

37. Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of Eternal Return*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 3-4.
 38. *Ibid.*, 5.
 39. *Ibid.*, 9.
 40. *Ibid.*, 20.
 41. *Ibid.*, 20-21.
 42. Z I, "On the Despisers of the Body."
 43. Z III, "On Old and New Tablets," sec. 30.
 44. Z III, "The Wanderer."
 45. James Hillman, *Archetypal Psychology: A Brief Account* (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1983), 12.
 46. *Ibid.*
 47. *Ibid.*, 13.
 48. *Ibid.*, 17.

CHAPTER 3

*The Birth of the Soul:
 Toward a Psychology of Decadence*

Daniel W. Conway

That a *psychologist* without equal speaks from my writings, is perhaps the first insight gained by a good reader—a reader as I deserve him.

—*Ecce Homo*

Nothing has preoccupied me more profoundly than the problem of *decadence*—I had reasons.

—*Case of Wagner*

Throughout his post-Zarathustran writings, Nietzsche advertises himself as a psychologist without peer or precedent.¹ Unlike those clumsy "English [*sic*] psychologists" (GM I:1), for example, who artlessly project their own pet categories of explanation onto the entire history and prehistory of morality,² Nietzsche claims to undertake a ruthlessly naturalistic investigation of the human psyche. Attesting to his "destiny" in his *faux* autobiography, he immodestly describes his "immoralism" as "requir[ing] a height, a view of distances, a hitherto altogether unheard-of psychological depth and profundity."³ Having (rhetorically) asked his readers, "Who among philosophers was a psychologist at all before me?" he definitively answers that "There was no psychology at all before me."⁴

Even by Nietzschean standards, however, this sort of self-congratulatory hyperbole seems excessively grandiose. What is its possible warrant? What are the psychological theories and insights that compel him to describe himself in such flattering terms? Although Nietzsche lays claim to an unprecedented understanding of psychology, he also understands human physiology to be continuous with, if not finally indistin-

guishable from, human psychology. "All psychology so far," he insists, "has got stuck in moral prejudices and fears; it has not dared to descend into the depths" (*BGE* 23). In order to precipitate this daring descent, he attempts to account for the whole of human interiority as a development and ramification of the basic organic principles of "animal psychology." Indeed, the insights of which he boasts so immodestly revolve around his pioneering work in *depth psychology*:

Who before me climbed into the caverns from which the poisonous fumes of this type of ideal—slander of the world—are rising? Who even dared to suspect that they are caverns?⁵

Since Nietzsche is the first philosopher to embrace spelunking as his signature method of psychological analysis, we might fruitfully ask how he arrived at his unique depth-psychological model of the soul. Toward this end, I wish to investigate the most original and controversial result of his experiments in depth psychology: his diagnostic theory of decadence.⁶

THE PSYCHOPHYSIOLOGY OF DECADENCE

In his writings from the year 1888, especially *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche consistently defines decadence as a systemic organic disorder that afflicts the instincts on which human beings prereflectively rely for guidance and regulation. Decadence thus involves what he calls "the degeneration of the instincts" or "the disgregation of the instincts."⁸ This systemic organic disorder characteristically manifests itself as an instinctive, involuntary enactment of self-destruction and self-dissolution. He thus offers the following two "formulae of decadence": "Instinctively to choose what is harmful for oneself";⁹ and the need to "fight the instincts."¹⁰ Elaborating on this theme of ineluctable self-destruction, he goes so far as to claim that

Every mistake in every sense is the effect of the degeneration of instinct [*Instinkt-Entartung*], of the disgregation of the will: one could almost define all that is bad in this way. (*TW* 6:2)

In all of these passages, Nietzsche presents decadence as involving a corruption or clash of the instincts. But what exactly does he mean by this reference? What role does instinct play in determining the range and depth of human interiority? While it is true that diagnoses of pandemic corruption inform virtually all of his published writings, he deploys the term *décadence* (as well as the eponymous theory) only in the writings from his final year of sanity.¹¹ And although he relies throughout his career on similar evaluative terms and categories, including *Entartung*,

Niedergang, *Verdorbenheit*, and *Verfall*, it is only with the appearance of the term *décadence* in 1888 that he finally gathers his scattered criticisms of Western culture into a unified—albeit inchoate—diagnostic theory. It is no exaggeration to claim, in fact, that the critical dimension of Nietzsche's philosophy is finally realized only in 1888, as a theory of decadence. The belated emergence of an incomplete theory of decadence thus serves to unify the otherwise fragmented critical dimension of his post-Zarathustrian thought, such that he can finally articulate the critique of modernity toward which he has gestured throughout his career.

Like most of the themes and topics that dominate Nietzsche's post-Zarathustrian writings, however, "decadence" receives neither a formal introduction nor a sustained analysis. Although he believes that decadence afflicts ages, epochs, peoples, and individuals, he nowhere manages to provide his readers with a detailed account of the phenomenon of decay. Indeed, he occasionally employs the term so loosely as to convey nothing more than his general sense of disgust and disapprobation. Despite a late burst of creative productivity in 1888, his theory of decadence remains both largely implicit and incomplete. In order to measure his contributions to depth psychology, we must first reconstruct and render explicit the account of decadence that informs his post-Zarathustrian writings. Indeed, his peculiar understanding of the instincts (and their inevitable decay) becomes intelligible only when situated within the framework of his depth-psychological model of the soul.

