

expressed in Oedipal, psychoanalytic terms; or if translated into some naturalistic interest in power or satisfaction.<sup>37</sup> It is possible to say that there is some sort of biological drive behind our efforts at reproduction, for example, and even behind the creation of social rules for that process, but it is not possible to imagine such a language of need and drive *employed in an address to another*, as a practical proposal to another, within what Nietzsche has called the context of "life." And yet all of this does not mean that we require some sort of idealized *distortion* of such a nature in order to be able to bear each other's claims on one another. Here the language of appearance and reality breaks down in a way that Nietzsche clearly signals as a model for what he means by, hopes for, in a *gayu scienza*, where that breakdown is taken to heart. We need, he seems to be suggesting, a philosophical language like this erotic language, not a flowery embellishment of a literal truth but one that has overcome thinking of the matter in those alternatives. This would be the "perspective of life" and would be a language capable of appealing and amusing Demeter, the language of Baubo.

And this way of putting the point makes it clear that Nietzsche also imagines that the experiment in so addressing one another might easily and contingently fail and fall catastrophically; it may just be the case that a sustainable attachment to life and to one another requires the kind of more standard, prosaic "illusion" (a lie) that we have now also rendered impossible. But like all desire, Nietzsche's is, as he says, "unjust" and does not measure itself by the rationally probable. Hence Nietzsche's unusual rhetoric: at once an attempt to shame and to inspire, all by merely manifesting his own aspiration, by offering an image of a life in which what are now taken to be all the possible reflective means of sustaining desire have been lost but that rejects any idea of a merely apparent life's having been revealed. If so, then the most sweeping expression for what is now needed will turn out to be as difficult as it sounds: to sustain the intellectual conscience constitutive of a *philosophical life*, but now without what had been traditionally understood as *philosophy*, the exposure of the reality behind, hidden beneath, the appearances.

37. It is a ironic that a large number of interpretations of Nietzsche, especially the so-called naturalist ones, do precisely what he is here forbidding.

PLP 12  
 chapter 3

#### CHAPTER THREE

### Modernity as a Psychological Problem

#### I.

Nietzsche's best-known attempt to break the hold that a philosophical or moral picture might have over us is genealogy. At least, genealogy can be liberating in this way if such a genealogy can show us that practices and norms could have been very much otherwise, that some assumption or norm we take for granted as inevitable and unavoidable in fact has a contingent, quite avoidable origin, and an origin considerably more complicated than any notion of "rational commitments" or "reflective endorsement" or "faith in revelation" or the like would allow.

However, I have been trying to suggest that sometimes Nietzsche speculates figuratively on unappreciated, ignored psychological elements of the "picture" itself. Wittgenstein's famous notion of a picture's having a hold on us is largely metaphorical, but Nietzsche explores the picture *as a picture* or an image and plays with the figurative details of the picture itself as a way of defamiliarizing it, changing the way we imagine it, depriving it of its "aura," we might say. He does this with a picture of the value of truth and with a picture of the ends or values of science. This amounts to a kind of rhetorical argument by analogy,

one that pivots on an attempt to help us see the traditional picture in a new way. (This somewhat literary approach is also consistent with the constraints Nietzsche had in effect laid down by his denial that philosophical critique amounted to revealing what really lay hidden under the appearances, the denial that we discussed at the end of the last chapter. In effect, he is not looking for what the "morality picture" hides but, more closely, at what it shows.) Once we do see it in this new way, we can come to understand the dispensability or even the arbitrariness of the traditional picture, and we can begin to appreciate the practical need for looking at things a different way. A new picture might come to get a grip on us. That is, the case for such a need is also made somewhat figuratively, as Nietzsche tries to paint a picture of what has turned into ill health, practical unsustainability, and even the "death" of some form of life. Sometimes this sort of case is made in an almost Hegelian or at least more prosaic way, as if various of our practices simply require commitments that are incompatible with one another, and the rational incompatibility of these commitments best explains the weakening hold of some view of norms.<sup>1</sup> But most of the time, Nietzsche's metaphors and images do most of this unusual work by themselves, giving us a different way of understanding what is happening to us. Imagining truth as a woman and philosophers as clumsy lovers is one such attempt; imagining a science that can be "gay," or a science like the original *gayza scienza*, with truth pictured not just as any woman but as Baubo, is another.

In this chapter and the next, I would like to examine two more such alternative psychological pictures. Both will demonstrate that the complexity of the literary dimensions of Nietzsche's project have been strikingly underestimated, that it is far more difficult to ascribe a position to him than has been appreciated. Ultimately this focus will narrow the discussion down to the one image Nietzsche most wants to

1. Nietzsche clearly thinks this about Christianity, where the norm for scrupulous honesty about one's motives eventually must raise similar and ultimately destabilizing, embarrassing questions about the motives behind the Christian commitment itself. And the "must" in that claim about issues that "must be raised" is a claim about a kind of practical necessity. All of which is surprising, given the usual views of Nietzsche. Cf., *inter alia*, *GM*, II, §27.

free us from—the powerful picture of a subject separable from and in effect "commanding" his or her deeds, a distinct causal force responsible for actions occurring and commitments undertaken, something like the pilot of the ship, or a general in charge of her own little army of body movements and vocalizations. As I noted in the preceding chapter, trying to free ourselves of such an image without introducing another picture just as inappropriate, that of some sort of subjectless play of anonymous forces, will be the crucial test of what Nietzsche is trying to convince us of.<sup>2</sup> The first image that I would like to discuss is in fact a little parable.

