosopher be virile?" (164) But would we be happy if he really were? We do not want Kant to have any sort of discernible sex life for the same reason that the columnist father was pleased at his son 'discovering' Kant was disqualified from being meaningful by not using metaphor. We exclude Kant from a safe circle composed of those who possess a quality that we think we hold. Kant becomes the outsider. The man who, as imagined by Musil's all-too-normatively educated Young Törless, has "solved the problems of philosophy once and for all" (142) becomes, through that very aspiration to the normative, rejected by the norm. He is seen as the outcast, the vagabond, the scapegoat. The imperturbable sage of Königsberg is expelled

by ‘exposés’ (in both the English and French senses of the word), such as that by the columnist’s son, and is rendered abject: the unsexed, the unmetaphorical. But this may not be the final move. Kant’s logodaedalic determination can, Nancy implies, through “curious acrobatics” (126), shake this impasse: syncopate it through almost invisibly subtle but nonetheless tangibly present linguistic “play of alternation” (35).

Nicholas Birns is currently working on Theory After Theory: An Overview of Contemporary Thought About Literature*, under contract to Broadview Press.*

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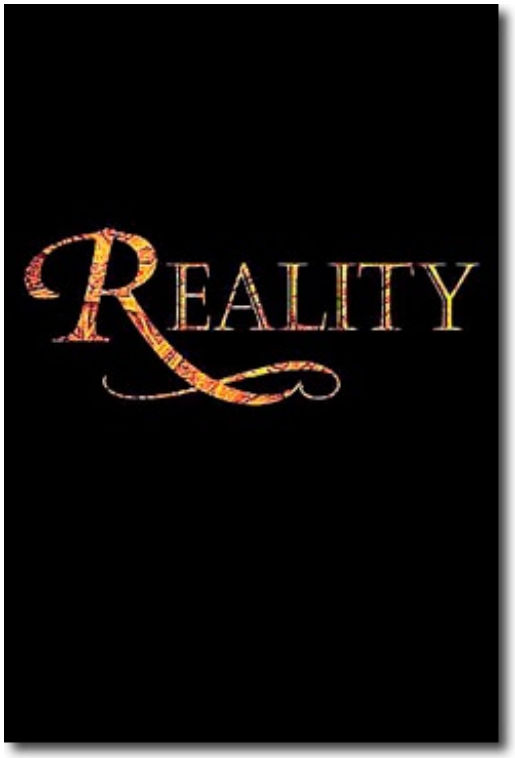
The Agonist
A Nietzsche Circle Journal

Book Review of

Reality

by Peter Kingsley (The Golden Sufi Center, 2003)
reviewed by Nicolas Leon Ruiz



Reality, by classicist and historian of philosophy Peter Kingsley, introduces us to a singular vision of the origins of western philosophy through a penetrating, in-depth study of Parmenides and Empedocles. In *Reality*, these two giants of Pre-Platonic philosophy appear in a wholly new light—as prophets and initiates—links in an ancient tradition of philosophy as a way of life and a sacred path. Here Kingsley builds on his earlier work, especially the seminal *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 1995) and his compact but inspired introduction to the poetry of Parmenides, *In the Dark Places of Wisdom* (The Golden Sufi Center, 1999). However, *Reality* goes well beyond both of these books, offering a thorough account of the philosophies of Parmenides and Empedocles as well as the history of the transmission (and distortion) of their writings from ancient sources through to modern scholars. Ultimately, Kingsley's aim in this book is not to offer his readers a new understanding of two founders of western philosophy. Instead, *Reality* provides a way into the lived experience of their teachings and their world—a world of great beauty, subtlety, meaning, and magic.

Parmenides

The first five chapters of *Reality* focus on the poem of Parmenides. On Kingsley's reading, Parmenides, founder of western logic, has been profoundly misunderstood: he was far from the solemn rationalist and purely abstract thinker he has been made out to be. Instead, Parmenides was an *iatromantis*—a "healer-prophet" and practicing priest of Apollo. His poem both records and invokes the ancient technique of ecstasy-through-stillness known as "incubation." His elu-

sive logic is, above all, a pathway to the divine.

Kingsley lays the groundwork for this radical departure from conventional understandings of Parmenides with an astute analysis of the "*proem*" (the formal introduction found at the start of many archaic works) of Parmenides' famous poem, which has long been "put aside as nothing but a rhetorical device, an allegory; as just a vague poetic attempt at describing how the philosopher leaves confusion for clarity, darkness for enlightenment" (29). As Kingsley dryly notes, before we do this to Parmenides, "it can be a good idea to look at what he has to say" because "[e]ach image plays its part in a completely coherent whole. Every single detail has its own particular place" (29).

Kingsley makes his case convincingly. He notes that the mythical imagery and geography of Parmenides' poem suggest a shamanic descent to the underworld, to the realms of the dead (29-31). The description of this journey evokes the practice of incubation and its ability to give access to other states of consciousness—far from being a mere allegory, the *proem* is a record of a real and powerful experience. He also points out that the language used by Parmenides is recognizably incantatory and initiatory (32-35) and that some of the oddest and least comprehensible details and irregularities of meter in the *proem* begin to make sense in an incubatory context (36-37). In addition to this, Kingsley reviews and interprets the almost totally neglected archeological evidence from mid-twentieth century excavations at Parmenides' hometown of Velia—evidence indicating that Parmenides was remembered in his native city as the founder of a priestly lineage and a "son of Apollo" for centuries after his death (37-43). As Kingsley notes, this evidence merely confirms the incubatory context already suggested by the opening of Parmenides' poem itself.

If this portrait of Parmenides strikes modern readers as surprising, it is because "Parmenides' teaching has been turned into something utterly dry; quite dead" (48). But behind the rigid, modern caricatures of "the father of logic" (which have their ancient antecedents) lies another Parmenides—a man whose teaching is about "life itself" and "has nothing to do with theory" because it is a "matter of experience: the experience of reality" (48). Making space for this long-forgotten experiential and initiatory core of Parmenides' teaching allows one to approach the poem with fresh eyes, opens up new interpretive paths.

Kingsley's grasp of Parmenides' skillful use of indirect language is one of his great strengths—his attention as a reader of ancient texts is both impressive and fruitful. He finds and makes use of pregnant allusions to Homer (64-65, 95-97, 222), meaningfully humorous contradictions in terms (89, 124), and tremendously subtle wordplay (96, 213, 225-229). But this expressive subtlety and hiddenness, a hallmark of Parmenides' poetry, springs from and points to something of much deeper significance, the leitmotif of *Reality*: *mêtis*. In ancient Greek, this was the word for "cunning, skillfulness, practical intelligence; and especially for trickery . . . It meant a particular quality of intense awareness that always manages to stay focused on the whole: on the lookout for hints, however subtle, for guidance in whatever form it happens to take, for signs of

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the route to follow however quickly they might appear or disappear" (90). *Mêtis* threads its song through *Reality*, and it is what allows Kingsley to present the three movements of Parmenides' poem as a seamless whole—in itself a major achievement.

The poem is traditionally viewed as having three quite distinct parts. There is the introduction, which recounts Parmenides' journey to a nameless goddess. Next there is the "Way of Truth," the great logic, in which the goddess explains to him what reality truly is. Finally, there is the "Way of Seeming," now mostly lost, which the goddess freely admits is "deceptive" and in which she gives a detailed account of the world we live in. As Kingsley notes, virtually absent from the scholarly literature is any sense that the parts of the poem once formed a coherent and organic whole: "The fixed tradition nowadays is to split his poem into three. The first part is poor myth; the second is philosophy; the last is poor science at the very best. And of course the general inclination is to focus on the philosophy, forget about the science and skip as quickly as possible over the mythology" (273). The problem with this approach is not just that it willfully disregards Parmenides' own aims and intentions. The poem can only be understood as a whole—none of the parts, in isolation, makes any sense. However, with a respect for the living, experiential essence of Parmenides' philosophy as a foundation, and with an awareness of the tremendous importance of *mêtis* as a guide, Kingsley is able to restore for his readers an understanding of the poem's unity.