Nietzsche's evolving depth-psychological model of the soul is perhaps best understood as an articulation of his provocative hypothesis that human psychology is merely a complicated instance of "animal psychology." His unprecedented turn inward reveals to him that animal activity, of which human activity is merely a complicated instance, is always the encrypted surface expression of the operation of primal drives and impulses:

Every animal . . . instinctively strives for an optimum of favorable conditions under which it can expend all its strength [*Kraft*] and achieve its maximal feeling of power [*Machtgefühl*]; every animal abhors, just as instinctively and with a subtlety of discernment that is "higher than all reason," every kind of intrusion or hindrance that obstructs or could obstruct this path to the optimum. (*GM* III:7)

This postulate, of a primal, instinctual life-activity common to all animal species, thus anchors Nietzsche's depth psychology in the naturalism that ostensibly frames his post-Zarathustrian critical project.¹² Rehabilitating his useless training in classical philology, he now characterizes the psychologist as "a reader of signs."¹³

Hoping to distance himself from all predecessor philosophers and

psychologists, Nietzsche vows to account for the whole of human interiority as a development and ramification of the basic organic principles of animal vitality. He thus charts the range and depth of the human soul by appealing exclusively to the naturalistic, empirical principles of animal psychology. Throughout his post-Zarathustrian writings, he consequently treats conscious intentions, volitions, and actions as derivative manifestations of a more basic, vital core of animal agency:

Man, like every living being, thinks continually without knowing it; the thinking that rises to *consciousness* is only the smallest part of all this—the most superficial and worst part—for only this conscious thinking takes the form of words, which is to say signs of communication, and this fact uncovers the origin of consciousness. (GS 354)

Thus interpreted, the “surface- and sign-world” of consciousness not only surrenders its privileged position within the domain of human interiority, but also bespeaks the depth—hitherto unacknowledged and unexplored—of the human psyche. Having exposed consciousness as the surface expression of an underlying deep structure, Nietzsche consequently locates the real source of “thinking” and of all human endeavors, in the invisible, unconscious drives and impulses that animate all of animal activity. From (at least) 1885 onward, in fact, he unwaveringly cleaves to a drive- and impulse-based model of human agency.¹⁴ As we shall soon see, this depth-psychological model of human agency serves as the basis and foundation for his account of decadence as an internecine clash of instincts.

Nietzsche derives indirect support for this evolving depth-psychological model of agency (and so for his emerging theory of decadence) from his speculative forays into philosophical anthropology. Intending to deliver a strictly naturalistic account of the origin of consciousness, he directs our attention to

the most fundamental change [man] ever experienced—that change which occurred when he found himself finally enclosed within the walls of security and peace. (GM II:16)

Describing the response of human animals to the (repressive) demands of civil society, he explains that

in this new world they no longer possessed their former guides, their regulating, unconscious and infallible drives: they were reduced to thinking, inferring, reckoning, co-ordinating cause and effect, these unfortunate creatures; they were reduced to their “consciousness,” their weakest and most fallible organ! (GM II:16)

In exchange for the peace and security promised by civil society, that is, human animals must forfeit the natural state of well-being (and

internal regulation) associated with the instantaneous discharge of their primal drives and impulses. In order to honor the founding taboos of civil society, they now must rely primarily on consciousness, a feeble organ of relatively recent emergence, to regulate their animal vitality. In an effort to simulate natural principles of regulation within the walls of civil society, human beings preside over the implementation of instinct systems, which impose an artificial order upon the amoral drives and impulses.

Nietzsche famously avers that consciousness has proven to be an extremely inefficient organ of internal regulation. Consciousness “is in the main *superfluous*” (GS 354), involving “an exertion which uses up an unnecessary amount of nervous energy” (AC 14). Indeed, human animals must pay dearly to afford, even temporarily, the extravagant luxury of renouncing the unconscious regulation provided them by Nature:

All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly *turn inward*—this is what I call the *internalization* of man. Thus it was that man first developed what was later called his “soul.” The entire inner world, originally as thin as if it were stretched between two membranes, expanded and extended itself, acquired depth, breadth and height, in the same measure as outward discharge was *inhibited*. (GM II:16)

Nietzsche’s genealogy thus identifies the birth of the soul as a contingent event in the natural development of the human species. As a consequence of this “forcible sundering from [their] animal past,” newly civilized human animals were obliged to participate, schizophrenically, in the taboo pronounced by civil society on “all those instincts of wild, free, prowling man.”¹⁵

While his terminological preference is both anachronistic and potentially misleading, his attention to the *soul* is perfectly consistent with the naturalistic orientation of his post-Zarathustrian philosophy. He explains, for example, that his prepotent critique of subjectivity banishes only the “soul atomism” that has stalled the progress of psychological investigation hitherto, and not the “soul-hypothesis” itself (BGE 12). He consequently proposes, as alternative formulations of this hypothesis, the “mortal soul”; the “soul as subjective multiplicity”; and the soul “as social structure of the drives and affects.”¹⁶

In his account of the birth of the soul, Nietzsche applies a naturalistic twist to the traditional Christian doctrine of original sin. Born of the tumultuous implosion of a formerly healthy animal organism, the human soul exists only in fragmentation and self-division. In perhaps his most outrageous reversal of the psychological model underlying Christian morality, Nietzsche interprets the ensoulment of the human animal as a type of incurable illness, which he calls the *bad conscience*:

Thus began the gravest and uncanniest illness, from which humanity has not yet recovered, man's suffering of man, of himself—the result of a forcible sundering from his animal past, as it were a leap and plunge into new surroundings and conditions of existence, a declaration of war against the old instincts upon which his strength, joy, and tranquillity had rested hitherto. (GM II:16)

Although Nietzsche immediately adds, in what his readers typically interpret as a positive gesture of recuperation, that the bad conscience has impregnated the human soul “with a future,”¹⁷ we would do well to resist the maudlin optimism he expresses in his diagnosis of this troubled pregnancy. Where Nietzsche detects “an interest, a tension, a hope, almost a certainty, as if with [humankind] something were announcing and preparing itself, as if man were not a goal but only a way, an episode, a bridge, a great promise,”¹⁸ there may in fact lie only the portents of impending dissolution and demise. By the time he writes *Twilight*, in fact, he is fully convinced that the pregnancy induced by the bad conscience is destined for miscarriage:

To say it briefly (for a long time people will still keep silent about it): what will not be built any more henceforth, and *cannot* be built any more, is—a society [*Gesellschaft*] in the old sense of that word; to build that, everything is lacking, above all the material. *All of us are no longer material for a society.* (GS 356)

Nietzsche's naturalistic account of the birth of the soul has important consequences for his inchoate theory of decadence. Indeed, he locates the ultimate source and necessity of decadence in the illness of the bad conscience, which obliges individual human beings to exhaust their native vitality in the struggle to refuse the incessant demands of their natural, instinctual heritage. In order to enjoy the fruits of civil society, that is, the human animal must expend a great deal of its native vitality simply to sustain the artificial introjection of its natural instincts, which in turn exerts an inordinate strain on the newborn soul. Compensating on the one hand for the deficiencies of consciousness as a regulative organ, while enduring on the other hand the inwardly directed discharge of its ever-active drives and impulses, the human animal prematurely exhausts their store of native vitality in an attempt to regulate the overtaxed economy of their natural organisms.