## II.

Paragraph 125 in Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* is perhaps the most famous passage in all of Nietzsche. In it, Nietzsche introduces a character, *der tolle Mensch* ("the crazy man"), who proclaims that God is dead and that we all collectively have killed him, that all must bear the burden of guilt (for centuries) for this horrible murder. Like other famous images in philosophy, like Plato's cave or Descartes's evil genius or Kant's island of truth surrounded by seas of illusion, the passage has taken on a life of its own quite independent of its place and function in *The Gay Science*, the book that may be Nietzsche's most beautiful and best thought out. It has come to represent and sum up not just the unbelievability of God in the late modern world but the "death" of a Judeo-Christian form of moral life, the end of metaphysics, or the unsuccessful attempt to end metaphysics, or even the end of philosophy itself.

Yet the passage is also quite mysterious and suggests a number of interpretive problems. As we have seen, the very idea of a death or an end to a form of life (rather than a refutation or an enlightenment) is worth considerable attention in itself, but the literary details of this

2. One of the few commentators to appreciate the importance of the literary elements of Nietzsche's style is Sarah Kofman (1972). As will be very clear, I disagree with almost every aspect of her interpretation, but she sees clearly what needs to be accounted for in Nietzsche's texts.

little drama are even more striking.<sup>3</sup> The announcement is made by a crazy man who carries a lantern although it is broad daylight;<sup>4</sup> says that he is seeking a God who, he clearly knows, does not now exist; and after proclaiming that the time for such announcement is not right and that he will never be understood, promptly begins his prophetic activity anew and with even more intensity (breaking into churches and screaming his message at the assembled multitude). He is clearly crazy, but in what sense is he crazy? There is of course a "romantic" sense of insanity as the inevitable price of authenticity or integrity, according to which it is the unusual depth or profundity of the insight itself that drives one crazy, a successor notion to the mythic sense that God may not be viewed by humans. His absence apparently cannot be borne either, according to such a romantic view.

But the announcement itself suggests a kind of insanity more directly. On the face of it, the announcement that "God is dead" is, even metaphorically, opaque. If there had been a god, we could not have killed him. That is, if we could have killed him, he could not have been a god in anything like the Judeo-Christian sense. If "God" existed only as a constructed object of belief—a kind of collective "illusion," in Freud's famous claim—then exposing this illusion might be unsettling and make for much anxiety. Afterward, it might be impossible to return to the same illusion. But such unease could not be about a "death" or, especially, *guilt* at having "caused" it, even if one reads the claim metaphorically (as in "We destroyed the old illusion that there was a god"). If that were the meaning intended, the only guilt relevant would be guilt at having allowed ourselves to have been so deceived.

3. Nietzsche is obviously suggesting that this death is not rightly understood as the inability to believe a proposition. (And, if that is so, if the phenomenon is more like what the religious call "losing faith," then the original being religious, is not originally and solely a matter of belief.)

4. This is an obvious reference to Diogenes, who did the same thing, but instead of searching for *un borne homme* (as Nietzsche is, I have suggested, following Pascal), he searches for a God who, he knows, no longer exists.

5. I discuss these aspects of the passage in much more detail in chapter 6 of the second edition of *Modernity as a Philosophical Problem* (Pippin 1999a, 144–59). The focus there is on the unusually apposite relevance of Sigmund Freud's differentiation between "mourning" and "melancholy" to the psychological problem Nietzsche wants to diagnose.

and could not be guilt at ending the delusion.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, it is a striking fact that Nietzsche himself provides, in his own voice, not the voice of a persona, a much simpler gloss on the claim and one far different in tone. He explains in *The Gay Science* that "the greatest recent event—that 'God is dead'" should simply be taken to mean "that the belief in the Christian God has become unworthy of belief" (GS, §343, 199, T).<sup>7</sup>

So the oddness of the language in paragraph 125 of *The Gay Science* itself, and Nietzsche's own very different gloss (especially since the theme of that later passage in book 5 is "cheerfulness," not guilt),<sup>7</sup> directs our attention to the contrasting uncheerful, indeed morbid tone of the first passage, the famous locus classicus often cited as Nietzsche's own "belief" that "God is dead" (Nietzsche's cheerfulness, *Heiterkeit*, is the important issue here because the most important question at stake for him since the encounter with the French moralists in the late 1870s is the possibility of a "gay science" and so not nihilism and guilt. This passage is the turning point in avoiding La Rochefoucauld's cynicism and Pascal's despair and approaching what he called, in praising Montaigne, "a coming to rest within oneself, a peaceful being for oneself and breathing out"<sup>8</sup> what Montaigne himself had described as "C'est une absolue perfection, et comme divine, de sçavoir jouyr loiallement de son ester."<sup>9</sup> It would seem that Nietzsche is trying most of

6. We could be said to feel responsibility, perhaps guilt, if we helped render the belief in God less credible, and so made much more painful the lives of millions who appear to need this illusion very badly, but, aside from a very small number of people, the announcement can hardly be said to have had that effect (as the end of the parable makes clear), and the passage suggests guilt about having "murdered God," with bloody knives even, not guilt at the effects of such a "murder."

7. Cf. Nietzsche's praise of Montaigne's cheerfulness, "Heiterkeit," and his contrast between two forms of *Heiterkeit* in the third of the *Untimely Meditations*. The language he uses to describe what he thinks Montaigne has avoided sounds as if addressed directly at the "crazy man's" histrionics: "There are two very different kinds of cheerfulness. The true thinker always cheers and refreshes, whether he is being serious or humorous, expressing his human insight or his divine forbearance; without peevish and strength, perhaps a little harshly and valiantly but in any case as a victor" (UM, 135).  
8. This is from "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth," or the fourth essay of the *Untimely Meditations* (207). The translation has been amended; the German reads: "ein In-sich-zur-Ruhe-kommen, ein friedliches Für-sich-sein und Ausatmen" (KS4, vol. 1, 444).