When the goddess gives her description of reality in the Way of Truth, she calls it birthless, deathless, unmoving, of a single nature, timeless, and one (163-180). And of course this doesn't accord with our experience of reality at all. Thus, commentators in the ancient world and contemporary academe have tended to take the twin route of supposing that Parmenides is talking about some other reality than this one—some abstract, logical realm of pure being—and of thinking that Parmenides is an enemy of experience. But Kingsley argues that Parmenides is not talking about any other reality than the one all around us and is not opposed to experience but to the poverty of experience that fails to find oneness and eternity in the only place they are ever found: right here and now (123-125, 164, 199, 293-294). There is reality—which is all around us and can be experienced in all its stillness, oneness, and completeness at any moment—and there is illusion, which is simply the failure to experience reality fully and is thus the only reality we know: the world of change, motion, time, and separation we seem to live in (81, 170, 199). Here again *mêtis* comes in—as the divine, deceptive power that creates the illusion we inhabit, as the missing factor in our lives whose absence keeps us in bondage and delusion, and as the faculty of grounded cunning and intense awareness that can be used to find our way into the oneness surrounding us (215, 220, 228, 281). The similarities to Buddhist or Vedantic thought are striking, but perhaps not as striking as an average western reader's surprise at finding a rich mysticism at the heart of Greek philosophy. This, however, may merely be symptomatic of how estranged we have become from the wellspring of our own culture. It may also be a sign of how much faith we have placed—or misplaced—in generations of scholars who have insisted, for reasons that were

often less than noble and with arguments that were often less than rigorous, on presenting Greece as the source and pinnacle of all things rational in contrast to that great Other, "the East."

In the fourth and fifth chapters of *Reality*, Kingsley explores the Way of Seeming and its relation to the Way of Truth. His recovery of Parmenides' science is extraordinarily valuable, especially in light of the trend of dismissing the final part of his poem as "a stopgap, a filler, a feeble sequence of second-rate thoughts" (212). Here, in the few fragments that remain of the Way of Seeming and the scattered ancient accounts of its contents, we find the knowledge that the moon's light is a reflection of the sun's, the first mention of a spherical Earth, the understanding that the globe has a hot equatorial belt, temperate zones, and cold polar regions. As Kingsley demonstrates, this final part of Parmenides' poem was no mere afterthought—it was cutting edge science far ahead of its time. But to understand why Parmenides considered advanced scientific knowledge to be illusion, a cosmic trick; to understand how this relates to the Way of Truth and knowledge of reality; indeed, to understand why Parmenides should have chosen to include the Way of Seeming at all: these are the real issues.

Kingsley grounds Parmenidean science in the realities of soil and blood, connecting it to the journeys of the great explorer Pytheas, Parmenides' fellow Phocaean who sailed beyond Gibraltar—apparently as far north as the Arctic. He brings out the significance of Parmenides' choice of words, situating his striking language of "bonds," "fetters," "helplessness," and "deception" in the vocabulary of ancient magic—especially that of binding spells and love magic. Most importantly, he shows how this magical dimension of Parmenides' poetry allows us to understand the Way of Truth and the Way of Seeming, reality and illusion, as inseparable aspects of one reality, as two sides of the same coin. Kingsley's work here is well researched, original, and brilliant. He takes us into the shifting, treacherous world of *mêtis,* a world so subtle and ambiguous that truth is necessarily shot through with illusion, a world in which illusions must be cared for as much as truth and where trickery and deception are the greatest truths of all (257-258, 461). It is also a world where nothing is simple or clear-cut, where our ready categories fall to pieces around us. Popular debates over the clash between "faith" and "reason" seem almost pathetically naïve. And even the most sophisticated modern and post-modern discussions of the relationships between science, philosophy, and art appear needlessly constricted and limiting alongside a practical mysticism where they have always existed in an elegant and sublime union.

Empedocles

Empedocles, another founder of western philosophy, is the focus of the final seven chapters of *Reality*. Kingsley contends that the poetry of Empedocles has been every bit as misunderstood as that of Parmenides. His importance as a driving force behind early philosophy, cosmology, biology, and chemistry is undeniable. He is memorialized in textbooks as the originator of the tremendously influential idea of the four elements. But Empedocles' deep, mystical religiosity, his concern with the destiny of the soul—clearly of fundamental importance to him—have long

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been pushed aside, treated as of secondary importance. They have even been seen as nothing more than an eccentricity—either as youthful idealism or a lamentable sign of decline, of the crochets of old age, depending how the scholar in question prefers to date his poetic output. In any event, the general sentiment has been that his religious views have nothing to do with the science and philosophy proper that find expression in his great cosmological poem (which, troublingly, took the form of an esoteric address to a lone disciple). It is because of this artificial separation, Kingsley argues, that so little of Empedocles' meaning has been grasped.

For Empedocles was a magician, a man who openly claimed to have become divine, and whose philosophy—all of it—points to a way of life aimed at restoring the human being to his or her divine station (318-321). And just as commentators have failed to see the unity of the three parts of Parmenides' poem, so too have they failed to see the intimate connection between Empedocles' mysticism and his science—and that the compartmentalization of Empedocles has been a total failure. It has not only been hermeneutically ineffectual, it has actually covered over the basic truth that "Empedocles' entire account of the universe was bound up with the fate of the soul. All those themes and ideas in his supposedly rational poem that were soon to prove so important, that were to provide a platform for early physics and chemistry and science, were not there to offer factual information. They were there to save the soul" (323).

Kingsley takes the less-trodden route of treating Empedocles' own concerns with great seriousness, plunges straight into the dark waters of esotericism and ancient magic—and the results are startling. If he is correct, then we have not only misunderstood Empedocles, we have essentially inverted his meaning. To see this, we need only look to what is perhaps the most striking example of this inversion: the issue of the sequence (and significance) of Empedocles' cosmic cycles. The conventional accounts of Empedocles' cosmology vary little from commentator to commentator. The dogmatic view has always been that there are four elements, divine and immortal: earth, air, fire, and water. These are separated and combined by the powers of Strife and Love. The universe *begins* with the elements in a harmonious mixture, a great homogeneous sphere, with all of existence totally under the influence of Love; then the elements are torn apart by Strife, with all the elements distinct from one another; then they are returned to their state of perfect harmony again by Love. Love is good, the bringer of unity and harmony, whereas Strife is baneful, terrifying, and accursed, the bringer of hatred, death, and separation (350, 369). And this, Kingsley claims, is completely wrong—literally backwards.

He points out, rightly, that Empedocles always states, directly or by implication, the sequence of the cosmic cycle as follows: the cosmos begins with the elements in a state of separation, completely under the influence of Strife; *then* the elements are combined into the harmonious, blended sphere under the influence of Love; and finally they are separated out again by Strife (349-351).[1]

1 In Empedocles see fragments B17, B20, B21, B22, B23 (by analogy), B26, and B35. The system of numbering used here is the standard enumeration of Diels and Kranz.

This little detail has enormous implications—it leads right to the heart of a constellation of ideas that, if its significance is grasped, places Empedocles' philosophy squarely in the company of Pythagorean and Orphic traditions that emerged from a living philosophical praxis aimed at the divinization of the human being. The key to understanding the importance of the cosmic cycles' ordering comes from Empedocles' own language, so subtle, that hints at the elements' general attitude to the process of uniting and separating. Like all things in Empedocles' magical universe, the elements have awareness, are divine and immortal, have intelligence and desire (348). And above all, they long to be with their own kind: like to like. The state of affairs at the beginning and end of each cycle, which can be viewed from one perspective as "separation and hostility," can also be viewed, from the perspective of the elements, as a state of immortality, purity, and the fulfillment of natural desire. Conversely, the "harmony" of Love is nothing to romanticize—it is the forcing together of things that belong (and prefer to be) apart; the ruthless violation of the inner nature and longing of the elements; and, crucially for Empedocles, the transformation of the immortal and divine into the mortal (352-354).