The clash of instincts that Nietzsche associates with decadence is therefore the inevitable result of the artificial mode of internal regulation required by civilization and imposed by consciousness. Healthy peoples and individuals can temporarily enforce this artificial mode of regulation, but the eventual cost to them—and their successors—is enor-

mous. Indeed, decadent peoples and individuals must bear the expense of the squandered vitality of their predecessors, in the form of an instinctual discord they cannot afford to quell:

Such human beings of late cultures and refracted lights will on the average be weaker human beings: their most profound desire is that the war they are should come to an end. (BGE 200)

By tracing the etiology of decadence to the illness of the bad conscience, Nietzsche thus accounts for the fatalism that pervades his 1888 writings. The bad conscience is the ineliminable, non-negotiable opportunity cost of civilization itself; it is the very condition and ground of human interiority as we now know it. Although some peoples and cultures can successfully mitigate its effects, thereby postponing the onset of decadence, no people or culture can opt out of the illness that constitutes and defines the human species. Death alone can free the human animal from the pain of the bad conscience. For this reason, Nietzsche remains sanguine about our prospects for reversing or arresting the decadence that afflicts the peoples and cultures of late modernity:

Nothing avails: one *must* go forward—step by step further into decadence (that is *my* definition of modern “progress”). One can check this development and thus dam up degeneration, gather it and make it more vehement and sudden: one can do no more. (TW 9:43)

In order to resist or reverse the advance of decadence, that is, a people or culture would need to rid itself of its besetting bad conscience. In perhaps his most hopeful comment on the possibility of humankind “curing” itself of its bad conscience, Nietzsche hypothesizes,

Man has all too long had an “evil eye” for his natural inclinations, so that they have finally become inseparable from his “bad conscience.” An attempt at the reverse would *in itself* be possible—but who is strong enough for it?—that is, to wed the bad conscience to all the *unnatural* inclinations, all those aspirations to the beyond, to that which runs counter to sense, instinct, nature, animal, in short all ideals hitherto, which are one and all hostile to life and ideals that slander the world. (GM II:24)

The question he inserts into this otherwise promising passage conveys the enormity of the reversal he envisions: *Who* would be “strong enough” to turn this “evil eye” against itself and impress the bad conscience into the service of the “natural inclinations”? Although his answers to this important question vary throughout the post-Zarathustran period of career, citing the redemptive power of the free spirits, the philosophers of the future, the *Übermensch*, and even Dionysus himself, Nietzsche consistently asserts that late modernity

itself lacks the resources to complete the redemptive task at hand.

Nietzsche consequently exposes the folly of all moral and political schemes designed to reverse or "cure" the decadence of a people or culture. A decadent age *must* move inexorably toward the exhaustion of its vital resources. Any attempt to defy this economic law threatens instead to accelerate the degenerative process:

It is a self-deception on the part of philosophers and moralists if they believe that they are extricating themselves from decadence when they merely wage war against it. Extrication lies beyond their strength . . . they change its expression, but they do not get rid of decadence itself. (TW 2:11)¹⁹

In the face of the escalating chaos that Nietzsche forecasts for the remainder of the modern epoch, one thing remains certain: The decadence that attends the twilight of the idols must run its inexorable course. Modernity will not be redeemed from within. As Heidegger would conclude nearly a century later, only a god can save us now²⁰—but only, Nietzsche would add, if the god in question is Dionysus.

INSTINCTS AND DRIVES

Nietzsche's genealogical account of the birth of the soul thus suggests that he equates the instincts with the unconscious drives and impulses that collectively propagate the primal organic vitality that is shared by natural and human animals alike. On this interpretation, decadence would involve a self-destructive, internecine clash among the animal drives that engender human agency. Strictly speaking, however, this equation is not entirely accurate. Indeed, the emergence of Nietzsche's theory of decadence coincides with an important refinement of his evolving depth-psychological model of the soul: his distinction between drive or impulse (*Trieb*) and instinct (*Instinkt*). The articulation of this distinction enables him to claim indirect empirical access to the "social structure" of the drives and impulses through his observation of discernible patterns of instinctual behavior.

Up until 1888, Nietzsche treats the terms *Trieb* and *Instinkt* as roughly synonymous, and faithful Anglophone translators have honored this convention. He employs both terms in contradistinction to the faculties and operations traditionally associated with human consciousness, for he intends both terms to refer in general to the primal, unconscious vitality that human beings share (and discharge) in common with all other members of the animal kingdom. In his account of the "origin of the bad conscience," for example, he employs the two terms interchangeably to refer to the unconscious animal activity that is forced

inward at the onset of civilization (GM II:16).²¹ He consistently maintains this use of *Trieb* throughout his career, but his writings from the year 1888 suggest the development of a subtle distinction between *Instinkt* and *Trieb*. While the two terms remain extensionally equivalent in the writings of 1888, denoting the unconscious drives that discharge themselves in the natural propagation of animal vitality, they are no longer treated as intensionally equivalent. In *Twilight*, Nietzsche consistently reserves the term *Instinkt* to refer to any specific organization of the drives and impulses, as determined by the dominant mores of the particular people or epoch in question. It is precisely this task of cultivating instincts, of ruthlessly imposing order and rule onto the natural, spontaneous discharge of the drives and impulses, of creating a "morality of mores," that occupied the entire prehistory of the human animal (GM II:2).