9. Montaigne 1962 (III, xlii).

all to draw critical attention to, rather than express or identify with, the "melancholic" tone, both of the announcement and perhaps of the coming modernist culture of melancholy, the tone appropriate to the belief that a kind of death has occurred, that we were responsible, and that this death results only in some unbearable, frightening absence. So the most extraordinary feature of the history of the reception of the passage is that what seems clearly to be a kind of symptom of a modern pathology, for which Nietzsche wants a diagnosis and some sort of cure, is often taken as the diagnosis of the modern "orientation" or mood itself. The picture he wants to free us from is the most familiar picture we have of Nietzsche!<sup>10</sup>

The most significant feature of the passage concerns what Nietzsche appears to think the appropriate response to this announcement should be. In setting the context for the announcement, especially in describing the audience to whom it is made, Nietzsche goes out of his way to suggest that what we normally regard as "atheism" is far too simplistic a description of what it would be truly to "incorporate" this truth. The opening passage describes as the madman's audience a group of people who "did not believe in God" and, when they hear the madman proclaim that he seeks God, jeer sarcastically and joke, "Has he been lost, then?" "Did he lose his way like a child?" "Is he hiding?" "Is he afraid of us?" "Has he gone to sea?" But if the madman is mad, these jeering atheists are clearly portrayed, as they are elsewhere in

10. I have tried to show (Pippin 1999a) that Nietzsche is here anticipating Freud's famous distinction between mourning and melancholy in reaction to a loss or trauma and so is suggesting that the madman's madness is this kind of melancholic obsession with what has been lost, complete with its narcissistic assumption of grandiose responsibility, lurid details of murder and blood and guilt, and repetitive compulsion. What is most revealing is what Freud says about melancholy: "Melancholy is psychically designated by a deeply painful disturbance, by a suspending of interests in the external world, by a loss of the capacity to love, by a restriction in activity and an emphasis on a feeling which expresses itself in self-condemnations and complaints against oneself and which escalates to a deluded expectation of punishment" (Freud 1963, 165; my emphasis). (The fact that the madman's reaction is pathologically melancholic does not mean that Nietzsche is trying to "ironicize" the entire issue, as if the madman were simply mistaken or neurotic. He certainly does mean to suggest that we have only just begun to appreciate how much will change once the "event" is properly digested. See, for example, 71, "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man [*Streifzüge eines Unzeitgemässen*]," §5.)

Nietzsche, as thoughtless, smug, self-satisfied boors. In other passages, Nietzsche's Homeric epithet for such atheists is "pale atheists," suggesting this lack of vitality or even sickness.<sup>11</sup> So we need to understand why, if the death of God signals a general end to the possibility of transcendence, religion, morally significant truth, and so forth, the successor culture would *not* simply have to be a culture of such pale (joking, ironic) atheists, people for whom nothing much is important beyond their own immediate happiness and their security in achieving future happiness.<sup>12</sup> If Nietzsche wants to suggest that the madman is pathologically wrong to treat the absence of God as a loss, wrong to take on the burden of a self-lacerating guilt, he seems just as dissatisfied with these "village atheist" types who are too easily satisfied with a secular materialism and easy unbelief and so do not understand the erotic aspirations and ideals Nietzsche elsewhere treats as "a condition of life."

Thus the question is, why does Nietzsche treat these self-satisfied atheists this way? *What* are they missing? What does Nietzsche want us to understand by his rejecting both the notion of a now absent God and the stance of what appears to be straightforward, enlightened atheism?<sup>13</sup> In his own terms, this means understanding why a life guided by the "old values" is just as impossible as a life guided by "no values," or with only the weakest of general or depth commitments, and so why a "transvaluation," an "Umwertung" of all values is what is now necessary, and what it would be like.

11. See especially *GM*, III, §24, 117. With reference to my thesis in this book, note also: "NB! Hence one finds less free thinking [*Freisinnigkeit*] among atheists than among the pious and believers when it comes to moral things (e.g. in moral questions Pascal is freer and thinks more freely than Schopenhauer)" (*NF* [1887], *KSA*, vol. 12, §21). And this more lighthearted note on atheists from *Eccē Homo*, in reference to Nietzsche's admiration for, even envy of, Stendahl: "He beat me to the best atheist joke, just the sort of thing that I would say: 'God's only excuse is that he doesn't exist'" (*EH*, 91).

12. I am grateful to Irad Kimhi for several conversations about this problem in particular.

13. It is certainly true that these atheists do not yet appreciate that a great deal more of the stability of their moral lives is affected by the "death of God." They do not appreciate that their whole picture of human psychology, human sociality, and virtually all nonreligious value is now threatened, that belief in God cannot be so isolated and simply given up. But in the terms used below, that is still too "intellectualist" a picture, as if there is something more they must come to understand. That is at best a half-truth; whatever they lack, it cannot be provided by enlightenment.

## III.

Nietzsche's most comprehensive and best-known term for the historical and psychological situation that in the present age requires this "transvaluation of values" after "the death of God" is *nihilism*, and that larger discussion sets out a bigger stage on which Nietzsche can present what he thinks will avoid the pathological response of the madman and the insipid and self-satisfied secularism of the last men and pale atheists.