For this is all that mortality really is for Empedocles—the bizarre result of Love's fitting together of immortal elements into temporary (and therefore mortal) compounds: the short-lived mixtures of our changeable world that seem to come into and pass out of existence (418-424). The power of Love, often simply called Aphrodite throughout Empedocles' poetry, accomplishes her work not by brute force but through the use of trickery and deception. This should come as no surprise, given Aphrodite's reputation in ancient literature for achieving her aims through the gentle but irresistible means of love magic (377-379). She seduces the elements away from their home and joins them into all the myriad combinations of mortal beings in our world—ourselves, pointedly, included (386). This is how Kingsley resolves the age-old question, the central question, posed by Empedocles' poetry: how does the story of the soul fit with the story of the cosmos? The answer comes from the fact that the element of air, or *aithêr*, was the substance of the soul for Empedocles. The *aithêr* of which every soul is composed—the divine, immortal consciousness at the heart of human experience—is a fragment of the *aithêr* of the heavens (401-402). This *aithêr*, in Empedocles' cosmic soteriology or soteriological cosmology, was long ago seduced into incarnation by Aphrodite; because of this, we are forced to live the myth of human existence, lost to what we truly are, our own original immortality and divinity forgotten under Aphrodite's spell.

And for Empedocles, just as for Parmenides, the only way to escape the bonds of our enchantment is to cultivate the divine faculty of cunning, alert awareness called *mêtis* (454-455). But of course this raises a very practical question: how can we human beings, so totally under the influence of Aphrodite's magic, find enough *mêtis* to break her spell, see reality as it is, and regain our divinity? The answer is as simple as it is surprising. We don't need to look anywhere else, to some otherworldly realm or some rarified, superhuman perception, because we already have everything we need inside us, a "gift of *mêtis* that penetrates our bodies, makes us virtually divine"

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(331). Empedocles finds divine *mêtis* in the senses, at the heart of embodied, human existence.

For those of us accustomed to think of mystics as despisers of the body, ascetics who try with all their might to escape the world of the senses, this information can come as something of a shock. Nevertheless, Kingsley shows how Empedocles' surreal language of "palms" that are "poured out" over people's limbs is the poet's subtly allusive way of indicating that, for him, the path to the divine runs right through the senses, not away from them (330-333). But the senses are a double-edged sword. Used consciously, they are "the essential instruments we need for openness and perceptiveness, for mastery, that can even make us divine" (331-332). But when we are so totally unconscious that we are "bombarded and overwhelmed by our perceptions" (332), then matters are tragically different. Then "our whole lives are a contradiction; an undoing of their own potential . . . The very fact that the promise inside us is unfulfilled makes it act, paradoxically, like a curse. Instead of helping us, it works against us and destroys us" (332). To quote Empedocles' own words about the utter futility of the human existence when lived unconsciously, at the mercy of the senses, without any *mêtis* worthy of the name: "During their lifetimes they see such a little part of life and then they are off: short-lived, flying up and away like smoke, totally persuaded by whatever each of them happened to bump into while being driven one way, another way, all over the place. And they claim in vain that they have found the whole" (326).

The other side of the futility and finality of mortal existence is the forgotten divinity hidden in the middle of it. And that divinity is only discoverable through the exercise of *mêtis*. In Empedocles' philosophy, we can only begin to experience that nascent awareness through the conscious use of the senses—a practice that he laid out very clearly in his poetry, which can be described, with every justification, as a meditative discipline (507-517). Many modern scholars choose to interpret Empedocles' writings on the senses as indicative of nothing more than an oddly colorful empiricism (507-508). They follow a fashion set by Aristotle, who, when he laid hands on Empedocles' poetry, took the questionable step of treating an esoteric address to a single disciple as a Peripatetic psychological treatise, reading Empedocles as merely concerned with the theoretical problem of the unity of sense experience (515). And as Kingsley shows, repeatedly, Empedocles' instructions to his student were couched in an esoteric form of expression so subtle, so deft that that they slipped and slip right by even the most formidable of intellects. But for those willing to look, there are signs of Empedocles' true interests and aims waiting to be recognized.

To offer one important example, Kingsley's reading of the difficult fragment B110 teases out and sees the significance of ritual titles and terms drawn directly from the great mysteries of archaic religion with their rich agricultural symbolism (520-533). In B110, Empedocles gives instructions to his disciple indicating how he must care for his teacher's words: "If you press them down underneath your dense-packed diaphragm and oversee (*epopteuseis*) them with good will and with pure attention (*katharêisin meletêisin*) to the work, they will all without the slightest exception stay with you for as long as you live. And from them, you will come to possess (*ktêseai*) many other things. For they grow (*auxei*), each according to its own inner disposition,

in whatever way their nature dictates" (519). As Kingsley notes, we have here several references that hint at cult titles of Zeus (a god uniquely important to the sacred work of farming): Zeus *Auxêtês*, "Giver of growth"; Zeus *Epoptês*, "Overseer"; and Zeus *Katharsios*, "Purifier" (526-529). Empedocles' choice of words here also suggests the traditional stages of initiation in the ancient mysteries—the first of which was purification (*katharmos*), followed by the transmission of the secret teaching itself, and then by the third and most important stage, the overseeing (*epopteia*) of the teaching as it germinates in the initiate, takes root and grows. As Kingsley notes, Empedocles assumes in his student a certain readiness to receive the esoteric teaching but is also careful to give him instructions, in B110 and elsewhere, on just how to oversee it so that it will begin to grow.

But seeing these references and parallels to the mysteries, with their lived spirituality and vocabulary of growth and grain, is more than just interesting; it is also exceptionally fruitful, as it allows the full meaning of Empedocles' philosophy to come to life for the reader. In particular, these parallels underscore the fact that Empedocles' teaching about the cosmos and the soul was not theory but an organic reality that takes root and grows in the reader, needs constant care and cooperation to flourish, has to be lived for it to bear fruit. Kingsley's full resolution to the problem of the connection between Empedocles' teaching on the cosmos, the soul, and meditation is formidable in its scope and accomplishments. It is certainly a philological and historical *tour de force* that resolves many longstanding debates and difficulties in the scholarship of Empedocles. To offer one highlight, he manages to make sense of—and link together—several typically baffling and bizarre Empedoclean expressions: his reference to a teaching that is "lacking in wood," an injunction to "perceive just as the pledges from our Muse command," his words to his disciple that speak of "splitting what I am saying in your entrails" (539-554). But Kingsley's work here is most valuable for offering the contemporary reader a way to engage an ancient system of mystical philosophy rooted in the realities of the natural world—the body, the senses, the world of agriculture and plant growth—a spiritual practice in which we become "farmers of our immortality" (529).

Approaching Reality

As I have noted, *Reality* is not, essentially, a book *about* the philosophy of Parmenides and Empedocles. Rather, it is a point of access to the lived experience of their teaching. As Kingsley says of his own writing, the historical and philological information in *Reality* is "utterly unimportant" (315). "All the details" in the book are "just a trick" (315). This may seem a strange thing to say. But as Kingsley stresses throughout the book, Parmenides and Empedocles belonged to a wisdom tradition that was "not an exercise for intellectuals, but a guide for transformation" (300) and that has "nothing to do with any of our modern notions about philosophy" (324). The detailed teachings of this tradition were never offered for their own sake or to provide food for thought. Rather, they "had to be lived" and had "the power to change one's life" (445). And be-

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cause they came from a living experience, because they pointed to the experience of reality and the fullness of life, the words of Parmenides and Empedocles only make sense when we start to experience them, live them.

This last point, which Kingsley drives home in every chapter, is, I suspect, what lies behind the extraordinary style and tone of *Reality*. For Kingsley altogether abandons the somber voice, the cool and cautious objectivity of the average classical scholar. His book is filled instead with fire, humor, and boldness. The layout of *Reality*, too, is utterly unconventional. For instance, there is the issue of the 30 pages of endnotes, the bedrock of Kingsley's arguments throughout the book, where the interested reader will find a truly impressive display of philological virtuosity and a wealth of groundbreaking insights and useful references. But these ingenious notes are tucked away at the back of the book, not mentioned once in the body text, and not referenced to page numbers. And yet it would be a grave mistake to suppose that Kingsley's break with (indeed, his deliberate affront to) the norms of scholarship has no real significance, no deeper meaning. Kingsley's basic point—that the writings of Parmenides and Empedocles came from lived experience and need to be lived to be understood—means that traditional scholarly approaches stand no chance whatsoever of grasping the meaning of the Pre-Platonic philosophers. And there is much to be said for this judgment, as Kingsley shows throughout the book—the inability of academics to appreciate the livingness of early Greek philosophy, the stubborn insistence that these ancient esoteric texts can be approached with level-headed objectivity, have led to interpretive disaster. So Kingsley takes the other route in his book, rejecting the failed dogmas and methodologies of conventional scholarship, and demands of his readers just what Parmenides and Empedocles did: "the urgency of our own being" (28).