Nietzsche's precise use of the term *Instinkt* in 1888 thus designates any specific set of conditions, imposed by and inculcated through civilization, under which the drives and impulses are trained to discharge their native vitality. The aim of this process of acculturation is to provide individual souls with the cultural (i.e., artificial) equivalent of those natural instincts that the human animal has forsaken in exchange for the peace and security of civil society. Disciplined to enact a trusty set of prereflective patterns of response to foreseeable exigencies, individuals might minimize their vexed reliance on a conscious regulation of their animal organisms. Nietzsche consequently applauds *Manu's* attempt

step by step to push consciousness back from what had been recognized as the right life (that is, *proved* right by a tremendous and rigorously filtered experience), so as to attain the perfect automatism of instinct—that presupposition of all mastery, of every kind of perfection in the art of life. (AC 57)

While philosophers and moralists hitherto have been satisfied simply to cultivate any kind of instinctual organization of the soul, usually settling for some heavy-handed regime of castration, Nietzsche undertakes an evaluation and rank ordering of the various systems of instinctual order that have prevailed throughout the course of human history.

This distinction between *Trieb* and *Instinkt* thus enables Nietzsche to incorporate into his evolving model of the soul an additional dimension of complexity. The unconscious drives and impulses compose the regulatory network of the soul, while the instincts constitute the patterns of regulation that govern the internal operations of this network. On this amended model of the soul, the drives and impulses themselves remain invisible, but the instincts admit of indirect empirical observation by virtue of the traces they manifest in detectable, public patterns of behavior.

Nietzsche's late distinction between *Trieb* and *Instinkt* thus serves the further purpose of supplying his critical philosophy with a more solid, empirical foundation. While he claims no direct access to the basic network of unconscious drives and impulses, he believes that an indirect access to them is available through a "scientific" interpretation of the observable patterns of behavior through which the instincts invariably express themselves. His writings from the year 1888 consistently treat the instincts as manifesting themselves in acculturated, habitual, pre-reflective patterns of behavior. He consequently applauds the methods and findings of Zopyrus, the itinerant physiognomist who (correctly) diagnosed the ugly Socrates as a "cave of bad appetites" (TW 2:9).

By carefully observing an individual's outward, instinctual behavior, Nietzsche can similarly deduce the principle of organization (or lack thereof) that governs the individual's underlying substructure of drives and impulses. Although instincts do not admit of direct observation, their surface traces function as signs of the "social structure" that prevails within the invisible body. He thus insists that "the values of a human being betray something of the *structure* of his soul" (BGE 268). As Freud would similarly conclude several years later, a "scientific" defense of depth psychology must establish an empirical link between the invisible activity of the unconscious drives and an established data base of observable phenomena. Just as Nietzsche points to "instinctive" patterns of behavior as reliable signs of the principle of organization that governs underlying drives and impulses, so Freud tirelessly documents the empirical data furnished by dreams, mischievements, parapraxes, and the like.²²

DECADENCE AND/AS THE STRUCTURAL COLLAPSE OF THE SOUL

Nietzsche's 1888 distinction between *Trieb* and *Instinkt* also enables him to specify the precise locus of decay within the invisible body. When he describes decadence as the loss or disintegration of the instincts, he does not mean that the underlying drives have somehow decomposed, but that their previous configuration has been compromised.

Decadence thus pertains not to the drives and impulses in themselves, but to the instincts, to the systems of internal organization that regulate the discharge of the drives and impulses: "I call an animal, a species, or an individual corrupt [*verdorben*] when it loses its instincts, when it chooses, when it prefers, what is disadvantageous for it" (AC 6).²³ Only the instincts undergo decay and become "reactive," which means that the drives and impulses no longer work harmoniously toward a collectively desirable end. As an instinctual system decays, its

constituent drives and impulses fall—amorally and indifferently—under a successor principle of organization, continuing all the while their natural activity of propagating and discharging the native vitality of the organism. For this reason, Nietzsche occasionally equates the decay of a system of instincts with the *disregation* (rather than the deterioration) of its constituent drives and affects.

Instinctual decay involves either the reconfiguration of the drives and impulses under a novel, unhealthy principle of organization or the "anarchy" that ensues when no single system of instincts emerges as dominant. Nietzsche more regularly associates the decadence of modernity with this latter model, pointing to the internecine clash between fragmentary instinctual systems, but both alternatives are equally unappealing. In either event, the soul is guided by a principle of organization that properly belongs to another time or place, perhaps to another people or race altogether. The ensuing clash of atavistic instinctual systems riddles the soul with open sumps and circuits, which introduce an additional element of endogenous wastage into the strained economy of the soul. Rather than discharge its vitality in outward creative expressions, the discordant soul largely exhausts itself in an internal conflict between competing instinctual systems.

Nietzsche does not mean to imply, however, that it is somehow possible to restore the drives and impulses to their "original" or "raw" form, independent of all acquired patterns of organization. As a creature uniquely reliant for survival upon its nascent interiority, the human animal is defined by the mediated, principled expression of its native vitality. Although Nietzsche occasionally employs "instinct" as a term of valorization to designate those rare, "aristocratic" principles of organization that merit his approval, the absence of instinctual organization in a human soul is in fact unintelligible to him. As an afterbirth of civilization itself, the human soul exists ~~only~~ as the product of training and cultivation, in accordance with the repressive demands of civilization. Nietzsche roundly (and unfairly) ridicules Rousseau for believing that some untamed "noble savage" lurks within the human breast, hungrily awaiting its release from the chains of culture and convention. The decay of a regnant system of instincts does not unleash our primal animal nature in its pure, unbridled fury, but simply enables the regency of another system (or of a bricolage of system fragments), ad infinitum.