The surface meaning of these claims about the *nihil*, about the absence that necessitates a transvaluation, has suggested many different kinds of provocations and so raises questions about how Nietzsche wants us to understand the conditions possible now (without God, in all senses of the term) for the success of that activity he treats as identical to a distinctly human living: esteeming, *schätzen*, valuing. ("Human," Zarathustra says, means "the estreater" [TSSZ, 431].<sup>14</sup>) The possibility of sustaining a commitment to any such value in the current historical condition, a condition of cultural or spiritual death, is the "psychological" question we have been following throughout.

On the one hand, the problem of nihilism can look like a problem of knowledge, or at least reasonable belief. What had once seemed known, or worthy of belief, now seems a "lie," "unworthy of belief." Such cognitivist terms suggest an anthropologist watching the disenchanting enlightenment of a primitive tribe, and so the notion appeals to such double-edged enlightenment as the best explanation for how we have come to be the first civilization that must live self-consciously without any confidence that we know what civilized life is for.

On the other hand, especially when Nietzsche is trying to draw a distinction between what he calls a passive and an active nihilism, what we have come to claim to know or to believe, while important, is not the chief issue. "Active" nihilism is interpreted as a "sign of increased *power* of spirit"; "passive" nihilism as "decline and recession of the *power* of spirit."<sup>15</sup> These passages take a familiar skeptical attitude

14. The point is made again in GM, II, §8, 49, where man is called "the calculating animal as such [*das abschätzende Tier an sich*]."

15. Cf. the passage from *Twilight of the Idols*: "Whoever doesn't know how to put his will into things at least puts *meaning* into them: that means, he has faith that a

about the practical implications of any putative intellectual enlightenment. Claims about value do not, for Nietzsche, report the discovery of moral facts but express, enact, encourage, and partially realize a commitment. Giving a genealogy of such commitments can never be completed by an inventory and evaluation of theoretical beliefs; something else must always be added. It has seemed to many modern philosophers that such an addition must be a kind of *subjective* reaction—an outpouring of sympathy, a recoil in pain, the stirring of a passion—and therewith a "projection of a value" as a way of embracing or rejecting some situation. This is not Nietzsche's position (although he certainly often says things that sound like this), but for now we need only note that while we can base reasons to act or to undertake commitments on such beliefs (as has often come to be the case, given our "intellectual conscience"),<sup>16</sup> the strength or weakness of the theoretical claim about "what there is" is not itself an independent factor in such commitments, in such acts of valuing. Acting is *negating* what there is and so presumes some sort of experience in which such an absence or a barrier or a limitation or a simple fact becomes unacceptable, not merely noted; it is something that must be overcome. Acting in the light of this unacceptability is "acting for a value," and what we are in effect looking for is the source and meaning of such unacceptability, given the death of God, the absence of any notion of a natural completion or telos, natural law, common human nature, or some objective ideal or divine legislator, and also given the gross simplicity of any attempt to try to will to reinvest the world with some new, life-affirming value.

In summary, then, we have been investigating how Nietzsche understands the psychological conditions of value, the possibility of an action-guiding depth commitment. He treats the current context as hostile to this possibility both because of the death of God and even more because of how that news has been understood. For a number of reasons, previously orienting commitments have lost their

will is already there (principle of faith)" (77, 158). And compare: "It is a measure of the degree of strength of will to what extent one can do without meaning in things, to what extent one can endure to live in a meaningless world because one organizes a small portion of it oneself" (NF [1887], KSA, vol. 12, 364).

16. See GS, §110, 111, on how our commitments to knowledge and truth came to "take their place as needs among the other needs."

credibility and, more important, their ability to inspire sacrifice and dedication, and the disorientation brought about by this collapse has been intensified by two forms of pathological reaction: a melancholic and ultimately narcissistic theatrical guilt and a self-satisfied pose of supposedly enlightened free thinking. These reactions also rest on misdiagnoses (themselves symptoms of underlying psychological conditions), treating nihilism either as a direct consequence of intellectual enlightenment or as if a result of a courageous decision to "pull out" the value in the world that we had naively "put into it" before.

## IV.

What I want to suggest at this point is probably predictable by now: that we treat the phenomenon of nihilism in a way closer to Nietzsche's images and figures and tropes, many of which have been cited often; images of death, decay, illness, the absence of tension, a "sleep" of the spirit (as in his beautiful claim that what is needed now is "an ability to dream without having to sleep"), and perhaps the most intuitive metonymy of failed desire: boredom.<sup>17</sup> These images suggest that the problem of nihilism does not consist in a failure of knowledge or a failure of strength or courage or will but a *failure of desire*, the *flickering out of some erotic flame*. Noting as we have how often and with what significance Nietzsche refers to life and the "perspective of life" as the issue of an erotic striving, that his question is "what makes possible the origination of such a wanting?" what sustains it and the sacrifices it calls for, and so forth, casts a different light on the nature of the "death of God" or nihilism crisis and on what Nietzsche regards as a possible way out of it. It frames all the issues differently, especially since the failure of desire can be baffling, quite mysterious,

17. Cf. *HAH*, 390; *BGE*, §228, 118. In *BGE*, §254, the passage in which he praises France as "the seat of the most spiritual and sophisticated culture in Europe today" (*BGE*, §254, 145) ("der Sitz der geistigsten und raffiniertesten Kultur Europas"), he attributes much of the boring quality of German life to Germans' lack of experience of and their innocence in "voluptate psychologica." Cf. also Heidegger's interesting shift in emphasis, in his lecture course of 1929-30 (*Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik. Welt—Endlichkeit—Einsamkeit*), from anxiety to boredom as an ontologically revelatory state (1975ff., 29-30:244, 248).