One final thing should be said about *Reality*. Throughout the book, Kingsley invites his readers into a world of esotericism and magic, a world of supreme deception that demands tremendous *mêtis* to navigate. He shows, in particular, how Parmenides and Empedocles composed their esoteric poetry to perform the very things they talked about, how the unusual cadences and imagery of Parmenides' poetry, for instance, mirror the sense of what he is saying, reproduce the effects of the incubatory experience he is describing (36), how Empedocles' poetry, with its dark riddles and cunning traps, is a "functioning model of the cosmos" (428)—a cosmos that is itself a great riddle and trap. It would take a great deal of obtuseness or self-deception on a reader's part not to ask a very fundamental question: might not *Reality*, a book about performative, esoteric texts, itself be a performative, esoteric text? With this fruitful uncertainty lurking at the edges of one's consciousness, *Reality* begins to appear a trickier read than first supposed. What slipped past the mind as an odd turn of phrase on a first reading is found, upon closer inspection, to contain a troubling and pregnant ambiguity. Patterns and echoes that might strike a careless reader as repetitive, even as indicative of an editorial oversight, turn out to have significance. *Caveat lector*.

In *Reality*, Kingsley has given us a brilliant and original recovery of the origins of our

civilization. But ultimately, even this is beside the point. The real contribution of this book is that it brings something long forgotten to life again, offers the reader the opportunity to step into the world it evokes, and gives a way to live out the essence of an ancient wisdom in our time. It is a work of genius; the most highly recommended reading.

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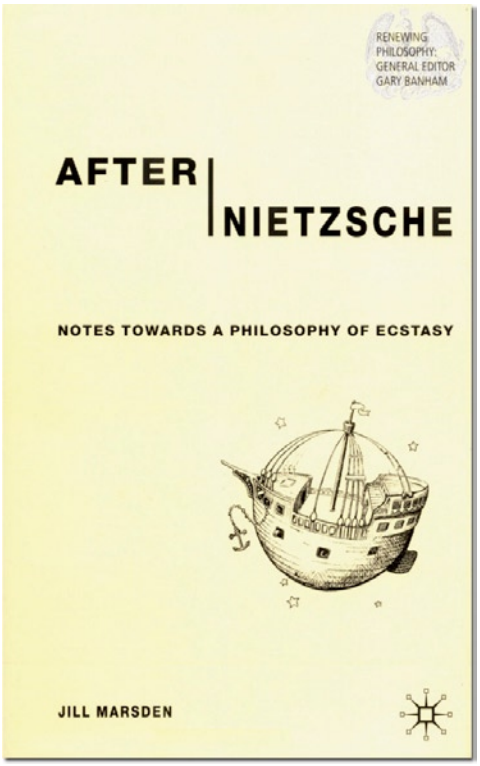
The Agonist
A Nietzsche Circle Journal

Book Review of

After Nietzsche: Notes Towards a Philosophy of Ecstasy

by Jill Marsden (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002)

reviewed by Christopher Branson (University of Warwick - Humboldt Universität zu Berlin)



Nietzsche's thought of eternal recurrence is at once immediate and maddeningly distant. In almost any one of its presentations it strikes the reader as though the demon were there with him. 'Here is something,' one feels: mysterious, enormous, tempting, dangerous. And yet the task of interpreting it is of great difficulty. Anyone who has discussed this thought in an undergraduate seminar knows just how quickly the sensation of deep insight can be lost through pithy extrapolation. The problem seems to be that of capturing the scale of the thought, of attempting to locate just why Nietzsche wrote of it with such gravitas. Perhaps we are guilty of assuming that our felt sympathy towards the thought automatically qualifies us to conceptualize it. As Jill Marsden writes in the preface to her inspiring book, *After Nietzsche*, "Eternal return is above all else a thought of the supreme affirmation of life but what it actually means to affirm life is highly questionable, a phrase too easily uttered and then abandoned unthought" (xiii).

Nietzsche himself warns us that we must take the thought in the correct spirit if we are to know the true weight of it. When Zarathustra experiences his vision of eternal return, finding himself at the gateway called 'Moment,' his arch-enemy, the dwarf-spirit of gravity, makes a mockery of the thought by reducing it to a safe, empty cognition:

> 'All that is straight lies,' murmured the dwarf contemptuously. 'All truth is crooked; time itself is a circle.'
>
> 'You Spirit of Heaviness' I said angrily. 'Do not make it too light and easy for your-

self!' (*Z*:3 'On the Vision and the Riddle')

It is a peculiar mode of thought that resists our cognitive powers and depends instead on something more akin to a musical sensibility—the ability to hear the 'tone,' or 'pitch' of the thought. This is a queer type of knowledge, paradoxically emerging at the eclipse of our reflective faculties. Marsden's claim is that such an experience of sensitive knowing entails 'ec-stasis' or the exceeding of the self, of passing beyond the form of identity given by the 'I,' and thus that ecstasy "is the necessary condition for thinking eternal return" (xi). It is only in the throes of rapture, she writes, that one can feel equal to the demonic call for supreme affirmation: "Amid the dazzlement of erotic love, of sublime entrancement, of visionary and hallucinatory bedazzlement, there is a joy that wills itself so intensely that *it wants itself more and again*" (8).

Whilst the thought of eternal recurrence is perhaps the inspiration behind this book—and an elucidation of the thought is certainly one of its goals—it is not its overarching theme. As the subtitle suggests, Jill Marsden is primarily concerned with developing a philosophy of ecstasy, of investigating what we can learn from the experience of rapture. This is not a phenomenological or descriptive project, however, which would render ecstatic joy an object of knowledge. Rather, it is to pursue the type of thought *generated* by experiences of transfiguration. This, Marsden argues, is one of the unique tasks provided to us by Nietzsche's philosophy in the wake of the death of God. This event—the collapse of our belief in the principle of identity—brings with it a new trajectory for philosophy. This is to communicate with that which had previously been banished from thought, the realm of experience lying beyond the fictional 'conditions of possibility' that the human animal has fabricated and progressively incorporated. This cannot involve the mere broadening of the thought of the same to include such extreme states, but necessitates a radical turn in our interpretation of what 'thinking' entails. Conceptual thinking "will of necessity inhibit any genuine contact with alterity, for specific difference will always be mediated by representation within a concept of identity" (4).

The question is, then, how one is to describe thoughts which reach beyond what is generally taken to be "knowledge." Jill Marsden's response is to pursue philosophy as aesthetics, as a science of sensitive knowing, which is taken not to be "a region of philosophy delimited from supposedly non-sensual areas of thought" (31). She argues that the notion of thought as *affective* is developed by Nietzsche all the way from *The Birth of Tragedy* right through to his later works. By ignoring the unfortunate metaphysical vocabulary that he borrows from Schopenhauer in his early work, Marsden reinterprets Nietzsche's development of Apollinian and Dionysian forces, along with the relationship between philosophy and art, in terms of a "Physiology of Art." This was the prospective title Nietzsche gave to a series of notes on art and *physis* in the 1880s, which connected his later concerns of embodiment and incorporation with the Apollinian and Dionysian, which are here referred to as "fundamental types".[1] The relationship between the body and

1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *KSA* 13: 17[9], translated by Jill Marsden, *After Nietzsche*, 191n2. Many of

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reviewed by:

Christopher Branson

aesthetic experience on the one hand, and the body and knowledge on the other, drives Marsden's thought.

Whilst Nietzsche's thought of eternal return may be described as the caesura of Marsden's philosophy of ecstasy, marking the birth of new adventures in thought, the problems that it seeks to re-think invariably arise in Kant. Indeed, the Kantian concept of the self haunts this book, representing in its multifarious implications the intellectual errors that a philosophy of ecstasy seeks to overcome. Marsden approvingly cites Deleuze's argument that Nietzsche's development of the concept of genealogy can be understood as the culmination of the critical project (15-16). Whilst Kant's conditions of thought always remained external to the conditioned, Nietzsche's critique of the *value* of values represents an *internal* critique, a concern with the creation of values such as knowledge and truth. In other words, Kant failed to apply his own dictum—that the 'in-itself' is unknowable—to our value judgements. It was through his concern with the genesis of values that Nietzsche's thought was led ultimately to the body as the site of this genesis and the material condition of thought.