Nor does Nietzsche mean to imply that the decay or imposition of any single instinctual system is particularly disastrous or beneficial for its constituent drives and impulses. The invisible body is an irresistibly active engine of propagation and discharge, and it continues its animal activity in utter indifference to the instinctual systems imposed upon it. The overworked distinction between "active" and "reactive" forces thus

pertains not to the drives and impulses themselves, but to the instinctual systems under which the drives and impulses are organized.²⁴ Indeed, the drives and impulses do not distinguish, as Nietzsche does, between "healthy" and "decadent" configurations of their enabling networks, or between active and reactive systems of instinctual organization. Despite his occasional wishes to the contrary, the human soul displays neither a natural affinity for healthy instincts nor a natural aversion to decadent instincts. Whereas an instinctual system is a human artifice, perfected and imposed by human beings in an attempt to orchestrate a temporary convergence between *nomos* and *physis*, the unconscious drives and impulses belong exclusively to Nature, from which they inherit their implacable indifference to human design.²⁵

For all of Nietzsche's confidence in pronouncing the decadence of various peoples and ages, however, his forays into depth psychology stray dangerously far from the naturalism that supposedly anchors his post-Zarathustran critical philosophy. While he consistently couches his symptomatology in empirical, naturalistic terms, his constant appeal to the unconscious drives and regulatory instincts remains to some extent speculative. Because the invisible body, by definition, defies direct empirical observation, the very existence of the unconscious drives and impulses remains to some extent hypothetical. The only observable traces of physiological decay lie in those mysterious encrypted symptoms that Nietzsche alone can interpret.

He insists that the native vitality of the invisible body can be measured with a "dynamometer" (TW 9:20), implying that such measurements would help to secure the tenuous empirical grounding of his critical philosophy. The precise calibration he has in mind for this wondrous instrument, however, such that it might accurately detect instinctual disarray, remains a secret to all but him.²⁶ In any event, he advances no reproducible method or system whereby others might scientifically confirm or dispute the findings on which he bases his diagnoses. That the human body is amenable to the semiotic strategies he introduces follows only from his postulate—untested and unproved—that human beings rely indirectly on the drives and impulses characteristic of all animal life. If we were to reject this postulate or even suspend it in skeptical abeyance, then Nietzsche's appeal to the invisible body, as well as the symptomatological turn it enables, would probably hold little scientific credence.

THE DISCREGATION OF THE WILL

Having investigated Nietzsche's distinction between *Trieb* and *Instinkt*, we are now in a position to undertake a more precise reconstruction of

the inchoate theory of decadence that informs his post-Zarathustran writings. Whereas healthy souls are instinctually fortified to maintain strict control over their patterns of influx and expenditure, decadent souls lack the structural organization and integrity provided by a single, dominant instinctual system. Hence Nietzsche's account of decadence as an inexorable march toward dissolution: "*instinctively* they prefer what disintegrates, what hastens the end" (TW 9:39).

As we have seen, Nietzsche hopes to articulate a starkly naturalistic account of the soul, an account that makes no appeal—over or surreptitious—to supernatural principles of explanation. Experimenting with alternative versions of the "soul-hypothesis," he consequently figures the soul as a transient, self-regulating subsystem sheltered within the undifferentiated plenum of will to power. Hoping to purge his philosophy of its residual anthropocentrism, he occasionally presents the soul as an embodied energy circuit, through which undifferentiated forces circulate and flow in accordance with amoral principles of internal self-regulation. For Nietzsche, the soul is no inert container, but a surging, pulsating capacitor, which continuously propagates and discharges its native holdings of forces.

As the figure of the capacitor suggests, the natural activity of the soul extends no further than the spontaneous expenditure of native forces in bursts of creative self-expression. This is its sole function, which it involuntarily performs in utter indifference to external obstacles and internal constraints. Even the self-preservation of the organism is subordinated to the maintenance of the soul's natural, unconscious rhythm of propagation and discharge:

[T]he really fundamental instinct of Life . . . aims at the expansion of power and, wishing for that, frequently risks and even sacrifices self-preservation. . . . The struggle for existence is only an exception, a temporary restriction of the will to life. The great and small struggle always revolves around superiority, around growth and expansion, around power—in accordance with the will to power which is the will to life. (GS 349)

Nietzsche thus conceives of the soul as the human animal organism functioning in its most primal, uncomplicated and rudimentary form, as a pure, amoral engine of will to power.²⁷ Hewing strictly to the stringent naturalism of his post-Zarathustran philosophy, he accords the soul no justificatory *telos* or metaphysical birthright, vowing instead to scour the "eternal basic text of *homo natura*" of its supernatural accretions (BGE 230).

In perhaps the most controversial element of his depth-psychological model of the soul, Nietzsche attempts to derive normative judgments

from his empirical analysis of the soul as an amoral engine or energy circuit.²⁸ What metaphysicians have characteristically hypostatized as the "will," he explains, is simply the enhanced feeling of power [*Machtgefühl*] that gives rise to an experience of causal efficacy.²⁹ This enhanced feeling of power, in turn, is an epiphenomenal result of the configuration of the soul under a specific principle of organization, or set of instincts:

In this way the person exercising volition adds the feelings of delight of his successful executive instruments, the useful "underwills" or under-souls—indeed, our body is but a social structure composed of many souls—to his feelings of delight as commander. (BGE 19)

It is this enhanced feeling of power that alone assures the human animal that its threshold level of vitality has been attained; it thus functions to alert the human animal that it currently operates under a viable principle of internal regulation. Nietzsche's appeal to this feeling of power as a standard of relative health (or decay) thus reflects, or so he believes, the naturalism that guides his symptomatological investigations.