not something that in some other sense we ever "want" to happen, as mysterious as the issue of how one might address such a failure. (More about this in chapter 6.) And, as we saw, none of the reformulations can appeal to any simple "naturalism." That is, what Nietzsche is talking about is clearly not the mere presence of powerful urges or passions or their matter-of-fact absence. We can experience such urges without "committing" ourselves to them; we can even have contempt for our own passions and for ourselves for having them. It is the possibility of a second-order passionate identification with some possible project or goal, some dedication to a hierarchy of what matters, that interests Nietzsche and that raises the questions of how he understands the possibility of the self's "negative" relation to itself and what would, in the historical situation he describes, make possible a way of addressing that "negativity" or self-dissatisfaction.<sup>18</sup>

This image of the passionless, bored bourgeois has by now become a rather banal cliché, in large measure thanks to Nietzsche. There are two elements that are striking (and underappreciated) in Nietzsche's account of this phenomenon: (1) that so much is at stake for him in this sort of fate: the unsustainability of "values" and assumptions we would otherwise think are simply indispensable for any coherent life; and (2) the role of various images of eros or striving in his narrative. The erotic images that refer to such a basic commitment repeat, become like motifs in Nietzsche's work. One example of these images states a problem that has clearly emerged from what has been said above and will occupy us for the rest of this chapter and much of the next. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Zarathustra announces the advent of nihilism as an erotic problem this way: "Beware, the time approaches when human beings will no longer launch the arrow of their longing

18. Stating properly Nietzsche's position on nature and naturalism is quite difficult. He clearly wants to distinguish himself from reductionism and the dismal science of the English genealogists. An example of the difficulty is the following remarks about Montaigne: "Even Montaigne is a naturalist in ethics compared to the ancients, though an endlessly richer and more thoughtful one. We are thoughtless naturalists, and are fully conscious of it [*Auch Montaigne ist den Allen gegenüber ein Naturalist der Ethik, aber ein grenzenlos reicher und dankbarer. Wir sind gedankenlose Naturalisten und zwar mit allem Wissen*]" (*NF* [1873-74], *KSA*, vol. 7, 741). There is another essay one could wish for from Nietzsche in *Ecce Homo*—"How I Avoided Becoming a 'Gedankenlose Naturalist'."

beyond the human, and the string of their bow will have forgotten how to whirr" (TSSZ, 9). In the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*, he notes that our long struggle with and often opposition to and dissatisfaction with our own moral tradition, European Christianity, has created a "magnificent tension [*Spannung*] of spirit in Europe, the likes of which the earth has never known: with such a tension in our bow we can now shoot at the furthest goals" (BGE, preface, 4). But, he goes on, the "democratic enlightenment" also sought to "unbend" such a bow, "to insure that spirit should not experience itself so readily a 'need'" (ibid.). This latter formulation coincides with a wonderfully lapidary expression in *The Gay Science*. In discussing "the millions of young Europeans who cannot endure boredom and themselves," he notes that they would even welcome "a yearning to suffer something in order to make their suffering a likely reason for action, for deeds." In sum: "neediness is needed! [*Not ist nötig!*]" (GS, §56, 64). (One of his most striking formulations of the death of desire occurs in *Ecce Homo* in a telling passage that has received almost no comment, even though it is a wonderful summary of the uniqueness of his position. He notes what is happening to us as "one mistake after another is calmly put on ice; the ideal is not refused—it freezes to death" [EH, II6].)<sup>19</sup>

In the context of these images, the possibility of picturing a state of character or social organization as valuable is what it would be for it to inspire a deep commitment to it, somehow to create a longing for such an object, or to find others in whom a possible spark of such longing could be discovered and fanned. Such a possibility is hard to imagine, since no subject, however strong-willed, could simply inject such erotic value "into" the world from a position "outside it" like this. Any such desire can only be found and inspired and sustained in a certain sort of world, a world where some intense dissatisfaction can be balanced by an aspiration at home in that very world, a world, in other words, lovable enough to inspire as well as frustrate.<sup>20</sup> Inspiration of this sort can create what Nietzsche has been calling the "tension" in a bow and what I have termed Nietzsche's account of the self's "negative" relation to itself. This tension, that is, amounts

19. Trying to "refute" an ideal is called an "idealism" (a faith in the autonomy of ideals) and is rejected. Ibid.

20. Cf. on this topic the valuable discussion by Lear (1990, 132-55).

to Nietzsche's term for self-consciousness, the possibility of some distance from oneself that makes possible everything from there being possible addressees of Nietzsche's rhetorical appeals to rendering intelligible that one could not be who one is, might thus have to become, world want to become, who one is.