In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche presents an account of the development of identity-based 'knowledge' in evolutionary terms. "Over immense periods of time," he writes, "the intellect produced nothing but errors. A few of these proved to be useful and helped preserve the species" (*GS* 110). These errors, such as the notions that there are enduring things, substances and bodies, and that a thing is what it appears to be, proved to be of use in the practical life of the organism, servicing its basic needs of survival, and were thus continually inherited down the generations. It is in this sense that Nietzsche defines the *strength* of knowledge: "[it] does not depend on its degree of truth but on its age, on the degree to which it has been incorporated, on its character as a condition of life" (ibid.). The power of knowledge is given by the degree to which it has become instinctive for the organism. The Kantian notion of the self can be understood as the condensation of these errors. This is to relativize the result of Kant's ingenious transcendental deduction: that the unity of the self and the perceived objectivity of the world are in a reciprocal relationship of determination. By understanding this quasi-stable "Self" as the product of a genesis through the incorporation of errors by the body, however, one is able distinguish between the self, which is given for thought, and the body, which is not. As Marsden puts it:

> [I]t is questionable whether the conditions under which 'representations' can relate to 'objects' are themselves invariant. If becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself, the body 'as such' is not to be regarded as a given. If the body is as much a constellation of the rhythm of things as the items in the perceptual horizon, then its status as a form of the same is as illusory as the things it surveys. (25)

Thus, the possibility of thinking beyond the form of the same seems to rely on our ability

the notes on the 'physiology of art' are collected in *The Will to Power*, Ch.IV, 'The Will to Power as Art' (794-893).

to perceive beyond the self, by attending to the affective experience of the body.

Curiously, one way in which we may begin to pursue this idea is provided by Kant himself in his writings on aesthetic experience. In perhaps the most exhilarating chapter of her book, Jill Marsden traces the Kantian concept of 'disinterestedness' in aesthetic experience, through Schopenhauer's anti-humanist interpretation, to its revaluation in the Nietzschean ideas of Apollinian and Dionysian rapture (Ch.3: 'A Feeling of Life, 47-72). What marks the experience of beauty from desire-based satisfactions is that the pleasure it gives us is "useless, gratuitous and literally good for nothing" (50).[2] That Kant attempts to align beauty not only with embodiment, but also with the Ideas of reason, and thus wants to give it an inspirational role in the supersensible vocation of moral goodness, should not deter us from the conclusion that beauty is itself purposeless: "[I]f beauty is a humanising power it must sustain the rift in order to bridge it" (ibid.).

The key insight with regard to aesthetic experience is of the *form* of judgement it involves. Insofar as it is without purpose, it is disinterested, removed from the self:

> To say that such a judgement is 'free' from interest means that I cannot choose whether to have a liking for beauty, it chooses me, *it compels me*. In a curious sense aesthetic judgement is *of me* (is grounded in sensations of pleasure and pain) without being obviously peculiar to me ('interested'). (54)

It is through philosophy pursued as aesthetics that the inhuman or ecstatic form of thought emerges. A normal, 'interested' judgement is referred to the presentation of an object's existence. In his transcendental deduction, Kant suggests that this knowledge of the object is the result of three transcendental syntheses of presentations by the imagination: the synthesis of sense impressions into a single manifold; the reproduction of past impressions in a present manifold; and the recognition of past and present representations as connected. What is unique about the representations of aesthetic experience is that they reproduce themselves without any acts of the imagination (54-5). "We linger in our contemplation of the beautiful, because this contemplation strengthens and reproduces itself."[3] Intentionality is in thrall when we are captivated by the beautiful.

Whilst Kant describes interested engagement with an object as the product of desire, meaning that it is empirical, pure disinterested contemplation is transcendental in nature and hence 'free' of reality (51-2). This is because contemplation of beauty entails making a 'reflective judgement.' Kant defines judgement in general as "the ability to think the particular as contained in the universal."[4] Since the universal, or rule, is not given in the experience of the purposeless

2 The notion of the purposeless expenditure of energy plays an important role in Marsden's philosophy of ecstasy, being associated with active forces in general (the need for life to squander in its self-overcoming, see 17-18) and sacred experience in particular (125-127).

3 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, translated by W.S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987): 68.

4 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*: 18-19.

artwork, the judgement made is a *reflection* on the particular, and is not determined from without. This reflection is referred by Kant to the question of *how* the subject feels itself affected by the presentation, which he calls a 'feeling of life' [*Lebensgefühl*].[5] It is this aspect of 'disinterested' experience that Marsden finds crucial to Nietzsche's project:

> It is particularly significant that Kant should propose that representations be referred to this *Lebensgefühl* because this implies that aesthetic judgement always entails an *evaluation* of life—a consideration of its pains and pleasures. Pleasure is aligned with a sense of life enhancement ('the furtherance of life') whereas displeasure signifies a sense of its inhibition or restriction. (52)

Marsden compares Kant's description of the beautiful with Apollinian rapture, in terms of the way the intuition of the flow of time (given by the syntheses of the imagination) is stalled and intensified (55).[6] It is in her alignment of Kant's analysis of the sublime with Dionysian pathos, however, that she suggests a link between 'disinterested' experience and the supreme affirmation of eternal return. Unlike the experience of the beautiful, where the subject is rapt in an 'inhuman' perception of form, the sublime experience involves the confrontation with that which cannot be rendered harmonious. This involves a far more ambiguous 'feeling of life' than the straightforward response of pleasure before beauty. Pleasure in the face of the sublime arises only indirectly from the momentary inhibition of the vital forces, followed by an outpouring of them that is all the stronger (56). In other words, in the experience of the sublime pleasure and pain engage in a dynamic of perpetual overcoming, which leads Marsden to the conclusion that, in spite of Kant's attempt to reel in the destructive power of the sublime, where it would only inspire in us a transcendental purposiveness, a darker thought might have been sewed. "Maybe beauty only emerges as a supremely *pure* and *idealizing* power when re-energised by the Sodom of 'our' destitution and despair" (ibid.).

The revaluation of suffering is central to Nietzsche's critique of values, but its relation to the concept of affirmation is not always given due thought by commentators. It is a truism to say that if we wish to affirm life, and life contains suffering, then we must affirm suffering too. In Marsden's interpretation of affirmation, where affirmation is not given by cognition but by the lived flourishing of active (i.e. vital) forces, suffering plays an essential, constitutive role in this flourishing. And if affirmation is accompanied by the feeling of joy in the organism, then the affirmation of life *per se*, as opposed to human life, would come with an unbounded pleasure, the ceaseless augmentation of pleasure by its antagonism with pain, and thus a constant overcoming. For Marsden, the most powerful experience of this exquisite paroxysm of joy in pain is given in Apollinian rapture. In Ch.2, 'The Tempo of Becoming' (24-46), she argues that, whilst the

5 Cf. Imannuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*: 44.

6 For Marsden's excellent discussion of Apollinian rapture and its relation to the Dionysian, see 30-47.

self-differentiating power of the Dionysian is the more fundamental force, since "the difference between Apollinian and Dionysian *ecstasy* is already thought *within* the Dionysian" (42), it is in Apollinian ecstasy that the vital energy inherent in both is concentrated and contracted, forming an eternalised image of this activity. With regard to the antagonism of pleasure and pain, she writes of the "secret violence" of Apollinian rapture:

> It attenuates the moment, retards the feeling of space and time, stalls the orgasm of Dionysian frenzy, *refuses to let go*. This is not the conservative activity of the functional body, eternally sheltered against desires which would delight to death. It is a far more subtle yet highly charged knowledge, an eroticism which palpably 'knows' its bounds, presses tantalizingly up against its carefully retained limits. (72)

If I find a flaw in Jill Marsden's reading of Nietzsche, it is precisely in the privileging of ecstasy as the site of affirmation. It strikes one as akin to remarking that it was only in their orgiastic frenzy that the Greeks loved life. Nietzsche describes the "craving for the ugly" of the best Greeks as an example of "neuroses of health" (*BT* 'Attempt at a Self-Criticism,' 4). If affirmation is to be given a physiological sense, in the sense of the active flourishing of life, then I believe that it should not be reduced to the extreme moments in the individual in which the Self is overcome in ecstasy. It should also, I believe, have a historical and communal dimension that refers to the flourishing of a people: "the youth and youthfulness of a people" (ibid.). It is in this broader sense of affirmation that the "weight" of the thought of supreme affirmation is revealed.