Indeed, the soul experiences itself as a unified, efficient force only when its constituent drives and affects work together to ensure an unimpeded propagation of agency:

L'effet c'est moi: what happens here is what happens in every well-constructed and happy commonwealth; namely, the governing class identifies itself with the successes of the commonwealth. (BGE 19)

Because the "invisible" body is a "social structure composed of many souls" (BGE 19), the appropriate "political" organization of these souls (or under-souls) will enable the enhanced feeling of power that accompanies a robust propagation of agency.³⁰ He consequently insists that

The "unfree" will is mythology; in real life it is only a matter of strong and weak wills. (BGE 21)

Hence the importance for Nietzsche of cultivating strong, monopolistic instincts: only when properly organized and configured do the unconscious drives and impulses attain a propagation of vitality that is commensurate with the feeling of power that he associates with willing. The decay of instinct thus results in a "weakness of the will" which he defines as "the inability not to respond [impulsively] to a stimulus" (TW 5:2). A capacitor is damaged not by a quantitative shortage of vital resources, but by an internal structural incapacity to channel these resources effectively and efficiently. He consequently defines decadence in terms of the "disaggregation of the will" (TW 6:2), a process whereby the drives and affects become (dis)organized in such a way that their

subsequent "aggregation" can no longer produce a feeling of power.³¹ The disaggregation of the will instead produces a "feeling of physiological inhibition," which he associates with "deep depression, leaden exhaustion, and black melancholy" (GM III:17).

Nietzsche occasionally attempts an even more fundamental analysis of decadence, explaining the "disaggregation of the will" in terms of an entropic deformation in the circulatory system of the soul. Although he conceives of the "world" of will to power as a boundless, undifferentiated plenum, he also believes that this "powerful unity . . . undergoes ramifications and developments in the organic process" (BGE 36). The entirety and complexity of human psychology, he consequently insists, can be understood in terms of the organic differentiation and diversification of the will to power (BGE 23). He consequently refers to the will to power as a "pre-form [Vorform] of life," and to the "life of the drives" [*Triebleben*] as a "ramification" of the will to power (BGE 36).³² Nietzsche's "morphology" of the will to power thus furnishes the context for his account of the "disaggregation" of the will. At the organic level of ramification and differentiation of will to power, the soul propagates quanta of force through its circulatory network of drives and impulses.³³ The internal flow of these quanta of force, which is determined in volume and regularity by the regnant configuration of the instincts, thus accounts for the vitality embodied by "individual" human beings. By means of an efficient propagation of quanta of force, a system of instincts thus enables the phenomenal sensations of empowerment and efficacy.³⁴ He consequently explains that

A quantum of force [*Kraft*] is equivalent to a quantum of drive, will, effect—more, it is nothing other than precisely this very driving, willing, effecting. (GM I:13)³⁵

The enhanced feeling of power associated with willing thus signifies (to the Nietzschean symptomatologist) an unimpeded flow of these quanta of force through the circulatory system of the healthy capacitor. "Willing" thus refers to a specific disposition—both quantitative and qualitative—of the quanta of force propagated and discharged by the capacitor.

Embracing Lange's principles of the "conservation of energy" and the "indestructibility of matter," Nietzsche insists that these basic quanta of force cannot be destroyed.³⁶ They can, however, fall under anarchic or ochlocratic principles of aggregation in the "social structure of the drives and affects," which invariably occasion a vital entropy. The quantity of vital forces within the soul remains constant, but in the event of a clash of competing instinct systems, these quanta of force become (dis)aggregated in configurations that are qualitatively incapable of sus-

taining a feeling of power. He consequently equates decadence with "the anarchy of atoms" (CW 7), which in turn occasions the experience of weakness of the will.³⁷

The advance of decadence thus cripples the soul as an efficient capacitor. Bereft of the instinctual reinforcement that hitherto ensured its structural integrity, the soul devolves into a distended, flaccid casing for the vital forces that now course aimlessly throughout it:

Everywhere paralysis, arduousness, torpidity or hostility and chaos: both more and more obvious the higher one ascends in forms of organization. The whole no longer lives at all: it is composite, calculated, artificial, and artifact. (CW 7)

While the disgregation of the will signals a crisis in the "invisible" body, a vigilant symptomatologist can indirectly detect this crisis by charting its symptoms in the "visible" body. As "the typical signs" of decay, Nietzsche lists selflessness, depersonalization, the loss of a center of gravity, and neighbor love (EH, "Destiny," 7).

The disgregation of the will leaves the soul a sclerotic capacitor, which becomes increasingly unable to propagate and discharge its native vitality. Decadence consequently manifests itself as a volitional crisis, or *akrasia*, which prevents individuals from acting in their own best interests.³⁸ The decadent soul must therefore accommodate within its collapsing economy an ever-widening gulf between the cognitive and volitional resources at its disposal, and it must compensate for the relative deficiency of will that ensues. Indeed, decadent individuals are not typically unaware of their condition, or of the mistakes they involuntarily commit; they simply lack the volitional resources needed to implement their cognitive insights. They often know their destiny, but they are powerless to alter it.

Nietzsche consequently locates decadence in the natural, inevitable failure of the "invisible" body to sustain an efficient propagation through itself of the will to power. He refers to life as the "foundation [*Grundbau*] of the affects" (BGE 258), and he subsequently equates "the decline of life" with "the decrease in the power to organize" (TW 9:37). A tremendous (and eventually mortal) collision transpires at the interface of will to power, or life, and its transient human capacitors. Like a raging torrent that is temporarily channeled and tamed, the will to power gradually wears down its capacitors with a relentless surge of vitality, eventually obliterating the locks and dams that were engineered to harness its boundless power. Bereft of the structure and organization supplied hitherto by an effective system of internal regulation, the "invisible" body continues to channel and discharge quanta of will to power, but now at the expense of its own structural integrity and "health." The disgregated

drives and impulses of a decadent soul are (dis)organized in such a way that any further propagation of quanta of force threatens to cripple the soul as a capacitor. Of course, the will to power itself is oblivious to all such qualitative "limitations" of its natural sumptuary expression. Unlike Nietzsche, the amoral will to power does not distinguish between "healthy" and "decadent" bodies; it expresses itself indiscriminately through either type of engine and eventually exhausts both.

CONCLUSION

As the greatest critic of the transformative power of the will, Nietzsche is egregiously miscast as a (failed) radical voluntarist. To the healthy, prescriptions of health are superfluous, while to the sick they are cruel. Contrary to popular prejudice, he offers no plan for restoring decadent souls to a more robust standard of vitality. He is interested neither in prescribing a recuperative system of instincts, nor in rallying the anemic and infirm to unlikely feats of heroism and nobility. Decadent souls can do nothing but enact their constitutive chaos, expressing themselves creatively in their own self-destruction.