However, on the other hand, fidelity to Nietzsche's images seems to make things even more puzzling. For the question of the possibility of such an appeal and response is always treated as a *historical* possibility (or absence of possibility) by Nietzsche, even given the warnings of the second *Untimely Meditation*. This embeddedness of such a subject adds to the difficulty. Consider this summation of the issue (a passage that also renders pretty irrelevant both most of Heidegger's great dissatisfaction with Nietzsche as well as the subjectivist/projection, neo-Humean readings of Nietzsche on value): "The whole attitude of 'man against the world,' of man as a 'world-negating' principle, of man as the measure of the value of things, as a judge of the world who finally places' existence itself on his scales and finds it too light—the monstrous stupidity of this attitude has finally dawned on us and we are sick of it; we laugh as soon as we encounter the juxtaposition of 'man and world,' separated by the sublime presumptuousness of the little word 'and!'" (GS, §346, 204). And Nietzsche was very well aware, from early in his writing career, that this unusual diagnosis of the condition of nihilism meant that strategies for addressing it were also going to be unusual, difficult, perhaps impossible. In "Schopenhauer as Educator," he notes a difficulty that suggests a tragic pathos to this position. "It is hard to create in anyone this condition of intrepid self-knowledge because it is impossible to teach love; for it is love alone that can bestow on the soul, not only a clear, discriminating and self-contemptuous view of itself, but also the desire to look beyond itself and to seek with all its might for a higher self as yet still concealed from it" (UM, 163). And in *The Gay Science* (§334, 186-87), he had noted that all love has to be learned. "Even he who loves himself will have learned it in this way—there is no other way. Love too must be learned." And from *Daybreak*: "All our thinking and poetising, from the highest to the lowest, is characterized, and more than characterized, by the excessive importance attached to the love story: on this account it may be that posterity will judge the whole inheritance of Christian culture to be marked by something petty and loony" (D, §76, 77, T).

Passages about eros and about the worldliness of eros have not, of course, been wholly ignored, but, as alluded to above, they are often folded into a general discussion of Nietzsche's views on the body, his supposed naturalism, and what he often refers to as the problem of instincts. And there is no particular reason not to see this emphasis on constant, powerfully motivating, human longing (or the enervating experience of its failure) as an aspect of what Nietzsche talks about elsewhere as instinctual forces (or their absence). (In *this* sense, he would again agree with Montaigne's claim that the human "condition est merveillesusement corporelle" [Montaigne 2002, 673].)

But again, as the emphasis on the presence or absence of "tension" has already revealed, a wholly naturalistic account would be much too hasty here. The very multiplicity and range of the different possible drives appealed to and the fact that Nietzsche's accounts of pre-volitional drives and instincts are often as much historical as organic (tied essentially to a specific historical self-understanding) indicate already that the basic psychological questions for him have remained interpretive, still essentially questions about the weight or significance of the corporeally pressing, however intense; the basic possible response to such embodied interpretations is a matter of Bildung or culture, not—or not any longer—the threat of sticks or the promise of carrots.<sup>21</sup>

According to Nietzsche, we are now in a position of tremendous collapse, flux, and uncertainty because of the failure of desire that he calls nihilism, and he clearly thinks there must be some—even if very indirect, unusual—way to *address* that failure. The most important of

21. Thus, from *The Gay Science*, "that a violent stimulus is experienced as pleasure or pain is a matter of the *interpreting* intellect which, to be sure, generally works without our being conscious of it" (GS, §127, 122). And especially in *Human, All Too Human*: "Because we have for millennia made moral, aesthetic, religious demands on the world . . . this world has gradually become so marvelously variegated, frightful, meaningful, soulful, it has acquired colour—but we have been the colourists" (HAH, 20). See also D, §103, 60 (that we must learn to think differently before we can "perhaps very late *weltleicht sehr spät*" learn to feel differently), and a very clear statement of the same point at D, §35, 57.

the psychological issues he must deal with is what he had called this "tension" in the boy, the way a soul can be said to pull against itself, a tension I suggested was the way Nietzsche understood the phenomenon of self-consciousness itself, the basic reason why a subject could never be said to be an object or a thing but can be, even at its most self-affirmative, also always in a negative relation to itself.

As we shall see in the next two chapters, this idea plays an important role in the distinction that he clearly everywhere assumes but does not specifically account for—the difference between a human action and an ordinary event. Nietzsche wants to make this distinction without reintroducing the standard Christian-liberal picture of individual reflective deliberation, endorsement, and causal power. In this context, the question concerns the psychological possibility of something like a reflective stance toward oneself (that "being a subject" is not like "being an animal" or "being white") and a kind of responsiveness that could account for some new sort of mobilization and direction of psychic energy and commitment. Nietzsche's rhetoric is not at all consistent with the picture of fixed natural types (master or slave types, say) merely expressing their inherited drives, so that the problem would be just finding a way to allow this to happen more robustly, to clear away the many barriers and internal monitors that the clever slavish types have constructed for millennia. This tension, while it is perfectly consistent with a naturalism and presumes no dualism, is hardly a matter of basic drives just *being* in conflict or tension. The self-relation in question is everywhere interpretive and evaluative, involves a self-dissatisfaction, not the pull of some other inclination, and so the question Nietzsche is raising concerns both the possibility of this self-contempt and what it would then mean to address it in some way, why one would address it.

## VI.

Nietzsche's account of this tension or self-dissatisfaction is essentially historical. The psyche amounts to a historically achieved and quite variable way of holding ourselves and others to account. For example, in the *Genealogy* he insists that quite a complex and difficult social



and historical achievement is necessary before it would even begin to make sense to evaluate ourselves and others with the notions of "intentional," "negligent," "accidental," "accountable," and their opposites (*GM*, II, §4, 43). This capacity for resistance and negating power he calls "the instinct for freedom," which he says is just another way of naming his "will to power" (*GM*, II, §18, 64). We can, he says in that same paragraph, formulate an ideal of beauty and make sacrifices, indeed suffer for it, only because we have first recoiled from the ugly *as ugly* (that is, not simply recoiled from an object).