From his first sketch of eternal recurrence, Nietzsche associated the thought with specific tasks, perhaps the central one of which pertains to knowledge, and more specifically, the incorporation of truth.[7] In section 110 of *The Gay Science* (the first part of which, concerned with the emergence and incorporation of the errors of knowledge, we discussed above), Nietzsche writes that it was only very late in the development of the organism that truth emerged, as a different form of knowledge to that which had previously been experienced. He writes that "the ultimate question about the conditions of life" has now been posed: "To what extent can truth endure incorporation? That is the question; that is the experiment" (*GS* 110). In a rich and instructive discussion of this thought, Keith Ansell Pearson argues that 'truth,' obviously a problematical term for Nietzsche, should here be understood in two senses. On the one hand, truth should be taken to mean the practices of truthfulness, such as "doubt, suspicion, critical distance, subjecting all things to scrutiny, and so on".[8] On the other hand, it refers to the ultimate "truth" which Nietzsche understands modern science as entropically indicating. This is "the knowledge that all things are implicated in a perpetual and eternal flux […that] we are not what we take ourselves to be *either*

7 See *KSA* 9: 11[141], translated by Keith Ansell Pearson in 'The Eternal Return of the Overhuman: The Weightiest Knowledge and the Abyss of Light,' the *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Issue 30 (2005): 2-3.

8 Keith Ansell Pearson, 'The Eternal Return of the Overhuman: The Weightiest Knowledge and the Abyss of Light,' the *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Issue 30 (2005): 7.

as moral agents *or* as thinking subjects".[9]

The specific historical event that we find ourselves living through is that of the death of God. Jill Marsden is right to point out that this collapse in our faith of "the eternally transcendent One" does not announce "a new beginning or starting point for thinking but a *return*" (7). We do not start again from nothing. God *is* dead, but his shadow is still shown in the caves of men. The will to truth, the critical drive which has undermined the form of identity, is still to be pursued to its limit. Whilst in our moments of rapture, be they erotic, aesthetic or religious, we may experience a joy so great that we will it again, the lightness of these moments casts the rest of our lives in shadow. This is the flipside of the thought of eternal recurrence, the great weight of its challenge. Whilst the 'Self,' in all of its reactive evaluations, persists in us, the thought that there is no redemption still carries the power to crush. *Who* can bear this thought? Perhaps a people yet to come. The incorporation of truth is the transformative task Nietzsche designates for those who will to bear it. And for this task we must also acquire a passion for the knowledge we wish to incorporate, which means to pursue knowledge as an experiment in gay science.

If, in spite of our best endeavours to appear good Nietzscheans, we are sometimes horrified that there is no redemption, that the universe is without purpose, then this indicates that we are still some way from acquiring the great health that wills the ugly and terrible, that sees beauty in horror. Nietzsche writes of his will to such health: "I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who make things beautiful" (*GS* 276). With this thought he introduces Book Four of *The Gay Science*, which culminates in the thought of eternal return and the introduction of the figure of Zarathustra. The development of an aesthetic taste for necessity ("*Amor fati*: let that be my love henceforth" (ibid.)) is thus deeply bound up with the thought of affirmation. Nietzsche tells us that the changing of a taste is dependent on the development of new habits, which may then be experienced as needs (*GS* 39). And, as we know, our habits are deeply connected with knowledge. To repeat, the *strength* of knowledge depends "on the degree to which it has been incorporated, on its character as a condition of life" (*GS* 110).

Thus we come to an understanding of why affirmation is to be pursued through *Wissenschaft*, and the incorporation of "truth" in particular. By teaching ourselves the truths of life, we may come to develop a taste for this naturalised understanding, and eventually a love of fate and necessity. Nietzsche emphasises that love always has to be learned. He describes this in terms of the development of appreciation of a strange form of music. First we must learn to detect and distinguish the elements of a melody. This requires the good will and the exertion to tolerate it in spite of its strangeness. (This good will may be understood in terms of the cheerfulness of gay science; the exertion in terms of our instinctive resistance to certain truths.) The final result is, however, glorious:

9 Keith Ansell Pearson, ibid.

> Finally there comes a moment when we are *used* to it, when we wait for it, when we sense that we should miss it if it were missing; and now it continues to compel and enchant us relentlessly until we have become its humble and enraptured lovers who desire nothing better from the world than it and only it. (*GS* 334)

The result of immersing ourselves in the truths of knowledge will be their incorporation, and our eventual affirmation of them. This is the process of making truth a condition of life. In Jill Marsden's terms, we may say that this is to make the "feeling of life" one experiences before this knowledge the joyful sensation of life's enhancement, as opposed to the pain of its hindrance, of confronting ideas that our instincts react against. Even if the thought of eternal return that Nietzsche experienced near Lake Silvaplana was borne in ecstasy, the thinker was nevertheless faced with the task of learning to love it:

> What shall we do with the *rest* of our lives—we who have spent the majority of our lives in the most profound ignorance? We shall *teach the teaching*—it is the most powerful means of *incorporating* [*einzuverleiben*] it in ourselves. (*KSA* 9: 11[141], translated by Keith Ansell Pearson)[10]

It is through the consideration of the task of incorporating truth that we can situate and appreciate Jill Marsden's explorations of the philosophy of ecstasy. Her commitment to the pursuit of thinking beyond identity, which is suggested in the experience of ecstasy, is itself an experiment in the pursuit and incorporation of "truth" (as the ultimate truth of the flux of eternal becoming). Furthermore, her development of the "physiology of art" as a philosophy of affectivity provides us with great insight into how thought and the body are related, and thus furthers our understanding of the mechanism of incorporating knowledge.

I should also point out that, whilst the content of Marsden's book is largely concerned with what type of knowledge is communicated in the throes of rapture, the self-body relation which it describes by no means excludes affirmation (as self-overcoming) outside of these extreme states. To think that the case would be to deny Marsden's insight that the body is not given for thought, and thus to make of ecstatic rapture a difference experience *in kind* from 'normal' life (a transcendental experience, *à la* reflective judgement in Kant), rather than a privileged intensification of it, in which the libidinal undercurrents of life are revealed. And, finally, I should also warn against the impression that, for Marsden, the thought of eternal recurrence is readily given in the experience of ecstasy. Hers is, after all, also a philosophy of experimentation and transformation. The thought of eternal return certainly is ecstatic, but, as she warns us, "What eternal return will be for us is a matter of what we shall be for it—what we shall be capable of embodying" (121).

This is only to describe and begin to engage with some of the thoughts that Jill Marsden

10 Keith Ansell Pearson, 'The Eternal Return of the Overhuman: The Weightiest Knowledge and the Abyss of Light': 2.

pursues in her book. One cannot adequately introduce all of its adventures here, which also include the exploration of the idea of rapture as the precondition of artistic creation, the notion that extreme states of health and sickness are the material conditions for overcoming the form of the same, and the interpretation of mystical experience as the site of thinking union without unity. As its modest subtitle suggests, the book does not attempt to provide a finalised system of thought, but consists of interrelated investigations into aspects of ecstatic experience. In doing this, using Nietzsche as the site of multiple vectors of thought, Marsden also engages with the works of Deleuze and Guattari, Bataille, Irigaray and Bergson amongst others.

Whilst I find an ultimate flaw in Marsden's interpretation of affirmation, this book demands to be read. It is a work of original and often highly incisive scholarship, which contributes much to the task of thinking beyond the human condition. And what is truly remarkable—an all-too-rare delight in academic writing—is that the book reads as though it were conceived and written *in* ecstasy. It communicates, like an artwork, something of the conditions of its genesis: the joy borne of rapture. The reader may be 'affected' by its thought for some time.