Human flourishing is therefore a remote and attenuated expression of one's physiological destiny. While individuals enjoy limited control over the precise expression of their native vitality, they can neither alter nor augment the vital resources at their disposal. Decadent individuals, for example, cannot help but enact their constitutive contradictions:

Instinctively to choose what is harmful for oneself, to feel attracted by "disinterested" motives, that is virtually the formula of decadence. (TW 9:35)

To the decadent souls whom he diagnoses, Nietzsche offers no cures, no therapies, and no hopes for a regimen of self-constitution that might make them whole. In a notebook entry, he ridicules the idea that we might combat decay simply by easing the experience of discomfort that attends it:

The supposed remedies of degeneration are also mere palliatives against some of its effects: the "cured" are merely one type of the degenerate. (WP 42)

Socrates' ugly face betrays not only an ugly character, but also the fatality of an ugly character. So for modern decadents as well: cosmetic surgery can perhaps salvage a misshapen face, but not a broken soul. Decadent individuals can hope at best to rechristen their constitutive ugliness as an alternative form of beauty; in order to receive this dubious service, they must consult their local philosophers and priests.

Decadence *must* run its inexorable course, gradually exhausting those protective instincts that might otherwise have resisted its advance (EH, "Wise," 6). Any recuperative scheme that claims otherwise is guilty of confusing the effects (or signs) of decay for its cause:

This young man turns pale early and wilts; his friends say: that is due to this or that disease. I say: that he became diseased, that he did not resist the disease, was already the effect of an impoverished life or hereditary exhaustion. (TW 6:2)

Like all decadents, this young man must enact the moral drama scripted for him: "one anti-natural step virtually compels the second" (EH, "Human," 3). It matters not that he acknowledges his role, discerning perhaps the familiar trajectory of the advancing plot, for his crippled will can muster no effective protest. Nor can he rely on his instincts to guide him to a healthier form of life, for it is precisely the failure of his instincts to collaborate harmoniously that has sealed his demise. In Nietzsche's post-Zarathustran writings, in fact, "physiology" becomes destiny.

NOTES

1. With the exception of occasional emendations, I rely throughout this essay on Walter Kaufmann's translations/editions of Nietzsche's books for Viking Press/Random House. For further discussion of the issues raised here in this essay, see my *Nietzsche's Dangerous Game* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
2. GM, preface, 4.
3. EH, "Destiny," sec. 6.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. For the most part, Nietzsche's post-Zarathustran theory of decadence has been either ignored by scholars or conflated with his treatment of nihilism. Notable exceptions to this rule include Daniel Ahern, *Nietzsche as Cultural Physician* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), especially chapters 1-2; Brian G. Domino, "Nietzsche's Republicanism" (Ph.D. diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1993); Jacob Golomb, *Nietzsche's Enticing Psychology of Power* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1989), especially chapter 1; and Henning Ottman, *Philosophie und Politik bei Nietzsche* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1987), especially part C, section 4.
7. TW 9:41.
8. TW 9:35.
9. TW 9:35; cf. TW 9:39, AC 6.
10. TW 2:11.
11. For a thorough account of Nietzsche's reliance on the imagery and vocabulary of *décadence*, see Domino, "Nietzsche's Republicanism," 133-44.
12. For a succinct and sympathetic account of the naturalism that informs Nietzsche's critical philosophy, see Richard Schacht, "Nietzsche's Gay Science, Or, How to Naturalize Cheerfully," collected in *Reading Nietzsche*, ed. Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 68-86.
13. *Human, All-Too-Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), preface, 8. On Nietzsche's ingenious transformation of philology, from the science of interpreting "dead" texts into the science of interpreting "live" bodies, see Eric Blondel, *Nietzsche, The Body and Culture: Philosophy as a Philological Genealogy*, trans. Sean Hand (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991), chapter 8.
14. On the development of Nietzsche's reliance on a drive-based model of agency, see the excellent study by Graham Parkes, *Composing the Soul* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), especially chapters 7-8.
15. GM II:16.
16. For Nietzsche's attempt to explain what the soul is like (rather than what it is), see Parkes, *Composing the Soul*, 7-8, 171-73.
17. GM II:16.
18. Ibid.
19. A persistent theme of Nietzsche's notes from 1888 is the belief that philosophers, moralists, and statesmen regularly mistake the consequences of decadence for its causes (cf. WP 38-48). Hence the failure of all prescriptive measures for "treating" decadence: "But the supposed remedies of degeneration are also mere palliatives against some of its effects: the 'cured' are merely one type of the degenerates" (WP 42).
20. Martin Heidegger, "Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten," *Der Spiegel*, 23 (1976):193-219.
21. In the context of the Darwinesque analogy he proposes to explain the origin of the bad conscience, he describes the loss on the part of the first land animals of "their former guides, their regulating, unconscious and infallible drives [*Triebel*]" in apposition to the disvaluation and suspension of their "instincts [*Instinkte*]" (GM II:16).
22. On the question of Nietzsche's multiple influences on Freud, see Golomb, *Nietzsche's Enticing Psychology of Power*, chapter 1.
23. Although Nietzsche does not use the term *décadence* in this passage, his definition here of *corruption* is virtually the same as his definition of *décadence* at TW 9:35 and 9:39.
24. The currency of this distinction is most directly attributable not to Nietzsche himself, but to Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), especially chapter 2. Deleuze proposes this distinction as the guiding typology of Nietzsche's thought, and he often employs it in synonymy to Nietzsche's own distinction between "health" and "decadence."
25. For a compelling account of the psychological conditions under which the (self-)creative individual might "return to Nature," see Parkes, *Composing the Soul*, 363-71. Parkes persuasively suggests that if one assiduously disciplines one's multiple drives and impulses, then eventually "control can be relaxed, one

can dare to be natural, and the multiplicity will spontaneously order itself" (377).