This historical narrative does, though, make a very minimal assumption about the "nature" out of which such historical development proceeds. As he puts it in the first paragraph of the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, the problem of breeding an animal capable of promising is a "task [*Aufgabe*]" that nature "has set herself" (*GM*, II, §1, 38). Nature "sets the task" that human beings must complete in historical time because any conceivable human situation is one in which suffering is unavoidable, and Nietzsche claims throughout the last two essays of the *Genealogy* that it is suffering that in effect shocks, provokes human beings into a complex response, not just reactions of avoidance and a policy of prudence. He gathers whatever historical, anthropological, literary, and philological elements he can muster to try to demonstrate that a species-distinct reaction is also provoked; that is, the burden of the question of *the meaning of suffering* is taken on. He assumes that we are so disposed that the deepest suffering we can experience is from a lack of any sense in the suffering. Consciousness itself is often treated by Nietzsche as such a reactive phenomenon, as if human beings do not merely suffer but, given the intensity of their suffering and some sort of disposition to react against it, they can be said also to be jolted into the awareness *that* they are suffering, and this not just as a kind of second-order neutral self-monitoring. Such second-order awareness is originally reactive and negative, seeks to cancel out in some way what injures so meaninglessly. For example, in the case of primitive injuries by others, he tries to show that we can retroactively render the act in some way sensible by requiring recompense from the offender. "What suffering means" is that balance has been upset and can be restored, usually by payment in the suffering of the offender; more precisely and gruesomely, by pleasure in watching the other suffer. His story then develops into the famous account of

bad conscience, internalization and sublimation, guilt and debt, the ascetic priest and ascetic ideal.<sup>22</sup>

This is a thought—that human nature is such as to deny itself its natural situation, that human nature just is a dissatisfaction with its own nature—that resonates with many philosophers whom Nietzsche would disown but who form an exclusive club. It is the founding thought of a decisive strand of modern philosophy—Jean-Jacques Rousseau's thought, and thanks to Rousseau, it shows up in Kant's account of our "unsocial sociability [*ungesellige Geselligkeit*]," in Hegel's account of the nonnatural claim of the other for recognition, and in Marx's famous account of the significance of socially organized labor. It shows up for different reasons in Freud's account of the harshness of the repression of natural (essentially Oedipal) desire and so our self-division (the self-division that makes us human, allows it to be said that we lead lives rather than merely exist). The somewhat mythic picture here is straightforward: the natural world is a world without genuine individuality (just mere particularity, in Hegel's language), is formless, brutal, chaotic, and indifferent, and to live a human life is (and essentially is *only*) to resist this, to make oneself *something* other than this, all because, at least up till now, we have not accepted it and have found a way to provoke such dissatisfaction in others and for posterity. This resistance amounts to achievement of what Nietzsche calls "the sovereign individual" (*GM*, II, §2, 40), in which individuality is understood as always a kind of fragile, unstable, threatened *achievement*, not an original state of being.<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche clearly wants to raise

22. Cf. *GM*, II, §15, 100: "I suffer: someone or other must be guilty!—and every sick sheep thinks the same. But his shepherd, the ascetic priest says to him, 'Quite right, my sheep! Somebody must be to blame: but you yourself are this somebody, you yourself alone are to blame for it, you yourself alone are to blame for yourself.'" See also *GM*, II, §28.

23. Cf. chapter 6 of Lear 1990. This position on individuality (as a social and psychological achievement) is an essential theme in post-Kantian German philosophy. See Pippin 2000c. The difficulty in discussing the relation between Nietzsche's views and the kind of "recognition" theories I discuss in the article cited is that, given Nietzsche's diagnosis of the "herd-like" quality of modern society—that is, given his concern with the massive forms of dependence and so conformism required by such societies—he is often loath to say much about the forms of dependence he wants to promote. (It is a misleading aspect of many conventional readings that the interpreters assume that Nietzsche is wholly uninterested in such dependencies.) The

the question of whether our threshold in accepting our natural situation of ignorance and suffering has come to be significantly lowered in bourgeois Europe, and he is clearly worried that it has sunk far too low, that we have lost the capacity to feel any self-contempt at our animal status.

The details of this famous genealogy would take us far afield. It is well known that Nietzsche believes that the interpretation of suffering provided by "morality"—that the reason for suffering was the subject's own sinfulness—actually succeeded for a while in creating the conditions of commitment, sacrifice, and dedication, but it exacted far too high a price. It thus ultimately left us "an outpost of discontented, arrogant, and nasty creatures" (*GM*, III, §II, 90) and led us into nihilism. What is important, though, is how frequently Nietzsche tries to show that any sort of self-determined and self-aware pursuit of a goal is both an enormously difficult and quite a fragile collective historical achievement, and one not at all necessarily linked to the Christian and liberal-Enlightenment versions. Accordingly, any philosophical attempt to treat the problems of agency, freedom, and responsibility as abstract metaphysical problems is bound to be merely a kind of game, the rules for which just express a fantasy, or what we need to believe about ourselves at some time. Also, anyone claiming that any of this account shows that we are therefore "unfree wills" or "determined" commits the same mistake and is simply implicitly proposing another ideal, a claim inevitably intertwined with a normative view of what it is to lead a life, either one with some historical resonance, some chance at inspiring a kind of life, or not. (The latest version of the ascetic priest, the modern scientists and their enlightened following, believes this about the beauty or utility of "truth," as much truth as possible. In the second essay of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche expresses his by now familiar reservations.)