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Exegesis of Nietzsche

Well, then, it's Yes all around:

Some strange moments in the Third Essay of the *Genealogy*

by Lawrence J. Hatab (Old Dominion University)

The following is taken from my forthcoming book: Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morality: An Introduction (Cambridge University Press, 2008), Ch. 5.

In Section 7 of the Third Essay, Nietzsche offers the remarkable claim that Schopenhauer was not actually a pessimist, even though he wanted to be one. What can this mean, given that Schopenhauer identified his philosophy as a pessimistic denial of meaning in life? After his discussion of Schopenhauer's ascetic pain-killing maneuver, Nietzsche alerts us to "the other side of the account," which amounts to a naturalistic perspective on Schopenhauer's pessimism: in other words, independent of Schopenhauer's metaphysical position on the nature of "reality" and its meaninglessness, Nietzsche asks about Schopenhauer's own personal posture as a pessimist, about what it means to *live* in that posture. He begins to articulate how even pessimism from this standpoint is a form of will to power that gives meaning to life in an agonistic relation to antithetical forces (in Schopenhauer's case, sexuality, women, and Hegel). Nietzsche claims that Schopenhauer *needed* these enemies to *avoid* becoming a pessimist. How so? The full implications of unadulterated pessimism would seem to subvert any impulse to *participate* in a meaningless existence; yet Schopenhauer lived a long, engaged, productive life of vigorous opposition to "optimism," especially a life of writing sophisticated books for a reading public, of bringing the wisdom of pessimism to bear on how people should think and live. This is why Nietzsche says that Schopenhauer's enemies "held him tight and kept seducing him back to existence." As a result, Schopenhauer was able to cure sheer nausea and find his own kind of "happiness." Such, I think, is Nietzsche's naturalistic redescription of pessimism that begins to articulate the distinction he made in *GM* III.1 between *willing* nothingness and *not* willing.

Nietzsche then moves beyond the "personal case" of Schopenhauer to consider philosophers in general (which he calls coming "back to our problem"). He claims that "as long as there are philosophers on earth" they exhibit an "irritation and rancor against sensuality." Owing to this posture against the immediacy of natural experience—whether it be in the service of transcendent aims or simply the more modest project of bringing conceptual order to sense experience—Nietzsche says that philosophers have always been partial to the ascetic ideal, to the self-castigation of natural sensuality. He even makes the seemingly reductive claim that a *genuine* philosopher

is marked by such ascetic tendencies, without which one is only a *so-called* philosopher (I leave aside the difficult question of whether Nietzsche is including himself in this typology).

Nietzsche then completes his naturalistic account of the seemingly *anti*-natural impulses in philosophy. These impulses are simply another form of will to power. Like all animals, the "*bête philosophe*" instinctively aims for optimal conditions of power in the midst of obstacles to these conditions. The agonistic structure of will to power accounts for a philosopher's *aversion* to sensuality (and things like home life) in the service of a stimulating *freedom* for a life of thought. The ascetic *ideal* names precisely this kind of power over natural forces that opens up the power of thinking. As in the case of Schopenhauer, the ascetic ideal in philosophers is not actually a form of life-denial, but an *affirmation* of a life marked by "the highest and boldest intellectuality (*Geistigkeit*)." Nietzsche adds, however, that affirmation here only applies to a particular kind of life, because the philosopher "affirms *his* existence and *only* his existence."

Yet with the claim that pessimism and asceticism, from a naturalistic perspective, are not actually a form of life-denial, we run up against two daunting questions: 1) What are we to make, then, of Nietzsche's frequent charge that these postures *are* a form of life-denial? 2) If these postures are not life-denying, what, if any, is the difference between their form of "affirmation" and Nietzsche's own ideal of life affirmation? The text must surprise us at this point, and these perplexing questions have not, I think, been adequately recognized or engaged in the scholarly literature. And the problem emerges again in a later section.

In Section 13 Nietzsche says that the "self-contradiction" of an ascetic "life *against* life" is only an apparent contradiction, only a provisional expression and interpretation, indeed a "psychological misunderstanding" of the *reality* of the situation, which is presented as follows: Even though the ascetic ideal may perceive itself as against life (this would be its metaphysical vision), from a naturalistic standpoint he claims that this ideal "*springs from the protective and healing instincts of a degenerating life*, which uses every means to maintain itself and struggles for its existence." In other words, when some forms of life are degenerating, are losing a more original natural vitality, life itself will engender different strategies (of power) to prevent an utter abnegation of life (suicidal despair, for instance). That is why Nietzsche says that the ascetic ideal is only a *partial* depletion of life instincts, the *deepest* of which "have remained intact" and which continually fight against sheer depletion "with new remedies and inventions." The ascetic ideal is "one such remedy" that struggles against a death-wish and thereby works "for the *preservation* of life." Proof of such a preserving force, we are told, is the historical success of this ideal that came to rule humanity with extensive power, especially whenever civilizing developments brought a "taming" of the human animal. Nietzsche calls the ascetic priest "the incarnate wish for being-otherwise, being-elsewhere." But the *power* of such wishing is distinct from something "elsewhere" because it is a "binding" to life that makes the priest an *instrument* for life, for creating "more favorable conditions for being-here and being human." The priest's power makes him the creative champion and leader of the

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herd by shaping their life-resentment into a meaningful form of existence. This is why Nietzsche says that the ascetic priest is only an "apparent enemy of life." His negating posture "actually belongs to the really great *conserving* and *yes-creating* forces of life."

So once again: What is the difference between ascetic "affirmation" (yes-creating forces) and Nietzsche's own ideal of life affirmation? Addressing this question will also provide another angle on the continuing ambiguity of Nietzsche's critique of life-denying values. The problem at hand is that Nietzsche stands for life-affirmation, and at the same time, throughout his writings he discusses other beliefs that are life-preserving, life-enhancing, life-promoting, and even yes-saying, while these beliefs are often the ones he attacks as life-denying. What is going on here? For the sake of economy, I want to suggest a distinction between *life-affirmation* and *life-enhancement*, where the former is Nietzsche's ideal and the latter can be attributed even to ideals that are life-denying in Nietzsche's sense.[1]

In order to build this distinction I must back up a bit and reiterate the complex genealogy of master and slave values, where *both* are instances of creative will to power; indeed, where the slave mentality seems to be a prerequisite for spiritual cultivation (*BGE* 188) and the creation of an advanced culture. As we have seen, the master-slave distinction may have clear delineations at first, but it begins to get complicated in the context of cultural creativity and Nietzsche's brand of higher types, who could be understood as an "interpenetration" of master and slave characteristics combined in a "single soul" (*BGE* 260). To be precise, most slave instincts are simply forms of brute resentment, and so Nietzsche singles out *creative* slave instincts as instruments of culture; only certain individuals will carry slavish elements in a higher direction. The priest type, for instance, is weak in a worldly sense, but strong in will to power by *creating* values that promote the sick and castigate the healthy (*GM* III, 15).

From the standpoint of creative will to power, there is a notable overlap between master and slave; indeed, the creative conflict between master and slave forces is called the most decisive mark of a higher, more spiritual nature (*GM* I, 16). Consequently, even the "evil" that designated the destructive threat of the master is now recapitulated in creative disruptions of established conditions.

> The strongest and most evil spirits have so far done the most to advance humanity: again and again they relumed the passions that were going to sleep—and they reawakened . . . the pleasure of what is new, daring, untried. . . . Usually by force of arms, by toppling boundary markers, by violating pieties—*but also by means of new religions and moralities* [my emphasis]. In every teacher and preacher of what is *new* we encounter the same "wickedness" that makes conquerors notorious, even if its expression is subtler and it does not immediately set the muscles in motion, and therefore also does not make one that notorious. What is new, however, is always *evil*,

1 Two textual instances of these terms can be noted: enhancement (*Erhöhung*) in *BGE* 257, and affirmation (*Bejahung*) in *EH* III, Z, 1. Nietzsche does not offer a precise, formal distinction along these lines in his discussions. Yet I believe that the distinction is clearly implied in the texts.

by:
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> being that which wants to conquer and overthrow the old boundary markers and the old pieties. (*GS* 4)

Innovators are the new object of hatred and resentment (*Z* III, 12, 26), they are the new "criminals" (*TI* 9, 45), the new "cruel ones" (*BGE* 230), the new perpetrators of "war" (*GS* 283). In sum, cultural creativity is made possible by a "crossing" of master and slave characteristics, so that not everything in the latter is "slavish" and not everything in the former is "noble." In the end, therefore, the creator-herd distinction is *not* equivalent to the master-slave distinction; there are overlaps, but the crude domination found in the original condition of the master cannot be considered the primary focus of Nietzsche's analysis of creative types.