26. Nietzsche insists that "one can measure the effect of the ugly with a dynamometer. . . . The ugly is understood as a sign and symptom of degeneration: whatever reminds us in the least of the degeneration causes in us the judgment of 'ugly'" (TW 9:20). In his notes, he similarly maintains that "the muscular strength of a girl increases as soon as a man comes into her vicinity; there are instruments to measure this" (WP 807); *Friedrich Nietzsche: Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*, ed. G. Colli and M. Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter/Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980), vol. 13, 1715f, pp. 526-27.

27. BGE 13.

28. Golomb offers a persuasive account of how Nietzsche's depth-psychological method enables "a morality of positive power" (*Nietzsche's Emancipation*, 225). See especially chapter 6, in which Golomb articulates his illuminating distinction between "negative" and "positive" power.

29. While outlining "a psychology of the artist," for example, Nietzsche maintains that "What is essential in [the frenzy of an overcharged and swollen will] is the feeling of increased strength and fullness" (TW 9:8).

30. My attention to Nietzsche's reliance on political metaphors for soulcraft, and to its Platonic provenance, are indebted to Parkes, *Composing the Soul*, 346-62.

31. For a provocative investigation into the potentially affirmative consequences of decadence, especially for the possible reconfiguration of individual agency, see Werner Hamacher, "Disgregation des Willens": Nietzsche über Individualismus und Individualität," *Nietzsche-Studien* 15 (1986):306-36.

32. Influenced by the antimaterialist atomisms promulgated by Boscovich, Lange, and others, Nietzsche presents the "world" of will to power as a dynamic whirl of quanta (or "centers") of force. Each quantum of force is defined not in terms of a material essence or substratum, but only in terms of its differential "effects" on other quanta of force within the plenum. He thus proposes, in a famous notebook entry, that "a 'thing' is the sum of its effects, synthetically united by a concept, an image" (WP 551). His hypothesis of will to power thus suggests an account of the world as an immeasurably dense, undifferentiated whole, which is *not* the sum of the constituent "parts" inhabited (and hubristically "explained") by human beings. If quanta of force are isolated and defined only in terms of their differential relations to other quanta of force (WP 1067), then any attempt to measure the world itself, through an aggregation of all known quanta of force, is doomed to failure and folly.

33. In his letter to Köselitz on March 20, 1882, Nietzsche credits Boscovich with replacing matter with force [*Kraft*] as the central focus of physics and cosmology. *Friedrich Nietzsche: Sämtliche Briefe, Kritische Studienausgabe in 8 Bänden*, ed. G. Colli and M. Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter/Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986), vol. 6, no. 213, pp. 183-84. For a definitive reckoning of Nietzsche's debts to Boscovich and Lange, see George J. Stack's seminal study, *Nietzsche and Lange* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1983), especially chapter 9.

34. In a notebook entry from 1887, Nietzsche thus scribbles: "What determines rank, sets off rank, is only quanta of power, and nothing else" (WP 855).

In the following year he adds, "What determines your rank is the quantum of power you are: the rest is cowardice" (WP 858).

35. In a notebook entry from 1888, Nietzsche thus insists that "If we eliminate these additions, no things remain but only dynamic quanta, in a relation of tension to all other dynamic quanta: their essence lies in their relation to all other quanta, in their 'effect' upon the same" (WP 636).

36. See Stack, *Nietzsche and Lange*, 35-36.

37. For a detailed study of Nietzsche's various experiments with atomism, see James Porter, "Nietzsche's Atoms," in *Nietzsche und die antike Philosophie*, ed. Daniel W. Conway and Rudolf Rehn (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1992), 47-90.

38. Mark Warren has persuasively demonstrated the centrality of a "crisis of human agency" to Nietzsche's understanding of modernity, in *Nietzsche and Political Thought* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), especially chapters 1-2. Rather than view this "crisis" in terms of the "natural," descensional trajectory of modernity, however, Warren attributes the "crisis" to the onset of "nihilism," a term that refers, he believes, to "situations in which an individual's material and interpretive practices fail to provide grounds for a reflexive interpretation of agency" (17). While this definition of "nihilism" bears a family resemblance to Nietzsche's concept of "decadence," Warren's various accounts of the "causes" of nihilism (see, e.g., 18-19) suggest a significant departure from Nietzsche's own symptomatological method. In fact, Warren's understanding of "nihilism" as a species of alienation would seem to betray the confusion of cause and effect that Nietzsche is keen to debunk.

CHAPTER 1

Nihilism and the Problem of Temporality

THE MEANINGS OF THE ETERNAL RETURN

With the publication of Karl Löwith's fundamental work on Nietzsche's concept of the "*ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen*" in 1936, the "eternal return of the same" assumed a central role, which it had not previously had in philosophical historiography; in the interpretation of Nietzsche's thought. In Löwith's book the whole range of Nietzsche's thought—from the juvenilia to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* to the posthumous writings published as *The Will to Power*—is bound together by the eternal return. Seen in this light, Nietzsche's philosophy becomes an attempt to "restore the pre-Socratic vision of the world" and marks the conclusion of a long process of "de-Christianization" in modern thought, starting with Descartes.¹ In 1936 Karl Jaspers also published his *Nietzsche*, and Heidegger began to shape his interpretation of Nietzsche in a series of courses he gave at the University of Freiburg through 1940, though he did not publish the work until 1961.² In Jaspers the eternal return still occupies a subordinate position,³ but Heidegger regards it as one of the main themes structuring Nietzsche's thought, or rather as the essential one along with the will to power. The will to power itself represents the essence of the world as Nietzsche views it, while the eternal return is its existence and actuation (*albeit*—and this is decisive—in a sense different from the relationship traditionally posited between essence and existence).⁴

Although the idea of the eternal return is the most powerful concept elaborated by philosophical historiography to date for the interpretation of Nietzsche, it falls far short of supplying a solution to all the contradictions present in Nietzsche's oeuvre. If anything, it actually brings out their fundamental outlines more clearly. In fact, the eternal return itself is a problematic concept,