In sum, "with the advent of an animal soul turned against itself, taking sides against itself, something so new, deep, unheard of, enigmatic, contradictory, and full of futurity had come into being that the character of the earth was thereby essentially changed" (*GM*, II, §16, 62, 77).

theme is mostly available indirectly in remarks about friendship, loneliness, and in Zarathustra's public activities, the consequences of Zarathustra's original reason for coming down from the mountain: "I love man."

## VII.

The best example of what I have been talking about occurs in paragraph 300 of *The Gay Science*. Nietzsche first claims that the necessary preconditions for modern science were the "magicians, alchemists, astrologers and witches," because their "promises and pretensions" "had to create [schaffen mussten] a thirst, hunger, and taste for *hidden and forbidden powers*," and that much more had to be promised than could be delivered so that this frustration would sustain the scientific enterprise until, much later, the promise could be fulfilled in the "realm of knowledge." Then, in comments on religion, he goes so far as to say that man had to *learn* even to "experience a hunger and thirst for himself," and so to learn to "find satisfaction and fullness in himself." Religious ways of life, in other words, gave human desire a form and a goal; made it possible for me to experience myself as somehow determinately dissatisfying such that I had to become a self, become who I am. His next remark is the most elliptical, and as is usual with Nietzschean imagery like this, it seems to try to create the very thing it describes; an aspiration to meaning, an insistence that there *be* more to understand and that we need to understand it in order to lead a life. "Did Prometheus first have to *imagine [sich vorstellen]* having *stolen light* and pay for it before he could finally discover that he had created *light by desiring light*, and that not only man but also *god* was the work of *his own hands* and had been clay in his hands? All mere images of the sculptor—no less than delusion [*Wahn*], theft, the Caucasus, the vulture, and the whole tragic *Prometheia* those who know?" (*GS*, §300, 170). *Prometheus created the light by desiring it* is the phrase that says it all. The lack he experienced was created and sustained by virtue of his action; the lack was not its occasion, and the determinate meaning of what happened—the injustice of Zeus, the meaning of Prometheus's suffering—represent extensions and consequences of the kind of gap he opened up and held open; the enigmatic meaning that he creates by his act and that he promises to be able to explain. This states in an unusually compressed way the idea often associated with Prometheus in interpretations of the myth—that the existence of human beings is completely gratuitous, as if a contingent gift, not something like the necessary unfolding or expression of a fixed and purposively evolving nature or of a divine providence. The image includes within itself the paradox in this way of

thinking—that human being, the sense-maker of suffering, is itself the product of human being, as if the cause of itself, and so it suggests the ominous warning: since there was no “reason” for Prometheus’s gift, it could just as easily and contingently be canceled.

These passages are dense and elusive, but we need to remember that the theme in these passages is eros, not will or spontaneous creativity, and that any tentative attempts to inspire a kind of longing can fail, and that it is very hard to understand what kind of erotic promises will get a grip and why. It is also one of the reasons there is little in the way of a programmatic response to nihilism in Nietzsche’s texts. The failure of desire and its experiential manifestations in everyday life—boredom, loneliness, and fatigue—are very hard to diagnose and extremely hard to respond to. (The pathos of romantic failure, the ever-possible sudden disappearance of desire, the role of illusion in sustaining any such romantic desire, and the total impossibility of any rational translation of desire into a calculus of mutual satisfaction are, we have seen, major metaphorical variations on the theme of eros throughout Nietzsche’s writings.) And again, the extraordinarily enigmatic metaphors and images used by Nietzsche—the eternal return of the same, the spirit of gravity, the pale criminal, a Zoroastrian prophet, a gay science—all seemed mostly to provoke what he has said we need: “neediness” itself, designed to create the need for interpretation, the *expectation* of meaning, and therewith alone the sustenance of human desire, a new kind of victory led by Nietzsche over our present “weariness with man.”

These are hard questions to pursue in the language of philosophy (which Nietzsche still by and large retains), not only because the images are interpretable in so many ways but because they are the sorts of questions addressed more regularly by modern, romantic, and confessional poetry than by philosophy. Many times, in ways that clearly echo Montaigne, Nietzsche suggests that a good deal of the answer depends on *him*, on whether he can portray the heroism and beauty of such futile attempts well enough, can inspire a sense of nobility not dependent on guarantees, payoffs, natural completions, benefits, and probabilities. He offers himself as a unique individual possibility, not an instance of a universal rule but a possible paradigm instance to be imitated. Looked at broadly, of course, the historical answer to Nietzsche’s question was clearly negative; the experiment with him at the center did not take,

his “truth” could not be successfully incorporated. He did not become a new Socrates, and his cultural and historical impact has been much more as a kind of “dissolving fluid,” a value-debunker, an immoralist, than as any prophet for a new form of life.

So, while Nietzsche may have avoided the melancholy of someone interminably mourning the death of God and, to use his earlier term of art, avoided the temptation to return to the tragic pessimism of the Greeks, the positive, erotic side of the project he proposes is only just barely on view and remains merely suggestive, tantalizing in the way he probably intends. This is the last erotic “guidepost” I want to mention, and it can only be mentioned here. In paragraph 276 of *The Gay Science*, he writes:

I, too, want to say what I wish from myself today and what thought first crossed my heart this year—what thought shall be the reason, warrant and sweetness of the rest of my life! I want to learn more and more to see what is necessary in things as what is beautiful in them—thus I will be one of those who make things beautiful. *Amor fati*: Let that be my love from now on! I do not want to wage war against ugliness. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse the accusers. Let *looking away* be my only negation! And, all in all and on the whole: some day I want only to be a Yes-sayer! (GS, §276, 157)