We need to recognize a general insight operating here: For Nietzsche, *any* development of culture out of natural conditions and any innovation will require a dynamic of discomfort, resistance, and overcoming, i.e., a contest with some Other. Nietzsche asks us not only to acknowledge this dynamic but to be wary of its dangers, which are indicated in traditional constructs and their *polarization* of a conflicted field into the oppositions of good and evil, truth and error. The ascetic ideal in the end represents the desire to escape the difficulty of incorporating the Other (*as* other) into one's field of operation. Affirmation, for Nietzsche, is anything but comfortable and pleasant; it means taking on the difficulty of *contending the Other without wanting to annul it*. The bottom line in Nietzsche's genealogy, then, is that *every* perspective is mixed with its Other, because a perspective needs its Other as an agonistic correlate, since opposition is part of a perspective's constitution. Conflict, therefore, is not simply to be tolerated; affirming oneself requires the affirmation of conflict, since the self is not something that is first fully formed and then, secondarily, presented to the world for possible relations and conflicts. The self is formed *in* and *through* agonistic relations. So in a way, openness toward one's Other is openness toward oneself.

Life-affirmation, in Nietzsche's strict sense, requires an affirmation of otherness, which is consistent with the agonistic structure of will to power, and which is consummated in coming to terms with eternal recurrence: the endless repetition of every instance of life, including those that one opposes. Life-denial stems from a weakness in the face of agonistic becoming, an incapacity to affirm the necessity of otherness. Yet life-denying perspectives are life-*enhancing* because they further the interests of certain types of life who have cultivated their own forms of power that have had an enormous effect on world history. So, for example, Christianity is life-enhancing (see *A* 34-35, 39-40) but not life-affirming. Life-denying perspectives exhibit *local* affirmations of their form of life; this is why the ascetic priest can still be called a "yes-creating force." As we have seen, even philosophical pessimism is a stimulus for (a certain kind of) life. The sheer absence of life-enhancement would amount to *suicidal* nihilism (*GM* III, 28). Short of suicide, then, all forms of life aim to will their meaning, even if that meaning is a conviction about the meaninglessness of (natural) life. This helps explain an interesting fact: Religions that yearn for

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a deliverance from earthly life still forbid suicide. Even Schopenhauer, who saw life as an absurd error, argued against suicide.[2]

Nietzsche's conception of life-affirmation goes far beyond life-enhancement; it aims for a *global* affirmation of all life conditions, even those that run counter to one's interests. We will have more to say about this matter shortly, but to keep our bearings we need to keep in mind the following distinctions: 1) that between life-enhancement and suicidal nihilism, and 2) that between life-affirmation and life-denial. Nietzsche can extol the value of life-denying perspectives because of their life-enhancing power.[3] But he can challenge these perspectives as falling short of life-affirmation.

Returning to Section 13, Nietzsche associates the ascetic ideal's life-enhancing power with human "sickliness" (*Krankhaftigkeit*). At first there seems to be a clear indication here of Nietzsche's critical posture against "degenerating life" that is consummated in the ascetic priest. Indeed, the historical success of ascetic power is called proof that the prevailing model for human existence "up until now" has been a symptom of sickness and alienation from natural life. As usual, however, this polemical position is not without ambiguity. The yes-creating power of asceticism provides life-enhancing meaning for a "sick animal." In fact mankind is *the* sick animal compared with all other animals. The implication is that animal life is normally a more natural health and that the human animal develops a kind of natural illness. Then Nietzsche asks: What *causes* this sickness? Here is where things again get complicated.

Nietzsche begins by correlating, even identifying, human sickness with something valorous: Humans are more sick in being more uncertain and changeable; also in being *unfestgestellter*, which can be translated in several ways—as more undetermined, indeterminate, unsecured, unestablished, or unrealized. In *Beyond Good and Evil* 62, Nietzsche calls humankind *das noch nicht festgestellte Thier*, which can be rendered "the animal yet to have an identity." Given Nietzsche's predilection for conditions of becoming, such characterizations can hardly be problematic in principle. In fact, Nietzsche connects human sickness with seemingly admirable qualities (viewed from his standpoint):

> He is *the* sick animal: where does this come from? Certainly he has dared more, innovated more, braved more, and has challenged fate more than all the rest of the animals taken together: he, the great experimenter with himself.

Nietzsche then calls humankind the "eternal-futurist," whose strength (*Kraft*) is an unstop-

2 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* Vol. I, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1958), pp. 398-402.

3 Moreover, within life-enhancement Nietzsche tends to distinguish *healthier* forms (e.g., the Greeks, the Renaissance) from *sicker* forms (e.g., Christianity). The former are closer to Nietzsche's sense of life-affirmation, but not necessarily up to its full demands.

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pable urge to the future that "inexorably digs into the flesh of every present like a spur." Right away Nietzsche adds: "How could such a courageous and rich animal not also be the most endangered, the most profoundly and extensively sick of all the sick animals?"

What are we to make of this intricate mix of characterizations, especially when it includes elements that seem to accord with Nietzschean virtues (daring, innovation, experimentation)? I think the reference to the future and its "injury" to the present gives us a clue. The temporality of experience seems to dictate the courage that elevates humans over other animals. Surely animals are *in* time, but humans seem to be aware *of* time in a special way. Animal life appears to be more immersed in the immediacy of present circumstances and instinctive behavior. For humans, the "non-being" of the future and the past have a *presence*, as shown in our capacity to anticipate and recall events that are not yet or no longer present. The ability to perceive *otherwise* than the present accounts for human innovation and experimentation, but it also calls for an abiding courage to withstand the continuing force of negation entailed by temporal awareness. Human experimentation also carries a comprehension of the possibility of failure, and so our projects can be haunted by finitude in a way that instinctive behavior is not. More generally, the awareness of death in the midst of life—even without any present threat—gives human existence a special burden. The condition of animals is also mortal and thus tragic in the end, but humans are *conscious* of tragic mortality, even at times of safety and success, and so they can incorporate a tragic awareness into their very sense of life, for better or worse.

I believe that such an orientation on time explains why Nietzsche combines bravery, endangerment, and sickness in his account of human existence. Unlike other animals, humans are "set loose" from the instinctive immediacy of brute nature by "exceeding" the present in a perception of past and future conditions—the creative potential in this excess recalls the remark (in *GM* II, 19) that bad conscience is a sickness in the manner of pregnancy. Yet temporal experience in this way is infused by negations of present "being," and so the human animal is marked by an intrinsic *insecurity* that registers at every level of life. For humans, temporal becoming is not just a fact of nature, it is also a tragic burden pressed upon our experiences and sense of meaning.

Nietzsche concludes the section with a reiteration of the life-enhancing power of the ascetic ideal. The burden of temporal experience can produce epidemics of being "fed up" with existence, which can threaten to obviate human participation in life. Yet Nietzsche claims that such a despairing condition can exhibit so much power that it becomes a new "fetter" to life. The No to life "brings a wealth of more delicate Yeses" that compels the ascetic type to *live* (in a different way). Perhaps I can summarize Nietzsche's analysis in the following manner: Humans are first and foremost embedded in the *first nature* of animal life. The *second nature* of temporal experience engenders both the greater capacities of the human animal and the burden of tragic awareness. This burden can produce the *counter-nature* of the ascetic ideal, through which "life struggles with death and *against* death." Yet from a naturalistic standpoint, even this ideal can be driven by primal life drives to find alternate routes of power and life-enhancing strategies in a

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counter-natural posture. We must keep in mind, however, that within this "positive" analysis of ascetic life-*enhancement*, there remains Nietzsche's own critical counter-posture of life-*affirmation*, which comes to reassert itself in subsequent sections of the Third Essay.

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